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## **O4-A3**

# **METHODOLOGICAL HANDBOOK**

[To develop the concept, design and elaboration of the methodology to be used for the module development.]

by GNW

SupEFL Project

Supplemental Self-help in English as a Foreign Language for Learners with  
Specific Learning Differences/Difficulties

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## Introduction

SupEFL - “Supplemental Self-Help in English as a Foreign Language for Learners with Specific Learning Differences“ which has been funded by the Erasmus+ Program of the European Union. The project is directed at special learners of English as a Foreign Language (EFL) who are experiencing difficulties with one or more of the four language systems (reading, writing, listening and speaking). We are developing self-help Open Educational Resources (OER) for learners of English with special needs in one or more of the following areas: reading, writing, speaking, listening, memory, motivation and/or learning in general.

The key project audience are learners with Specific Learning Difficulties (SpLDs) who will be end-users and will be most interested in the final product. To reach them the project team is also targeting teachers and trainers who would want and need guidelines on how to identify such individuals, implement our self-help program and track the progress of learners with SpLDs.

**This report focuses on the conceptualization, design and elaboration of methodological handbook during the implementation phase of the project.**

	<b>Description:</b>	<b>Tasks:</b>
<b>O4 - A1 Self-learning Modules</b>	Authoring the 7 learning modules; Reading, Writing, Listening, Speaking, Memory, Learning and Motivation.	To develop key tools and techniques learners can use to accelerate their learning.
<b>O4 - A2 Training Pathways</b>	Development of training pathways.	Development of training pathways.
<b>O4 - A3 Methodological Handbook</b>	Conceptualization, design and elaboration of methodological handbook.	Development of methodological handbook.
<b>O4 - A4 Technical Implementation</b>	Designing, programming and publishing online of the learning modules,	Development of GUI, illustrative resources, video-audio resources software development and optimization.
<b>O4 - A5 Updates and Improvements</b>	Updates and improvements of the learning modules.	Updating of products according to piloting activities and recommendations.

**Table 1: Description of O4 activities and tasks**

## Methodology

Based on the analysis of the research carried out during the first stage of the project (O3-A3) and the developed training guidelines (O3-A4) we have developed a methodology for the creation of the self-help modules that follows the training pathways (O4-A2)

The development and description of the pathways starts from the guidelines and elaborates it. The rules of the learning and the specialities of the special learners define these pathways.

The methodology follows the main features of the needs of the special learners and the rules of learning. It provides the base of the content, the form and implicate the tools of the course.

The methodological handbook covers the following aspects:

1. Learning and language learning
2. Special learners' learning
3. Multi-channelled learning
4. Built up from passive listening levels towards more demanding active language production
5. Activities include the most popular aspects of everyday activity of the target group
6. Focused on success and positive feedback
7. Pathways
8. Listening – understanding
9. Remembering – recalling
10. Repeating – speaking
11. Imitation – reading
12. Copying – writing

## 1. Learning and language learning

There are three main forms of learning:

- free exploration
- methodical learning
- expert learning

Free exploration leads to an instinctive knowledge. Methodical learning provides the educated level of the knowledge. The expert learning leads to a high level understanding that makes a person able to reform the material, to teach it to others or create new materials at the area.

Description of the three learning forms:

- Any learning material has to give exploratory area to get a whole picture of the topic and help the learner to engage with the topic. The free exploration means that there is no required knowledge, that way no mistake can be made, so there is no anxiety in this learning. It is like a child's learning, when explores the environment.
- After the learner got some impression and basic knowledge at a topic, the methodological learning can be more effective, because it is based on former experiences. The learner needs clear rules, clear details and names of the elements of the learning. A systematic knowledge can be built using tables, figures, mind maps, and other tools, plus through many opportunity to practice.
- After the learner got the clear rules and practice, the third level of learning can happen. Expert learning is the synthetic learning, when the learner understands the connections between the topics, areas and materials, and the knowledge becomes a whole in the mind. This process can't be taught, just let happen.

