Adequate methodology for the best comprehension of the content given in the course

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this individual project was to apply the most adequate methodology for the comprehension of the information in the content given for the participants in the course ACTUALIZATE. Thanks to the data of the field work, where we could identify many important aspects of the target group such as: learning habits, most familiar tools and favorite format to learn and similar projects inside and outside the country to decide on what methodology is the most appropriate to use. The results were that a sequential, inductive and exemplified methodology is the most appropriate for them, likewise, online documents (PDFs) and mind-maps were the main tools to ensure that the trainees have more than one option to learn something.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Context

After the first two editions in 2012 and 2013, the UCG in cooperation with its students has diagnosed the need of a more appropriate methodology for SMEs from Miraflores in the course. The past two editions were quite useful to recognize strengths and weaknesses in many aspects of the whole course, not only the methodology to use but also the praxis of the content given.

The main aspects the students complained about were the lack of monitoring and personalized attention by the teachers. Others said that the content was too complicated for them, that the presentation needed a more profound introduction so that all the learners can continue until the end and not lose track of the class. Another group expressed that the that the theory was applied in a real life situation, it was good but did not transcend to become an everyday practical tool to improve the SMEs commercial situation.

For this situation, a literature review and a comparison with similar projects inside the country and abroad were studied and taken into account to design an appropriate approach, design and evaluation of the course.

1.1 Theoretical framework pedagogical

In order to develop the project ACTUALIZATE many pedagogical schools were taken into account such as the pedagogy of Autonomy by Paulo Freire

and the Cognitivist Vision by Bruner to make a suitable educational project for the target group, in this case, the SMEs from Miraflores and any entrepreneur who is willing to learn. At the same time, this seminar takes the reality of each student´s profile into account, in the category of SMEs, using these pedagogical theories to elaborate an adequate program focusing on the identity and particularities of this type of students.

1.2   Paulo Freire and the pedagogy de Autonomy

Paulo Freire is one of the most transcendental Latin American educators of the twentieth century, according to experts *´´is the most influential on educational issues in the late twentieth century and one of the most popular on issues with informal educators, in the need of dialogue and with the claims of the disadvantaged''(Freire, 2004, p.1).*   The last part of the citation establishes one the main concerns of the project which is the need of dialogue, in other words, the lack of tools that the SMEs from Miraflores need to keep developing in a world where updates and trainings guarantee to be connected with the current social reality, otherwise, the business project starts to become obsolete and do not meet the real needs of the XXI century. For this reason, the project ACTUALIZATE recognizes this educational and social necessity to elaborate an academic project for this target group. Also, we claim the last point marked on the *claims of the disadvantaged* because it is a neglected sector lacking of opportunities like these, either for lack of time or scarce

economic situations to continue to develop, ensuring and improving their original economic proposal thanks to the benefits of this educational program.

Paulo Freire establishes principles into his teachings that were taken to elaborate the educational methodology in this project, one of the them is ´´*Respect for each individual´s knowledge (…) do what you say and take a chance accepting the new, while rejecting any form of discrimination; reflect critically on educational practices and assume your cultural identity.´´ (Freire, 2004, p. 2).* It means that we first recognize that the SMEs from Miraflores, represented by both workers and employers have a particular technical knowledge and based on that we developed the seminar this year, they have already acquired through years of experience and our objective is to strengthen it and update it.

In virtue of what has been said, ACTUALIZATE, is an invitation to try something new that for sure will be a vital complement for the economic, social and personal development of the target group. Likewise, it is a cultural claim to their own identity which is a social obligation that must be defended and promoted by the UCG, its students and Miraflores.

In short, the pedagogy of Autonomy posted by Paulo Freire, is the pedagogical and theoretical foundation of ACTUALIZATE, because it seeks to recognize the particular situation of the target group and makes us develop a program that meets the particular sector´s needs.

By creating an audiovisual and multimedia educational program, the main subject, the student, in an autonomous and independent way will internalize the knowledge and the external tools of the training with his/her own language.

1.3 Cognitivism by Bruner

Jerome Seymour Bruner, an American psychologist who established the Cognitivism in the twentieth century states that ´´ the mind is an active agent in the learning process, building and adapting mental models or systems of knowledge'' *(Bruner, 1991, p.1).* Therefore, recognizes that the human mind is transformed over time experienced by the person mindset. It is precisely for this reason that ACTUALIZATE, takes Bruner as its methodological support, because the past seminars respond to his method of teaching where the trainees will internalize the knowledge given.

