

VIOLETA JURKOVIČ

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

SAŠA PODGORŠEK

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

Developing a module structure in an online course for LSP teacher professional development

ABSTRACT. Self-directed open educational resources can serve as valuable tools for the continuing professional development of LSP teachers. This paper introduces an open educational resource, the LSP-TEOC.Pro course, which has been available since 2023. The course is organised into instructional modules, each serving as a distinct learning block. However, a research gap remains in understanding how intra-module design influences user experience and learning outcomes in self-directed courses. Given that module structure is of utmost importance for efficient learning, the main objective of this paper is to provide an intra-module presentation and analysis from the user perspective with respect to the following elements: difficulty, length and pacing, objectives, development and sequencing, interior feature strands, design, and clarity. The qualitative data were derived from the diaries kept by the course users when engaging with course content, and the open-ended questions in the post-participation surveys completed by the users. The results of the qualitative data analysis concerning module structure revealed overall user satisfaction with the intra-module structure. However, the results also highlight several points for consideration when designing self-directed courses, particularly concerning module design and clarity, efficient use of digital tools, and the users' needs for feedback and a sense of belonging to a community of practice. These results may assist LSP teacher educators in the application of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course in in-person, blended, or online educational events, as well as course designers of self-directed courses in reflecting on various aspects of structure at the level of individual instructional blocks.

KEYWORDS: LSP-TEOC.Pro, teacher professional development, LSP teachers, self-directed online course, open educational resource, intra-module structure.

1. INTRODUCTION

Over the past decades, several professional development programmes for LSP teachers have been proposed, along with the introduction of various frameworks to support their professional growth (Master 1997; Howard 1997; Hall 2013; Turula & Gajewska 2019). However, most language teachers working in

LSP contexts have not received formal pre-service education specifically tailored to this specialized field (Basturkmen 2014; Bocanegra-Valle & Basturkmen 2019; Podgoršek et al. 2021). This gap was addressed by three Erasmus+ initiatives:

1. the Catapult project created a Language Teacher Education Massive Open Online Course (MOOC) for LSP teachers (<http://catapult-project.eu>),
2. the TRAILS project developed an LSP teacher training programme curriculum (<https://trails.hypotheses.org>), and
3. building on the TRAILS curriculum, the LSP-TEOC.Pro project developed a self-directed online open educational resource (<https://moodle.lsp-teoc-pro.de>).

The data collected during these projects provided a solid research-based background for the implementation of LSP teacher development programmes (see e.g. Bocanegra-Valle & Perea-Barbera 2023; Jurkovič et al. 2024; Podgoršek et al. 2021; Zourou & Torresin 2019). However, further research is required to identify the key factors that can maximise the effectiveness of the results generated by these three Erasmus+ projects and further enhance the design of LSP teacher development programmes.

This paper adds to the body of research by analysing the LSP-TEOC.Pro course. This course was designed primarily to be used by future or in-service LSP teachers to develop and upgrade their LSP teacher competences autonomously by selecting their learning objectives, the modules that they wish to focus on, and the strategies that they prefer to adopt in their continuous professional development. However, the LSP-TEOC.Pro course, whether as a whole or through individual modules, can also be used in in-person, blended, or online instructor-led LSP teacher development programmes or workshops based on flipped learning. Given that the issue of unit structure (i.e. module structure in the case of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course) is of utmost importance for efficient learning (Skela & Burazer 2021), the main objective of this paper is to provide an intra-module presentation and analysis of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course from the user perspective.

2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Designing education programmes for LSP teachers is crucial for equipping them with the skills and competences necessary to address the specialised needs of their LSP learners. Based on Richards (2001), course development for language teaching must consider various factors and follow a systematic process. This process consists of developing a course rationale, describing entry and exit levels, selecting course content, determining the scope and sequence, planning the course structure, and, finally, preparing the scope and sequence plan.

The first step in the process involves establishing a clear course rationale, which defines the programme's purpose, target audience, and objectives. This rationale should align with the learners' specific needs and the learning contexts, serving as a statement of the course guiding philosophy. Following this, entry and exit levels are determined to identify the learners' baseline competences at the start, and the expected proficiency upon course completion. The third step focuses on defining the course content. This should be based on the results of the needs analysis process and ideas from different sources (e.g. materials on the topic, analysis of similar courses and consultations to match the specific needs of the learners), and should reflect real-world tasks and relevant materials. This is followed by the next step, in which the scope and sequence define the breadth and order of topics, skills, and competences to be covered in the course. This helps organise the course logically and progressively, ensuring that learners build on their knowledge, skills, and competences systematically. The fifth step, which this paper focuses on, involves course structure planning. In other words, here the overall framework of the course is organised, including the distribution of topics, activities, and assessments. Richards (2001) suggests that a course should be organised around instructional blocks, which can be modules or units. Modules are self-contained and self-standing learning sequences with their own objectives and a final assessment part. On the other hand, units are shorter than modules but usually longer than one single lesson. The last step of course development involves the description of the course in the form of the scope and sequence plan that includes the listing of modules and the estimated required teaching and learning time.