Schools tend to focus on the second level, and usually don't let learners to be prepared by the exploration. That makes the official education less effective and more difficult for the learners.

It is important to realize that most of the people never get to the third level of the learning at most ability and knowledge area, and it is normal, as this level is not needed. Even the first level, the instinct, sense level of knowledge or ability can be enough in the everyday life. The second level is needed for an educated level of the life, where the abilities and knowledge is well developed.

Certainly everybody has to have some areas where an expert level is attained. These are the areas of the profession and high level hobbies, etc. Otherwise the 'user level,' the systematic knowledge is enough for anybody to solve everyday problems.

The three types of learning and knowledge level mean in second language learning a natural way of language acquisition.

- the possibility to experience and sense the language,
  - to imitate what has been sensed,
  - repeat and use the language on an instinct level
- 
- awareness of the language
  - getting familiar with the rules of the language
  - practising
- 
- understanding the language's rules
  - teaching the language
  - study the peculiarities of the language

Considering the modules of our course we have to build up the two forms of learning in each area. The third form is not that should be taught, as it is that would happen if the learner is interested in the language on an expert level, and wants to contemplate.

## 2. Special learners' learning

Special learners' learning differs from the majority's ways of learning however special learners differ considerably from each other, too. There are important, common features that make special learners special, but not all the features characterize every special learner. Frequent features:

- holistic information processing
- poor sense towards details
- rich imagination
  
- short term attention span
- diverted attention
- occasional hyper-focusing
  
- impulsivity
- restlessness
- preference of the fast solutions
  
- inflexibility
- autonomy
- sensibility

These characteristics show that special learners are good in free exploration and expert learning, while poor when methodological learning is needed. That is why they are in trouble in schools and school-like courses that hardly offer else than step-by-step built learning. A learning material for the special learner has to go through on all three levels of learning.

However, it is important to keep in mind that the most important characteristic of the special learners is that they are more sensible of the quality of the learning environment than others. It means that the best learning environment is the personalized learning environment.

The learning material has to be built on a basic optimal level that meets the special learners' needs, plus the material has to be built on more pathways to give the choice for the learners to follow the personally preferred pathways.

### 3. Multi-channelled learning

To use more learning styles and channels is the best learning for everybody. For a special learner it is a need.

Everybody has preferred learning styles, but it doesn't mean that the preferred style is the most useful and preferred in all learning situations. Not only the learners' need but also the learning material defines the most suitable style and channels.

Multi-channelled learning is a way to give choice for the learning brain to use the needed stimuli. It is the basic, natural environment where we learn. There are visual, auditory, tactile stimuli, stimuli that can be manipulated, that move, and give way to interactivity.

Our learning course can offer multi-channelled materials in the different modules, but differently considering the area and the learning form of the material.

### 4. Built up from passive listening levels towards more demanding active language production

The free exploration form of learning starts at the listening in the language learning and hence in the second language learning. That is the way a child learns a language, but an adult's second language learning is different. After a learner is on literal level, needs also the text. Thus words and sentences have to be added to the listening material.

Multi-channelled learning means not only the different senses, but also the literal modality, the text. However, though the text is available, no production is required. The learner has to get enough experience before any active production.

The passive and active learning is different in the different ability areas:

- 3 listening – understanding
- 4 remembering – recalling
- 5 repeating – speaking
- 6 imitation – reading
- 7 copying – writing

The material and tasks should require production only after the passive learning gave enough knowledge to ensure that the learner won't make mistake. This is the over-learning.

The **over-learning** is needed especially in the learning of the special learners to avoid mistakes. It is important firstly from cognitive reasons not from motivational point of view.

Especially the dyslexic learner's brain is endangered by the chaos caused by rivalling stimuli, but also the other special learner types can be easily stuck by contradictory inputs.

Passive learning enables the learner to get enough clear input to risk production. Over-learning guarantees the stable knowledge.

## 5. Activities include the most popular aspects of everyday activity of the target group

Language is communication and not simple knowledge. It differs considerably from other school subjects. Yet, foreign languages are taught like history or biology. Even the teaching of the first language is different from the second language learning, because the mother tongue of the learner is on a communicational level, and the goal of the learning is to get a more systematic awareness and knowledge of the language.

The learning of a second language is learning to communicate. Thus the material should be based on the normal everyday activities, interest areas and the cultures areas.

That is why we have to focus on such areas.

- Situations concerning social networking – Skype, chat and forum groups, mobile calls,
- Editing and sharing personal data
- Playing on-line games, quest, search
- Everyday work and private situations
- Individual interest

## 6. Focused on success and positive feedback

As it was emphasized earlier, the 'over learning' is the safe side. The specialty of the special learners' information processing is that they never ever should err. Once an information gone wrong, it would remain an unsure item. However the over-learning has another invaluable advantage, the continuous success that makes the learner believe in the positive outcome. That makes the learner do more effort, and the effort will pay back with achievements.

Motivation is one of the main weak points of the special learners' learning. Special learners have collected a lot bad experiences and failures during schooling. They are convinced that learning is not their area of success.

“No matter what you think, you can do it or not. You will be right.”

A learning material that provides safe learning is half success. The safest way to ensure the success is to give choices. The pathways have to be not only multi-channelled but also flexible to give material for slow and fast, straight forward and trial luck progress, too.

## 7. Pathways

The learning modules will be built independently but it doesn't mean the learner would face with the independent modules. The learner will face with the pathways, the modules provide the materials.

The following description is an adaptation of the modules into the pathways. All the materials follow the above defined structure using the passive to active functions:

- listening – understanding
- remembering – recalling
- repeating – speaking
- imitation – reading
- copying – writing

All the materials should provide multi-channelled, interactive learning environment and focus on communication used everyday activities and on interest areas.

The pathways provide the background for the improvement of the motivation and learning in general for the special learners learning second language.

## 8. Listening – understanding

The material consists of situations, games and tasks where the learner can listen and see the words, sentences and the short instructions, and can see pictures of the words and situations of the communication. Short thematic videos, cartoons, songs and flashcards can be useful. The visual aids and the situations help the understanding of the words and sentences.

Dyslexic learners are often poor in listening because many dyslexic learners suffer of sound discrimination difficulties. That is why it is important to have the correct wording in text, too. Certainly the learners don't have to read, but the written text gives a visual aid to the poor auditory processing.

Learners with ADHD may have problem to listen to longer texts. This problem arises later in the usage of the language, when longer speech should be followed and understood. The segmentation and visualization of the text helps to follow the flow of the text, and it can be built up in from the beginning.

## 9. Remembering – recalling

A multi-channelled material helps to remember the words and sentences. Recalling situations activates the words and sentences. Multiple choice tasks, memory card games, sorting games are the examples of such tools.

Learners with attention deficit may have problem in these tasks as any memorizing needs attention, too. Active participation helps the learners to avoid mind wandering. That is why it is important to give tasks, colouring, sorting, searching, giving choices, creating own word groups, flashcards, etc.

Dyslexic learners tend to mix up words and forget very shortly the words that have been learnt. Beyond the multi-channelling and interactivity the creation of associations helps to remember the words. Words and sentences can be associated to pictures, movements and situations. They can be grouped. Pairs of opposite meanings, topic groups and synonyms can be created.

## 10. Repeating – speaking

The text and voice together provides the safe pathway. After the learner had enough experience through listening, the learner has to have materials where the passive repeating is the task, repeating questions, answers, etc. After the repetition tasks the learner can tell the questions, answers, etc, that were memorized by the repetition.

Many learners are afraid to speak using the second language because they don't feel safe enough and/or because it is too much effort to build sentences. That is because the usual second language teaching gives only elements and rules to glue the elements.