In conclusion, the pedagogical tools in ACTUALIZATE, respond to the methods of Paulo Freire and Jerome Bruner, because both promote

independent and autonomous learning within the SMEs from Miraflores, empowering the target group with tools for exercising and updating their knowledge in order to achieve the maximum development of their entrepreneurial skills.

2. METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL

This project includes a proposal, which final outcome will be to deliver knowledge to strengthen areas that the microentrepreneurs need to improve through distance education methodology design.

The starting point is to have the willingness to change and the attitude open to learn. A second aspect is vital, the teacher and students have to become familiar with the formats. This methodological proposal has been based on research and testing of a multidisciplinary team of Academic Units of Distance Education (UNAED) of the Autonomous University of Tamaulipas. The proposed methodology is based on filling the following formats: Course Overview, Module specification, evaluation and accreditation of the module.

Educators must be ready to develop the skills that new challenges demand, understand the technologies that are involved and the tools that can be helpful to fulfill the expectations of the new roles in the changing world that we have to teach.

The design of this online course requires a multidisciplinary team, consisting of experts from different professional backgrounds: graphic designer, programmer, expert in instructional design (scripts), content expert, educators, etc.

This guide provides the information necessary for content experts who are responsible for defining the knowledge, skills and attitudes to be acquired by the participants in the course.

According to research conducted by the UNAED, distance education is an *´´educational strategy based on the application of technology to learning without limitations of time, place, occupation or age of participants, which implies new roles for students and for teachers, new attitudes and new methodological approaches´´* indicating that *´´computer technology incorporates the necessary tools that allows students to have access to: content, teaching, learning strategies, activities and opportunities where the participant decides when, where, and how to use´´*

Our course does not depend on the internet connection, since it is also available in CD format, which enables the student to do it either ways: online or offline. This requires a planning and design following a systematic process based

on needs and objectives. The activities, resources and evaluation to assess the students´ learning process will be designed keeping in mind these axes.

Additionally, we take some elements of the two proposed designs of online courses, televised and media: 1. The proposal from Catalano, Avolio and Sladogna in the book ´´Design curriculum based on competency standards, concepts and methodological guidelines´´ by the Interamerican Development Bank (IDB) and the Multilateral Investment Fund; 2. The proposal of the Veracruziana Univerisity in his Guide for the Design of Online Courses, 3. Aprendamos (Municipality of Guayaquil, Ecuador).

3. DESCRIPTION OF THE INDIVIDUAL PROJECT

3.1 Objectives:

General objective

- Apply the most adequate methodology for the comprehension of the information in the content given for the participants in the course.

Specific objectives

- Provide the participants with didactic tools in order to guide their learning process.

- Evaluate the participants in a practical and holistic way.

3.2 Methodology

1- According to the field survey, the most needed topics were chosen to elaborate each chapter.

2- After the selection of the most meaningful topics, the general objectives and specific objectives were set in the general description of the course format. (Format # 1) See Appendix.

3- For the methodological development of each chapter, an inductive, linear, consistent and organized format was used in the following manner: introduction, development, closure, evaluation and a small workshop.

(Format #2) See Appendix

4. INCORPORATION OF THE METHODOLOGICAL PROPOSAL FOR THE COURSE DESIGN.

The methodology proposed by the UAT is based on the following formats:

4.1 General course description

This format works as a guide to design the general information that both the teacher and the team work should know about the project for its participation, elaboration and implementation on the educational platform.

4.2 Specification of each module

The main purpose of this format is to design the didactic units inside each module: presentation, objectives, potential learning problems, supporting material.

4.3Evaluation

Each chapter has one evaluation that is divided in two parts with the following types of evaluation: True or False and Multiple-Choice. Once the trainee has followed the course through, the summative evaluation can be taken. The summative evaluation is the collection of the most important concepts and practices throughout the six modules.

Once the 6 modules are finished, the participants will have to take a summative evaluation that gathers all the main concepts and exercises of each chapter. This evaluation will be the final stage before the accreditation.

4.4 Accreditation

If the participant approves the summative evaluation with at least 7, as a low pass , a certificate will be issued either by the program or the university. This certificate is a real proof of the effort and positive results in the final assessment of this course.