Focusing specifically on modules as instructional blocks, Richards (2001) identifies several factors that contribute to a module's success: length, development, coherence, pacing, and outcome. Therefore, a module should include sufficient material but be manageable. Each activity within the module should lead effectively into the next, ensuring smooth transitions and module development. This means that the module should have an overall sense of coherence, with activities and lessons that are logically connected. Activities should move reasonably, avoiding significant discrepancies in the time required to complete them. By the end of the module, learners should be able to display knowledge or skills related to the objectives stated at the beginning of the module as the instructional block. To summarise, instructional blocks should make the course content easier to teach and learn, provide a progression of difficulty levels, and create coherence and structure throughout the instructional block and course. Importantly, a sequence of module components or building blocks will create a learning pathway (Skela & Burazer 2021).

In the context of textbook writing, Schneider (2008) undertook a comprehensive review of relevant literature and provided four distinct categories of

structural components of instructional blocks tailored to facilitate learner motivation and effective learning, namely openers, closers, integrated pedagogical devices, and interior feature strands. Openers encompass overviews, introductions, outlines (in textual, bulleted, or graphical form), focus questions, learning objectives, and case problems. Closers, on the other hand, encompass elements such as conclusions, summaries, definition lists, review questions, reference boxes, tools used for self-assessment, less and more complex exercises, problem cases, and tables tailored for real-world application, project ideas, bibliographies, and hyperlinks. Integrated pedagogical devices manifest as various techniques including word emphasis, summarising marginalia, point-highlighting lists, summary tables and graphics, cross-referencing key concepts, markers identifying embedded subjects, study and review questions, illustrative teaching and learning materials, advice, and reminders or previous elements. Finally, the fourth category pertains to interior feature strands, which encompass case studies and descriptions, problem descriptions, reflections, primary references, data, and models. The strategic planning of these structural elements is important for course and instructional block design, and plays a paramount role within the context of LSP teacher development in line with the focus of this paper.

Borg (2023) outlined ten key principles to ensure the success and impact of effective continuous professional development for teachers, which largely overlap with Richards' (2001) steps to be taken in a course development process, and emphasised the concept of teacher cognition and the need for ongoing teacher support. The first principle is to define learning-oriented and feasible objectives and set clear goals to improve learning outcomes and enhance teacher competences. The second principle emphasises the importance of understanding the context and audience. Building on existing practices and cognitions forms the third principle. A constructivist approach should be used to start from where teachers are and gradually extend their practices. The fourth principle is to make continuous professional development a situated process, closely connected to classroom practices and the local context. Focusing on both the content and process of continuous professional development is the fifth principle. The content should align with the defined objectives and context, emphasizing active learning processes such as constructivist, dialogic, collaborative, and reflective approaches. Continuous professional development should promote practical application in teaching. The sixth principle is to make teacher learning a social process. Collaborative learning through peer observation, mentoring, reading groups, and professional communities should be encouraged. The seventh and eighth principles view continuous professional development as an ongoing process that should provide continuous teacher support. Prioritising teacher educator competence is the ninth principle. Finally, the tenth principle is to

optimise practical arrangements such as timing, duration, location, delivery mode, and available resources.

Sarré et al. (2021) report on a study, conducted upon delivering three seasons of the Catapult LTEMOOC. An important finding is that the participants of the MOOC initially favoured the xMOOC model, which focuses on content delivery, practical ideas, and certification. This preference was evident as most participants were interested in gaining theoretical knowledge, practical tips, and obtaining a certificate. The xMOOC model's structured approach, with clear syllabi and sequences of activities, was appreciated for its ability to provide these elements effectively. However, the results also seem to indicate that the participants' objectives evolved over time, with an increasing appreciation for interactive elements and community building functionalities typically associated with cMOOCs [for a discussion of different types of MOOCs, see also Guerrero-Quíñonez et al. (2023) and Sallam et al. (2020)].

This paper aims to present and analyse the LSP-TEOC.Pro course at the intra-module level from the user perspective, focusing on the design and user experience in relation to key pedagogical elements: difficulty, length and pacing, objectives, development and sequencing, internal feature strands, design quality, and clarity. By examining these aspects, this study contributes to understanding how modular open educational resources can support the professional development needs of LSP teachers. Furthermore, the results of this analysis should assist LSP teacher educators in applying the LSP-TEOC.Pro course in in-person, blended, or online educational events of various formats. Additionally, this analysis will help course designers of self-directed courses, also in fields beyond teacher education, reflect on various aspects of course structure at the module level as individual instructional blocks.

3. MATERIALS AND METHODS

3.1. Context

The main objective of this paper is to provide an intra-module presentation and analysis of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course from the user perspective. Discussing the needs-based content of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course falls beyond the scope of this paper. Hence, readers interested in the selection of the course content are invited to refer to Bocanegra-Valle and Perea-Barbera (2023), Jurkovič et al. (2024), and Kic-Drgas and Jurkovič (2024).

Module structure and content were developed in Intellectual Output 3 titled "Development of course content for LSP teacher education and development",

which corresponds with Richards' (2001) step five of course design, i.e. planning the course structure. The intra-module structure of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course is presented in Figure 1 (see Jurkovič et al. 2023: 5).

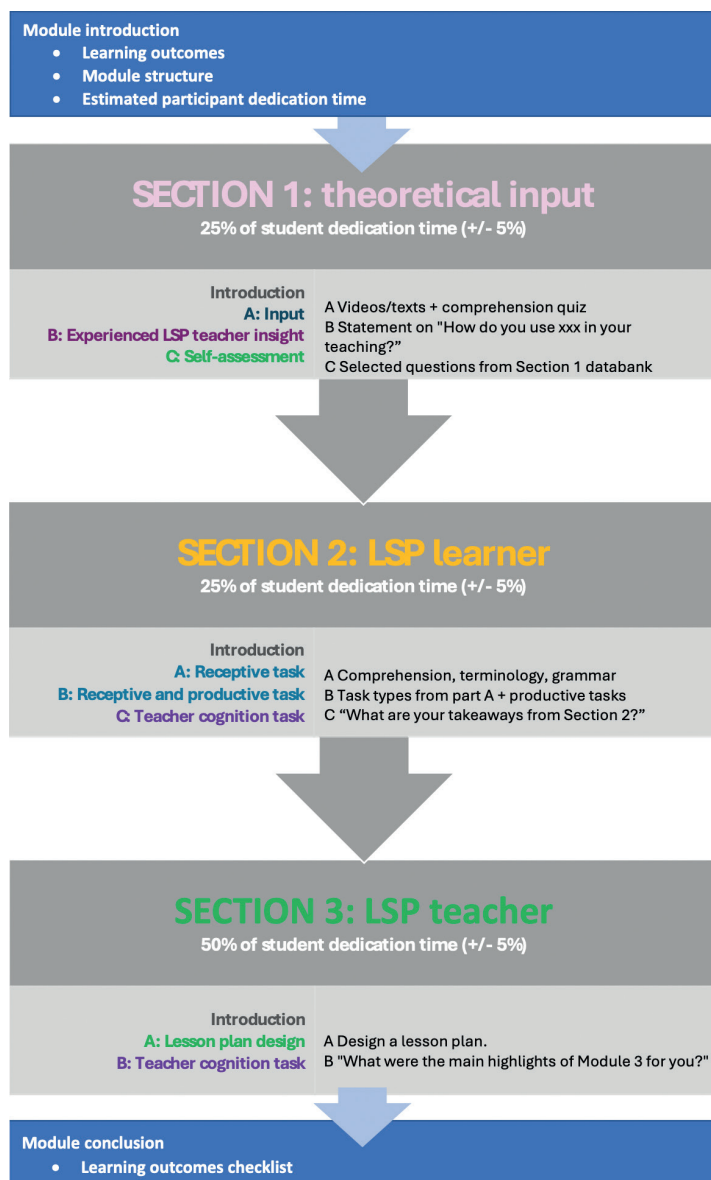


Figure 1. LSP-TEOC.Pro module structure

Source: Jurkovič et al. (2023: 5).

As Figure 1 shows, each module opens with an introduction that describes the learning outcomes that the module users should reach after module completion, the overall module structure, and the purpose of each of the main sections, and the estimated time that completing the module should take.

Each module is then further subdivided into three main sections. The purpose of Section 1 is to provide course users with the theoretical input they will need to work on the activities in the other two sections. Section 1, which should take about 25% of the module user's dedication time, is further subdivided into:

- an introduction with an explanation of the content and purpose of this section,
- the theoretical input enacted through audiovisual or textual input,
- PDF files with the slides used in each audiovisual presentation,
- quizzes for the self-assessment of the acquired knowledge and potential acquisition of Moodle badges,
- a short video or audio recording of an experienced LSP teacher explaining the practical importance of the topic examined by the module, and
- a self-assessment quiz with randomly selected questions from the Section 1 question bank.

Section 2 aims to guide course users through the module first in the role of LSP learners (learning pathway A) and then in the role of LSP teachers (learning pathway B). This approach enables users to first experience the learning process of LSP learners, and then reflect upon it from an LSP teacher's perspective. In this way, the users are provided with a model for the development of their own materials in Section 3. Section 2, which should take about 25% of module users' dedication time, is further subdivided into:

- an introduction with an explanation of the content and purpose of this section, as well as the roles that the user will undertake (LSP learner in learning pathway A, and LSP teacher in learning pathway B),
- a task or a series of tasks in which the course user goes through the topic of the module as an LSP learner (e.g. by completing a needs analysis survey provided by the course designers, by going through a series of tasks aimed at the development of discipline-specific genre awareness, or by completing LSP terminology exercises), and
- a teacher cognition task in the form of an essay question in which the user takes over the role of an LSP teacher and is encouraged to reflect on the tasks and process that they experienced as LSP learners.

Section 3 of each module is designed to guide and assist the course users in the design of module-related LSP materials for a hypothetical (if the user is not an in-service LSP teacher) or real (if the user is an in-service LSP teacher) group of LSP learners. In this section, the users are advised to refer to the concepts

presented in the previous two sections, and to use the materials prepared by course designers as models. Section 3, which should take about 50% of module user dedication time, is further subdivided into:

- an introduction with an explanation of the content and purpose of this section,
- a task or a series of tasks in which the module user assumes the role of an LSP teacher and is assisted in the creation of their own resources (e.g. a lesson plan for the teaching of subject-specific genres, a task designed for the consolidation of subject-specific terminology, or an achievement test),
- a teacher cognition task in the form of an essay question in which the user is encouraged to reflect on the module content (in a reflection journal, in a forum, or through chat), to upload their products (in a user portfolio) and compare them with those uploaded by other users and course designers.

At the end of each module there is a conclusion with a learning outcomes checklist where the module user can self-assess the achievement of the learning outcomes designed for each module. Additionally, a list of recommended further reading resources is provided for users who wish to further enhance the competences developed by completing each module.

3.2. Research question

In this paper, we will attempt to provide an answer to the following research question: "What are the opinions of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course users in terms of intra-module structure regarding its difficulty, length and pacing, objectives, development and sequencing, interior feature strands, design, and clarity?"

In order to provide a comprehensive answer to this research question, the following research model will be used (Figure 2).

3.3. Instruments and data collection

Data for the present study were derived from three instruments used for data collection during the large-scale trialling in Intellectual Output 6 titled "Trialling developed LSP Teacher Education online course."

The description of the users' sample will be based on the data derived from the "triallee and privacy policy notice" survey (gender, age, location, pedagogical background, work experience, work status, languages taught or studied, and LSP discipline).

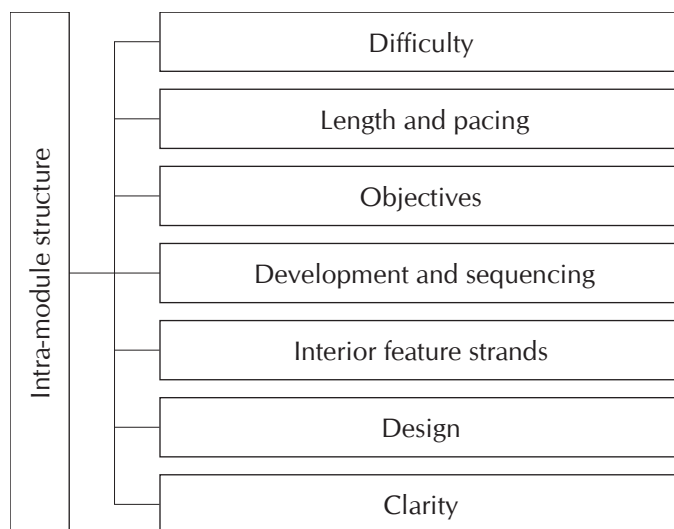


Figure 2. Research model

Source: based on Richards (2001), Schneider (2008).

The qualitative data used to analyse user perspectives on the LSP-TEOC.Pro course at the intra-module level, which will enable us to answer the research question posed for this study, will be derived from:

- the diaries kept by the course users when engaging with course content, and
- the answers to open-ended questions in the post-participation survey completed by the users with an overall evaluation of the four LSP-TEOC.Pro modules that they had selected.

3.4. Participants

The Intellectual Output 6 large-trialling of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course (see Kırkgöz et al. 2023) involved a total of 183 users, among whom 79% were female, 20% were male, while three participants identified their gender as 'other' or preferred not to express it. Most users were aged between 21–30 years (34%) while only two users were 61 or older (1%). The users mostly came from the countries involved in the project: Spain, Turkey, Poland, Slovenia, Croatia, France, Germany, and Italy, while 7% came from other countries. Most users were already LSP teachers at the time of taking the course (38%), 29% were general foreign language teachers, 27% were students, while 6% did not mark their status. The

foreign language that a vast majority of the users taught was English (75%), followed by Spanish (8%), and German (7%) while the other LSPs were taught by only two users or one. The field or discipline that the users had experience with LSP teaching included the humanities (30%), followed by business (20%), engineering (15%), education (9%), and tourism (7%). The other disciplines such as law, medicine, health, or chemistry were marked by less than 4% of users each.

The inventory of users who were involved in the large-scale trialling but also decided to keep a user diary was 30.

3.5. Data analysis

As mentioned in the Introduction, the primary objective of this paper is to provide an intra-module presentation and analysis of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course from the user perspective. During the large-scale trialling, a survey was conducted to collect demographic information about the users and measure their overall satisfaction with the selected modules. Additionally, the users completed pre- and post-participation tests, the results of which were used to assess improvements in their knowledge and skills related to each module's topic. However, the surveys did not include specific questions designed to generate quantitative data on participants' opinions of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course at the intra-module level regarding its difficulty, length and pacing, objectives, development and sequencing, interior feature strands, design, and clarity.

Therefore, the results presented in this paper are based on the analysis of qualitative data. This facilitated a deeper understanding of the users' experiences and the meanings they derived from them (Seidman 2006). The analysis of responses to open-ended questions in post-participation tests and user diaries was conducted in two stages. Initially, the data were read multiple times to identify relevant aspects of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course at the intra-module level that the users addressed in their entries. Subsequently, the entries were coded to reveal common themes and concepts, which were then connected to the analysed intra-module elements.

4. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

In the following section, the results of the qualitative data analysis, conducted in accordance with the research model presented in Figure 2, will be presented. The main findings will be supported by quotes from user diaries (labelled as D) or answers to post-participation survey open-ended questions (labelled as PP).

4.1. Difficulty

We first aimed to find out whether the difficulty level of the modules and module activities was appropriate for the objectives pursued by the course. In this respect, there seems to be a certain degree of disagreement among the users. In fact, some have expressed that the modules can be passed with relative ease if you are an experienced LSP teacher but may be quite difficult for inexperienced LSP teachers or students (D4):

I must say that some activities and quizzes can be passed without much effort when you are an LSP practitioner but I guess that some of the modules' content must be rather difficult for advanced learners or novice teachers.

4.2. Length and pacing

The second aspect we considered was whether the length of the modules as a whole and the module activities were appropriate, and if any module or activity took considerably more time than others. Some activities embedded in the modules are estimated to require more time than intended by the designers and the unanimous agreement appears to be that the modules can be shortened (D17):

Planning lessons takes a lot of time – not enough time to do all the activities properly.

4.3. Objectives

The point of analysis here is to examine whether the objectives of each module as an instructional block were clearly stated and whether they met the needs of the course users. The users agree that (D6):

Objectives and learning outcomes are specified at the beginning and you are introduced to what you are going to learn.

Nevertheless, some users expressed their lack of understanding of the link between the stated learning outcomes and some module activities (D8):

The link between the practical outcomes and the teaching / learning materials [...] was not clear to me.

Another question that emerged from the analysis is whether the module activities should be related to a single discipline or different disciplines (D1):

On the one hand, it is desirable that course participants have to go into detail in every activity in every possible LSP field [...] because they don't know in which field they'll be working in the future. But, on the other hand, as an LSP teacher I would have preferred activities specifically related to technical English.

4.4. Development and sequencing

The examination of development and sequencing concerned the question whether the components of each module created a properly developed and sequenced learning pathway; in other words, whether the sections and activities within each module were logically connected and developed. Overall, the modules seem to be well developed and sequenced (PP53):

I like the variety of the activities as well as their gradual growth in complexity.

This aspect of intra-module design seems to have motivated most user comments in the diaries as well as answers to the post-participation test open-ended questions, particularly with reference to the structure of Section 2 of each module, which has been further subdivided into learning pathways A and B, as described in section 3.1. Context. Few users appreciated this sub-division and experiencing the process through the eyes of an LSP learner in learning pathway A (PP101):

I found this to be a great way to look at the subject from different perspectives.

On the other hand, most users found in particular learning pathway A highly confusing (PP123):

The activities where you have to take the role of a learner are very confusing, perhaps they are not well executed or well explained but they are VERY confusing and also I don't think they are useful at all.

Moreover, several users found learning part B redundant because the third section of each module was dedicated to the course users in the roles of LSP teachers (D4):

In section 2 parts there are LSP user and teacher parts and then whole section 3 is devoted to the LSP teacher. Isn't it a bit of repetition and doesn't it make the modules longer?

In addition to the modules' macro-structure at the level of its three sections, some doubt was expressed concerning the development of activities at the

micro-level within the main sections, in particular inconsistencies between the theoretical content presented in the video presentations and the subsequent quiz questions (D27):

It might be sometimes the case that the questions do not exactly correspond to what has been explained in the video.

Nevertheless, a shared opinion among the users seems to be that several elements were particularly beneficial to the module development and sequencing. The first is the module introduction section (PP95):

In all the modules, I liked how the introduction section introduces the segments of the specific modules and the learning outcomes clearly.

All users seemed to agree that the structure of all modules is coherent. The coherence of the modules is also aided by a clear division into the theoretical and practical parts, where the necessary theoretical input is provided first to lay the foundations for the practical tasks (D12):

The layout of each module is truly comprehensive. I really appreciate the idea of having three different headings, one from the theoretical point of view, the second one from the LSP user, and the third one from the point of view of the teacher.

Moreover, the audiovisual theoretical input is followed quizzes with questions designed to support the users' comprehension and consolidation of the topic examined by each module, which was also highlighted as beneficial by several users (D20):

The fact that you have: video + presentation (and not very long), and then the quiz helps a lot organising the activities and learning required, acquiring the knowledge, and then testing it.

Last but not least, another benefit is that module development and sequencing is supported by the use of examples and models (D17):

A huge benefit is a hands-on approach at the end of the modules which provides both students and teachers with opportunities to apply the acquired knowledge in doing or designing classroom activities.

4.5. Interior feature strands

In this section, we will examine the user views on a variety of interior feature strands embedded in the individual modules and overall to facilitate learning and enhance user motivation: audiovisual theoretical input, presentation slides, quizzes, insights of experienced teachers, portfolios, forums and chats, reflection journals, and further reading sections.

4.5.1. Audiovisual theoretical input

The audiovisual theoretical input provided in Section 1 of each module was appreciated by all users in their diaries and answers to post-participation open-ended survey questions (PP73):

I liked video presentations and especially the fact that they have the same format. This is a nice inspiration.

In fact, some users suggested incorporating additional video explanations at other points of the modules, such as when giving instructions to the practical exercises. However, the users also expressed a degree of dissatisfaction with the format or the presentation mode, especially concerning the monotonous narration in some video presentations (D7):

I am aware that it is difficult to improve this, but the videos were a bit monotone, and because it is just an introduction, it makes you want to attempt the quizzes without watching the videos first.

Another improvement they suggested concerned the lack of interactivity, insufficient user-centredness, and therefore disconnectedness with the audience (D15):

The videos need to be made more attractive to engage the viewer. At the moment they look like a recorded class. They can be made more interactive, for example integrating relevant questions at some points that students can answer without going to a quiz afterwards.

4.5.2. Presentation slides

In all modules, the audiovisual theoretical input is followed by PDF files with the slides used by the speakers. This is an interior feature strand that was positively commented upon by several users (D22):

Placing the slides after the video was useful to read and review some points that were not clear in the video.

4.5.3. Quizzes

The objective of the quizzes that follow each presentation with audiovisual or textual theoretical input was to check and consolidate the main points presented in the theoretical input. The quizzes can be attempted several times and the correct answers are provided after a failed attempt. In the views of the users, this is useful for the consolidation of knowledge (D23):

Many of the activities have a suggested answer key (and all the self-assessment tests) and the student can check their answers with the suggested ones immediately after they are done, as a way of self-correction and learning.

In addition, having a question bank so that the questions can change with each quiz attempt avoided question repetition and seems to have a positive effect on learning (D12):

It is nice to see that each time I take the quizzes, the options / choices change.

However, several users noted that the quizzes often have a repetitive format and fail to encourage active engagement with the content, as the quiz questions are not integrated into the video presentations but are instead presented as stand-alone sections (PP27):

I would like some tasks that wouldn't be so passive, just clicking the right answer.

4.5.4. Insights of experienced teachers

The insights of experienced teachers presented in the form of brief video presentations at the end of each theoretical section seem to have received a positive response among all users (D2):

This was a very good idea – it is much more interesting than the lecture – and there is a personal touch it is not monotonous, a real person.

Nevertheless, some suggestions for improvement were also provided, such as adding explanations of how an activity related to a particular topic was applied in an LSP context, including activities based on these narratives, or using a dialogue or interview technique instead of a single-person narrative (D12):

The videos with experts' testimonies would be more interesting and enjoyable if they were framed as interviews (e.g. a written question can be shown and then the expert's answer).

4.5.5. Portfolios

The portfolios were used in Section 3 of some modules to encourage users to upload user-generated content or materials created on the basis of the provided theoretical input in Section 1 or examples provided by course designers in Section 2. The portfolios appear to be viewed as a useful activity by some users. However, most users suggested that having a portfolio in a self-directed course where no feedback is provided is less useful (D8):

If detailed individual feedback was given, then these tasks would be useful.

4.5.6. Forums and chats

As activities that aim to build a community of users, forums and chats were included into some modules so that the users could compare their answers and thoughts with those of others, which was perceived as beneficial. However, not many users decided to share their views, which contributed to the sense of isolation felt by some users (D11):

We need more community building tasks. [...] Am I alone on this course?

4.5.7. Reflection journals

Reflection journals were incorporated into the modules to encourage users to reflect on the activities that they completed, and then upload their reflections. The views of the users on this interior feature strand are mostly positive (D14):

It is important to reflect on how these tasks have contributed to our understanding of language teaching and learning.

Nevertheless, as was already noted in relation to forums and chats, few users decided to upload their reflections. Therefore, some users suggested removing reflection journals altogether while encouraging the users through instructions to reflect on the completed activities on their own (PP134):

I would perhaps remove reflection journals as participants can easily take notes on their own account.

4.5.8. Further reading suggestions

At the end of each module, suggestions for further reading were provided for users who wanted to explore further what was presented. While most users found these to be useful, some emphasised the importance of having updated and comprehensive lists (D2):

The further reading / references recommended are really good but, in some modules, they do not seem to be very updated or there are not many.

4.6. Design

Design refers to the attractiveness and clarity of the module visual design. Although some users thought that the course design was appropriate, most thought that this is one of the shortcomings of the modules and course as a whole. Their remarks refer to various design aspects. The first one is lack of consistency of punctuation. Second, the users' comments referred to vertical coherence or the need for splitting of module content across several pages (D15):

Visually, I've got very overwhelmed with the amount of things that were inside each module. As you scroll down, there are way too many things to pay attention with and it can be easy to forget one exercise.

Moreover, in the users' opinions, slide design should have been made simpler and more consistent across presentations (D18):

The presentations in the introductory modules could have had less text (especially quotes) on the slides and perhaps a bit more visuals which would make them more appealing.

Another suggestion made by the users concerned the functionality of opening the attached documents in new tabs and not in the same window (D3):

All documents should open in a new window.

Moreover, user engagement would be greater if the speakers were visible in all video presentations (PP22):

There were only their voices which can create a perception for the learners that they don't take them into consideration. It is important for people to see their teacher. To create a bond with them.

Next, the absence of progress tabs that would provide the users with visual information on the share of the module already completed was seen as another shortcoming (D24):

I thought I had completed the module but it seems that there is something I should do and I don't know what and I have no idea what to do with it. It is very frustrating. Could we have a checklist with progress to verify what to do in such a case?

Last but not least, activity instructions are provided on the Moodle desktop but are not repeated in the attached files, which meant the users needed to return to the Moodle desktop to find the required instructions (D18):

I'd like to find instructions for portfolio activities inside the activities themselves.

4.7. Clarity

The final aspect of the intra-module structure that will be analysed is its clarity, in particular the clarity of the purpose of individual activities, and activity instructions. A large number of user comments extracted from their diaries and answers to post-participation test open-ended questions can be classified under this aspect.

Generally, the users thought that more and clearer instructions should be provided while several comments also questioned whether the purpose of various activities was clearly stated (D8):

What should we do here? I added the entry, but have no idea what to do with that. [...] Adding tasks with no clear purpose, without explanation, shouldn't take place here.

Finally, the users were not certain whether any feedback would be provided on the assignments that they had uploaded (D4):

Will there be an evaluation process of the assignments after uploading these documents to the system, if so, how long will it take?

5. DISCUSSION

The main objective of this paper was to provide an intra-module presentation and analysis of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course from the user perspective.

First of all, the step of course design in which the intra-module structure is defined cannot entirely be separated from the preceding steps of course design nor the key principles that support effective continuing professional development for teachers (see Borg 2023; Richards 2001). In fact, these steps are mutually interacting and intertwining, and should therefore be seen as recurring rather than isolated elements in a sequence. This means that the structure of the instructional blocks (i.e. modules in the case of the LSP-TEOC.Pro course) will be informed by the course rationale, entry and exit levels, course content, and course content sequencing developed in the first four steps of curriculum development (see Richards 2001). Vice versa, the findings resulting from an analysis of modules as instructional blocks can inform course designers in adjusting these elements to other modes of delivery than the ones that the course has originally been planned for. In other words, the findings of the analysis of module structure presented in this paper can lead to adjustments in the course rationale, entry and exit levels, course content, and course content sequencing if the LSP-TEOC.Pro course, primarily designed as a self-directed open educational resource, or its modules are used in in-person, blended, or online instructor-led LSP teacher development programmes.

The results of the qualitative data analysis concerning module structure in the LSP-TEOC.Pro course indicated the overall satisfaction of the users with the intra-module structure. Most users made positive comments on most requirements that – according to Richards (2001) – account for a successful module: difficulty, length and pacing, objectives, and development and sequencing. These requirements were also met through the efficient use of openers, closers, integrated pedagogical devices, and interior features strands (see Schneider 2008). The interior feature strands that the users mostly appreciated include audiovisual theoretical input that was accompanied by the slides in PDF format used by the presenters, the insights of experienced LSP teachers used to conclude each theoretical section, further reading suggestions provided for users who wanted

to further explore the aspects examined by each module, and reflection journals. The latter is particularly relevant because the LSP-TEOC.Pro course was built on the notion of the development of an LSP teacher as a reflective practitioner (see Borg 2023). In other words, this is an LSP teacher who reflects on their own teaching practice to develop their teaching expertise (Burazer & Skela 2023).

However, the results also highlight several points for consideration that may assist developers of online self-directed courses in different fields. First, several users expressed a sense of isolation because of the lack of engagement in a community, which can be identified as one of the shortcomings of self-directed courses designed for autonomous learning. In these courses, opportunities for peer observation or mentoring as examples of collaborative learning are not provided. Therefore, teacher learning does not develop into a social and collaborative process, defined by Borg (2023) as one of the key principles of teacher education. In addition, the findings highlight the importance of interactive elements and community-building functionalities, as emphasised by Sarré et al. (2021), and the need to engage in LSP communities of practice, identified as a professional development need of LSP teachers by Bocanegra-Valle and Basturkmen (2019) and Jurkovič et al. (2024).

Next, the present findings indicate that in addition to the requirements that support a successful module identified by Richards (2001) and presented above (difficulty, length and pacing, objectives, and development and sequencing), two additional requirements should be added to the properties of effective self-directed courses in online environments. These are design and clarity. The results of the qualitative data analysis highlight the importance of visual design and ease of navigation through module sections for user motivation. The visual design refers both to the design of the slides used for theoretical presentations, the design of the quizzes, and well as the design of modules as a whole. Here we may claim that the affordances of the applied digital tools and Moodle as the selected virtual learning environment have not been exploited to their full potential.

With reference to clarity, in self-directed courses there is no teacher who can explain the tasks or activities if the users fail to understand their instructions. This highlights the need for clear and comprehensive instructions, possibly repeated in attached documents that open in new tabs or windows, as users do not have the opportunity to ask anyone for clarification. In other words, instructions to tasks and activities in learning materials for self-directed courses need to be much clearer and more comprehensive than instructions to tasks and activities in instructor-led courses.

Last but not least, the issue of clarity of intra-module structure was also noted with regard to the division of each module into sections, and further into subsections. In fact, many users expressed their doubts specifically with

reference to learning pathway A as a subsection of Section 2. Here, the users were guided through the module topic in the role of LSP learners, where the users were expected to experience the process of learning an LSP as a learner. In this way, they would reflect on the process that LSP learners experience in their LSP classes. This means that the users were asked, for example, to fill out needs analysis questionnaires, complete grammatical and lexical exercises, or complete language tests. However, even if this approach proved to be efficient and successful in in-person instructor-led workshops (see Jurkovič 2003), it seems much less relevant or even detrimental in self-directed courses. Given that several users suggested that the modules could be shortened, abandoning this subsection represents a feasible option. However, if the LSP-TEOC.Pro course content or its modules are used in instructor-led events, experiencing the LSP learning process by assuming the role of an LSP learner once again becomes fertile ground for reflection.

6. CONCLUSION

This paper adds to the developing body of knowledge regarding the requirements underpinning efficient and relevant professional development of LSP teachers. Among the needs that the LSP-TEOC.Pro course did not seem to meet at the intra-module level were the users' need to receive feedback, the need to receive support, and the need to belong to a community of practice. In a self-directed online course designed for autonomous learning, these needs can be met with difficulty. However, with the promising developments of artificial intelligence for interaction with different categories of users, it will certainly become worth exploring if artificial intelligence can replace human interaction in providing feedback, support, and a sense of belonging to a professional community of practice. Therefore, an issue that the LSP community and broader community of course designers must address is the efficient use and implementation of the available and constantly developing digital technologies that will bridge the shortcomings identified through the analysis of the user experience with the LSP-TEOC.Pro self-directed online course at the intra-module level.

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Opracowanie struktury modułów w kursie online dla doskonalenia zawodowego nauczycieli języków specjalistycznych

ABSTRAKT. Otwarte zasoby edukacyjne do samodzielnej pracy mogą służyć jako cenne narzędzia ustawicznego rozwoju zawodowego nauczycieli LSP. Niniejszy artykuł przedstawia kurs LSP-TEOC.Pro jako przykład zasobu, dostępnego online od 2023 roku. Kurs jest podzielony na moduły, z których każdy służy jako odrębny blok edukacyjny. Jednak nadal istnieje luka badawcza w zrozumieniu sposobu, w jaki projektowanie modułu wpływa na doświadczenie użytkownika oraz efekty uczenia się w kursach samokształceniowych. Kurs jest podzielony na moduły instruktażowe. Struktura modułów ma kluczowe znaczenie dla efektywnego uczenia się, dlatego głównym celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie i analiza tych modułów z perspektywy użytkownika, z uwzględnieniem takich elementów, jak trudność, długość i szybkość wykonywania poszczególnych komponentów, cele, rozwijanie treści i ustalanie jej kolejności, komponenty kursu, wygląd i przejrzystość. Dane jakościowe pochodzą z dzienników prowadzonych przez użytkowników kursu podczas jego realizacji oraz z otwartych pytań zawartych w ankietach wypełnianych przez użytkowników po ukończeniu kursu. Analiza danych jakościowych dotyczących budowy modułów wskazała na ogólne zadowolenie użytkowników ze struktury modułów. Jednak wyniki ujawniają również kilka aspektów, które warto wziąć pod uwagę przy kolejnym projektowaniu kursów w trybie samokształceniowym, w szczególności w odniesieniu do wyglądu i przejrzystości modułu, efektywnego wykorzystania narzędzi cyfrowych, potrzeb użytkowników w zakresie otrzymania informacji zwrotnej i bycia częścią społeczności. Pozyskane wyniki mogą pomóc nauczycielom języków specjalistycznych w wykorzystaniu kursu LSP-TEOC.Pro na zajęciach stacjonarnych, hybrydowych lub online, a także projektantom kursów.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: LSP-TEOC.Pro, rozwój zawodowy nauczycieli, nauczyciele LSP, samokształceniowy kurs online, otwarta edukacja.

VIOLETA JURKOVIČ

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

violeta.jurkovic@fpp.uni-lj.si

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0730-5862>

SAŠA PODGORŠEK

University of Ljubljana, Slovenia

sasa.podgorsek@ff.uni-lj.si

<https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1013-2122>