It takes a lot time to translate the text one would like to tell, and it is not the real way of speaking. The real speaking doesn't mean translation but reproduction of the relevant text for the given communication.

Conversation topics, blocks of expressions and situations are the elements of the effective language learning. Ready-made whole sentences and expressions help the learner to speak fluently without the tiresome and slow translating. After a lot listening and repetition, the sentences automatically appear in the mind.

## 11. Imitation – reading

The reading phase is the first real literal phase that can be tricky for dyslexic learners. Some dyslexic learners won't be able to learn to read at all, or wrong and very slowly. They are the learners with deep dyslexia, who has serious phonological processing difficulties. The rest of the special learners, even the dyslexic ones are able to learn to read on the second languages, too. However considerable preparation is needed to achieve an appropriate level.

The first rule is that the learner mustn't be in a situation where a word would be pronounced or written incorrectly. Again, over-learning is very important.

The foundation of the reading starts at the beginning on the listening level, when the text can be seen while the learner still doesn't have to read, merely listen, understand then repeat the text. The literality can be built up easily even in case of dyslexia through natural early presentation of the written form of the language.

Most of the dyslexic learners can become good and eager readers on second language, too, though may have problem with the reading aloud. As reading aloud is not a frequent expectation, it hardly causes troubles.

Reading text that is known and many times listened, leads to easy reading. The base of the fluent reading is to see many times the correct words and fill up a stable inner lexicon of the words in the mind. That is why the audio-books can be helpful if there is text that is read aloud by a machine. Also movies with subtitles can improve reading.

Reading helps to improve speaking by developing the vocabulary and grounds writing by the increasing phonological awareness. That is why it is especially useful to provide many texts with voice and pictures or movies to read.

## 12. Copying - writing

Writing means to produce the written text and also the right spelling. Both can be challenge for a special learner. Either because of instable phonological, visual or auditory processing or because of the low motivation for the written communication, the writing skills can be a weak point of the special learners. The two reasons combine and strengthen each other. If the learner has difficulties with the writing ability, the motivation for writing will be low, thus the learner writes less. Without practice the writing won't improve, thus again, a lot trouble will be connected to the written communication. This vicious circle has to be prevented or cured.

Like reading starts at an early phase, at the listening, also writing can start at the beginning of the second language learning. It won't be real writing, only copying. Tasks where the words have to be copied either by moving a missing word to a sentence or copying letter by letter, base the writing skills.

Natural writing situation can serve as motivational background for writing. Writing SMS, e-mail, or chat, later writing comments are short tasks and can be engaging.

Proper spelling is a lifelong challenge for the most of the special learners. Even very skilled readers, literally very educated people can show bad spelling skills. People with attention deficit are always endangered by their inattention periods, and the poor spelling is one of the most characteristic and common residual symptom of the dyslexia.

Fortunately the digital devices can help a lot in the writing and spelling. Word processors and mailing programs with spell checkers and a lot other supporting tools can help to produce right spelled written communication. Also during the learning of the written communication on a second language the support of the right spelling is crucial. Practices to use spell-checkers should be part of the learning.

## Summary

Our work is to provide self-help learning materials for special learners to learn English as a second language. The current psychological knowledge on the needs of special learners and the rules of learning help to provide effective learning environment for our target group.

Special learners' learning is special because of their more sensibility to the learning environment, and because of the education doesn't provide proper conditions for learning.

Combined the natural forms of learning and the specialties of our target group the learning pathways have been developed.

The main features of our methodology:

- to follow the natural learning – learning environment starting with free exploration plus giving materials for the systematic learning
- to provide natural learning environment through multi-channelled materials
- to build on communication and individual interests
- to ground a skill through passive, non-production focused learning following active, production focused learning
- to avoid confusion using continuous feedback and over-learning
- to ensure self-confidence through providing a strengthening, positive atmosphere by independent learning and individual choices