5. RESULTS OF THE EVALUATION

The training course was designed with a linear, inductive and exemplified format. Since the most common technological tools were laptops, Tv's and tablets, the resource to be used was the video, which was available in both online and offline (CD's). Our training course uses PDF´s as supporting material in each module/chapter to consolidate the knowledge delivered, in case the trainees feel they need another approach. Within the online documents (PDFs), mind-maps were the main tools to break down the content in a more visual way. Likewise, key words were useful to introduce the participants into the class, however, this strategy was not used in every chapter/module.

The design of the evaluation relied on two types of questions: True or False and Multiple Choice. They were selected for the evaluation section for their easiness and practical for both the teacher and the participants. We decided that at the end of each chapter/module, there should be an evaluation which will not be considered as an official grade but will reinforce the knowledge acquired in each unit. Also, we decided that a summative evaluation with the same types of

questions must be designed as the last stage of the course before accreditation to meet the holistic principles.

6. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The evaluation of the course was limited in terms of variety of activities, the course only relied on two types of activities: True or False and Multiple Choice. I would recommend for the future, a more versatile range of activities to give more opportunities to different types of learners. The time was another factor that hindered us in our effort to expand the types of activities in the evaluation section. This type of project needs more time and more supervision by accredited teacher from UCG, especially from Education so that the project can exceed the expectations and minimize the mistakes.

While designing the course, I could realize that some chapters need more practices, for example in the sixth chapter, the one about ''Accountings''. First of all, the content was overwhelming, the evaluation was theoretical when it had to be rather practical, the type of evaluation was not the most adequate especially in this chapter. This chapter (6) needs to be considerably reduced in content, it was the most extensive. Despite the ''workshop'' that is presented after each evaluation at the end of each unit, it is up to each student to go beyond what is given in the training course, the results will be seen if the student takes this step

ahead; if not, the student will be relegated to a limited amount of information that will be forgotten eventually.

A previous academic observation is that the chapters/modules' content cannot be too extensive like because this complicates the evaluation design. The content goes hand in hand with the pedagogical design and they must be regulated carefully.

The video tutorials are so effective and the course itself practical because the trainees can stop and continue whenever and as many times as they decide is necessary to learn.

Let´s not forget another crucial feedback here, there must be two people of Education and Multimedia or graphic designers at least to carry out a more better work. A lot of the work relied on first, the educator and the multimedia expert.

One of the main problems found in the seminars 2012 and 2013, the lack of time, is now solved with ACTUALIZATE. Our digital platform offers two options: online and offline (DVD) which enables the students to have free access whenever they want. With our training course, new doors are open, for new

knowledge and a new era in the commercial development of the SMEs at Miraflores.

7. PERSONAL REFLECTION

This seminar helped me out to grow both personal and professionally. From both points of view I could confirm that it is vital to work with good communication, honesty, commitment and respect inside the group. Even though, there were people with less work experience, who lacked of many of the before mentioned aspects, the problems have to be solved and not exaggerated. For this lack, the group had serious problems, the chemistry of the group was not good at the beginning but in the end everything was better. It is complicated when just a few members of the group have to carry out most of the job and even worse, when they do not have a good communication, the project is affected negatively. Despite being a patient person, I learned to be more patient and not to lose control in many situations, for example: we had a whatsapp group and frequently talked about the roles and things to do. Some members did not respond to the requests on time or they just did not answer to it. The air was heavy at a times, even a fight could happened, but it never did.

On the other hand, I feel that I had to do more than what I was supposed to, I had become: an expert in instructional design (scripts), content expert and also my role given as an educator. However, making a script after having done a chapter is

demanding, overwhelming and satisfactory at the same time because it is nice to know that the things are done by us and not by a person out of the group. The expert in instructional design did a superficial work that had to be done all over again later. Nevertheless, all the sacrifice contributed to my professional development too, I learned to be more careful, to check things more than twice, to ask for feedback in the same way, to keep in mind that nothing is perfect and that it can always be improved. I could put into practice the scheme/strategies that I use when planning my classes, this time it was a much more detailed planning, about topics that I was not familiar with, I had to a lot of research about the topics I was planning about, I had to adapt the language, material, approach to a group with a total different background from what I am used to.

One more recommendation is that the multimedia expert has to be open to change things and to do what is best for the educational purpose, more than the multimedia purpose. To conclude, I am happy for all the ups and downs of the project, it was one more experience that enriched my life and I hope that this project have a long-term impact on our society. Besides what we can learn, I think that more important is what we can give to a group of our society in need of help from us both: the university and its students. I am sure that this project will be improved, expanded and accessible to other cities in the future.

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9. APPENDIXES: