Digital Education in Crisis Situations: a review of an ongoing Erasmus+ project DECriS

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Introduction

- The disruption brought by the pandemic altered the educational landscape

- It challenged
  - the existing higher education institutions (HEI) infrastructure,
  - program curricula,
  - teaching and learning process and
  - administration

- Along with the challenges, this pandemic also created an opportunity for HEIs to incorporate and make greater use of DE, and open education in general.

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Introduction – cont…

- The growing body of research as well as different examples of case studies and best practices suggest that
  - there are great benefits and opportunities when using DE tools in higher education (HE), especially during crisis situations such as COVID-19 pandemic
  - However, the research also points out the disadvantages/obstacles
- The benefits could apply to
  - both students and teachers/trainers, and
  - in terms of cost-effectiveness to
    - the institutions themselves.
- However, there is a growing evidence, not only the feeling, that DE – and OERs – are not used as much as one could hoped for.

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Introduction – cont...

- Our research is a part of Erasmus+ project Digital Education for Crisis Situations: Times when there is no alternative (DECriS)

- It aims
  - to create a framework for proper adoption of DE and OER's in general, and in crisis situations in particular, making sure they will:
    - improve the quality of the DE and expand the possibilities for collaboration and knowledge sharing,
      - which may decrease the feeling of isolation common in situations like lockdowns.

Introduction – cont...

- Partners – University of Osijek, University of Barcelona, University of Librarianship and Information Technology, Sofia, SRCE, University of Zagreb and University of Hildesheim

- Project focuses in particular on:
  - digital competencies;
  - new innovative curricula and educational methods;
  - criteria for evaluation of OERs;
  - international cooperation; and
  - cooperation with business sector

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Focus and activities

- Strenghtening the cooperation among partners
    - EINFOSE and ILO partners – some dropping out, some joining in
- To offer *in situ* and online learning environment though summer schools and tutorials

Focus and activities – cont…

- What have we organized:
  - Summer schools – Osijek, 2021 and Hildesheim 2022
  - 3 Multiplier events
    - Barcelona, November 2021
    - Sofia, May 2022
    - Zagreb, November 2022 (now)
    - Plus the last one to be held in Osijek, May 2023 (Final Conference)
  - Tutorials – one in Barcelona, November 2021 and the other one in Zagreb, November 2022
  - Regular Transnational Project Meetings

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Focus and activities – cont…

- For the purpose of this presentation I intend to present the DECriS project through its intellectual outputs (IOs) in the following manner:
  - what has been done within the project up to now,
  - what are our current efforts and plans, and
  - what will be done by the end of the project.

Intellectual Outputs of the DECriS project

- **What has been done so far within the project's IO-1**

- The aim of IO-1 of the DECriS project was
  - to investigate state-of-the-play of the use of DE and OERs at European HEI in the field of (L)IS during the COVID-19 pandemic.

- The most important findings from the research conducted at 56 (L)IS HEIs from 23 European countries.
  - two most dominant aspects of digital education that were implemented during COVID-19 pandemic were live teaching sessions via video conferencing tools and online communication with students.
  - all (L)IS schools/departments used video conferencing tools while the majority also used learning management systems (LMS) and online anti-plagiarism systems.

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IO 1 – results – cont…

- All (L)IS schools/departments used digital learning materials, while 46% of them used digital OERs.

- In that sense, blended learning has proven to be the most used teaching method, along with project-based learning and problem-based learning that were also significantly represented.

- Unfortunately, we discovered that 54% of (L)IS schools/departments didn't use OERs during COVID-19 pandemic!

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IO 1 – results – cont…

- However, (L)IS schools/departments have been also using OERs developed and created by others at national and international level, as well as OERs that were designed, developed and created by their own staff.

- A fact that could shine more light on how OERs have been approached up to now, before and during the pandemic, relates to the lack of institutional policies e.g. more than 2/3 of (L)IS schools/departments have no institutional policy regarding OERs.

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IO 1 – conclusion

- The others findings of IO-1 research process within the project will be uploaded at the web page of the project in the report entitled
  - "State-of-the-play of the use of OERs at European higher education institutions in the field of Library and Information Science during the COVID-19 pandemic" https://decris.ffos.hr/intellectual-outputs/o1
- Several research papers were or are in process of being published

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Intellectual outputs – cont…

- **What is currently being done – activities connected with IO-2 and IO-3**
- "Digital Education appraisal and quality perception by students, teachers and trainers at the partner HEI during the COVID-19 crisis".
- IO2's aim is to get insights about the students' and teachers' attitudes towards DE and educational resources -in general- and towards canonical OER -in particular-, mainly during the COVID-19 crisis and in contrast with their pre-pandemic experiences.
- For IO-2 we used following qualitative methods:
  - semi-structured interviews with teachers (39)
- focus groups with students (10).

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IO 3 – basic information

- Regarding IO-3, there are two main goals
  - The first goal is to prepare a list of critical success factors which can be used to assess the quality of existing OERs.
  - The second goal is to present a typological classification for the evaluation of the quality of the OERs.

- After the critical success factors have been separated and organized, this deliverable is prepared in form of a methodological framework which will be available to all HEIs wishing to use them in evaluation processes of OERs.

IOs plans

- **What is yet to be done – planning IO4, IO5 and IO6**

- In IO-4, we mapped the success factors to the practices at partners' HEIs.

  - The mixed methodology was used in each of the partner's HEI

IOs plan – cont…

- In IO-5 we will apply the success factors to the existing OERs from the EINFOSE project in order to improve them and test how the success factors can be applied in practice

- There are five OERs in key areas of

  - Advances of Information Science,

  - Research Methodology in Information Science,

  - Principles of Information Organization and Information Seeking and Retrieval, and

  - Evaluation of Information Services, and

  - Curation of Analogical and Digital Material (new)

IOs plans – cont…

- IO-6 aims to explore
    - how the HEIs organized internship/apprenticeship and other forms of students' field work during the time of crisis, and
    - how these can be improved in an online setting as a basis for developing a methodology for further research that include students' satisfaction rate as well as a perspective and expectations from hosting institutions.

- The internship practice in the COVID-19 crisis also pointed out to the problem that all forms of field work can not rely only on physical presence in hosting organizations

- We have in particular in mind the online internship/apprenticeship in the business sector, i.e. in private computer companies, and public sector (e.g. libraries, documentation centers, centers for information analysis), in the time of COVID-19 pandemic or similar crisis situations

- With this deliverable we would like to indicate the potentials of online internship/apprenticeship.

Concluding remarks

- Digital Education has the potential to provide better teaching and learning opportunities, especially in regards to the unpredictable circumstances such as COVID-19 which revealed that many HEIs faced problems of
  - technical,
  - socio-psychological and
  - didactic nature.
- In DECriS project we are framing our outputs based on a platform model which serves in a crisis situation and supports the mash up of different services, models, strategies and educational materials so that they respond to these shifted goals and accommodate new set of educational needs.

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Thanks for your attention

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