



SWOT ANALYSIS

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1. Summary of the project

Language is more than mere communication; it is a tool for thinking, for the intelligentsia, for culture and history. Linguistic poverty has always been around the youth, though not limited. The project Lexipedia contributes to the linguistic education of teenagers and the development of their vocabulary in a highly attractive way. The project motivates students, educators and agencies in Greece, Hungary and Romania. It aims to plan, realize and assess a vocabulary bee, with contestants high-school students between the ages of 13 and 14. At least 90 students will be directly engaged with the project, in addition to a number of supporting actors.

In a number of distinct phases, the project manages the creation of a lexicon, its translation, the training of the spelling bee contestants by enriching their vocabulary and their knowledge, the contests and, finally, the Greek, Hungarian, Romanian and English editions of a report that will present the process and the results of the vocabulary contest scheme. Proper feedback and dissemination, as well as future applications, are of high importance, thus all partners will act accordingly by promoting the educational tools in the three member states and beyond.

“Language is a process of free creation; its laws and principles are fixed, but the manner in which the principles of generation are used is free and infinitely varied. Even the interpretation and use of words involves a process of free creation.”

—Noam Chomsky

2. Introduction

2.1 Background of Lexipedia

Several findings and reports often refer to the issue of the linguistic culture, education and expression of the youth, especially pupils. Some of them focus on the reduction and the gaps in the vocabulary that have emerged (speech impairment). Others retain the ambiguous attitude towards the so-called “youth slang” or “teenage slang”, swinging between acceptance (linguistic creativity) and stigma (linguistic poverty).

Although these views are usually formed on the basis of certain linguistic prejudice of teachers, linguists or even the media, the existence of linguistic deprivation, weak expression and the general lingual crisis is a serious issue caused by the lack of, reduction or standardization of an efficient system of language education in primary and particularly in secondary education. As a result, poor language acquisition has had detrimental effects on the intellectual development of the youth and the society in general.

Language is by no means a mere tool for communication; it is a tool for thinking and for the intellect, a bearer of civilization and history, a path for the expression of the spiritual and cultural level as well as the psyche of the people; a means of literature approach. But, above all, language is the access to knowledge, the most powerful weapon of the youth.

Therefore, lingual incompetence poses serious threats to the social cohesion as well as to the identity and the continuity, the survival and the prospect of the peoples. At the same time, it deprives the young person of necessary intellectual skills, with adverse consequences in their capacity of communication, in their expression of collective obligations towards society and in their generation of innovative ideas for future employment in a competitive environment, for intellectual and social progress and for a decent living.

There are many ways to effectively address the issue and improve the linguistic education of students and the youth; increasing the hours of language teaching, the implementation of regular training seminars for teachers, impose limits to the linguistic arbitrariness of SMEs, organization and participation in cultural initiatives and events in and outside the school environment, the creation of libraries and the promotion of reading.

Lexipedia also contributes to the increase in the quality and to the restoration of the language. By acting in an extracurricular fashion, the project has students, teachers and institutions imbued with awareness and mobility through a ‘game’ which inspires love for the process of learning and the language itself.

2.2 Summary of the report

The preliminary evaluations conducted by the partners of the project were assessed for the elaboration of the present SWOT analysis. This report presents the findings as extracted from the input—the documentation submitted by the partners of the project—by outlining them in brief and assessing their weights on the efficiency of the work. Apparently, the target group of Lexipedia is seldom aimed at by initiatives under the theme of lingual development; a fact that puts Lexipedia a step ahead from the competition. In addition, the local communities of the partners do not often take part in activities that promote language acquisition, thus increasing their interest and curiosity. The demanding conditions, however, place Lexipedia in a situation where some factors might affect its smooth development; yet all involved members are aware of the challenges and accordingly equipped. A short list of recommendations is presented, to facilitate the overcoming of any potential internal and

external factors that may cause inconveniences in either the workflow or the dissemination of the results.

2.3 Learning results of Lexipedia

The learning results expected from Lexipedia project are summarized in the following lines:

- To develop the basic interpersonal skills, to strengthen or restore the oral eloquence and to facilitate the daily communication within the social interactions of the teenagers;
- To develop very important and determining for the lives of the participants' academic skills, especially reading and writing skills, including spelling, which can also contribute to their personal satisfaction and future professional prospects.
- To improve the capacity of the participants to cope with the school requirements.
- To give motives to the participants to build their own strategies and memory techniques that will help them to process incoming information and to handle the educational material effectively.
- To create an incentive for the participating students through interactive projects, which will help them become independent, to use the language as an educational tool and to develop their own glossological system with confidence.
- To develop the skill of automatic recognition of a word and its integration in different semantic fields, which will improve the user's ability to understand texts and master both a passive and an active vocabulary.
- To cultivate the ability to use dictionaries and familiarize teenagers with the macrostructure of the dictionary and distinguish it from other types of books.

3. Feedback from partner countries

3.1 Greece

In formal settings, the education is characterized as inadequate, because the sterile storage of physical books, the connexion between school and higher education and the end of education encourage the removal of the spiritual and linguistic culture from the individual. The compulsory education curriculum states that the purpose of teaching the language course is to develop the student's ability to operate efficiently, confidently and creatively in written and spoken language, and to actively participate in school and the wider society. The didactic approach is based on a rational attitude to language teaching, meaning that the students are asked to perform effective speech acts, such as convincing an interlocutor or simply be able to provide information. The educational system encourages passive reading and reproduction of texts, as shown inter alia in plenty of copy exercises in elementary school, in the word-for-word memorization of material selection in the university and in the absence of even the simple critical reading activities, such as text conversation the summary, even underlining their main points. Although common in other systems, activities such as independent reading of literary books are not encouraged. The above produce a line of citizens lacking a broad range of skills as well as compelling critical thinking or social intervention.

As far as the informal settings are concerned, it has been stated that modern life has had a negative impact on the proper linguistic expression for a number of reasons. The technological development has been accompanied by a glossary of technical terms predominately in English, imposed on all languages with limited expertise, including the Hellenic language. The technological superiority of the developed countries has been seen wrongfully as an indication of cultural superiority. In conjunction with xenomania, the lingual perception has been altered in the minds of its speakers. In addition, the contemporary materialistic mentality prevails; thus an affinity for lingual development is considered outdated and anachronistic. The intense lifestyle of large urban centers causes their citizens to live somewhat isolated, alienated and unable to communicate effectively with their fellows. The excessive labor and the minimal free time have a materialistic effect on the people's mentality and cause mental fatigue whilst preventing them from engaging in other activities that require concentration such as reading. Finally, young people, running with the stream, use limited vocabulary and often type in "greeklish", which further impoverishes their linguistic capacity.

The language of young people has been the subject of discussion and evaluation, to assess the young and adults differently. More often than adults criticize young people for the way they speak, parents and teachers react, and vary the attitude of media towards the language of young people since sometimes accepted and sometimes stigmatized. Young people, for their part believe that their language is distinguished by the straightness of, for identification with their age and culture. The youth "vocabulary" has been a result of the contemporary influences, foreign languages (primarily English) and the media. Their language level is primarily connected to the general interests of each individual and, secondarily, to the individual's perception and knowledge.

The project can promote Mentores' values and activities; new paths of collaboration with teachers, schools, organizations and other local and European institutions will emerge. The Lexipedia contest will improve the local young people's ability to use the language. Lexipedia will influence a better understanding of the importance of languages; it will promote the theme of a more appropriate verbal communication, free from misinterpretations

and misunderstandings. In addition, schools will be motivated to further organize extracurricular training activities, such as contests.

3.2 Hungary

Language acquisition is highly relevant in all jobs and circumstances where intercultural events may occur. Foreign languages are essential to anyone who wishes a real career with prospects. Yet, language acquisition in Hungary is unsatisfactory, in spite of the fact that foreign language learning in schools is compulsory. The problems exist in understanding and producing language and in successfully using of language in your country, especially among children, youngsters and youths.

Hungarian is a very unique language not related to any of the well-known European languages which makes learning other languages difficult. Hungarian culture is open to foreign cultural products but with a tendency to translate everything—books and films—limiting people's exposure to foreign languages.

Debrecen Summer School is primarily involved in teaching Hungarian and other languages. They have shown significant interest in any project related to language learning and teaching, since they are regarded as opportunities to improve their skills and methods, and to gain new experiences. Given the above, it is expected that the young people, their families and friends as well as the teachers involved will enjoy being part of Lexipedia; in addition, a successful completion of the project may be a good motivation for similar activities.

3.3 Romania

Modern technology has a great effect on the lives of the young people, only few of which remain resilient to change. Unfortunately, the Internet and new technologies in the media may affect their lives in negative ways, such as social and intellectual marginalization. Language acquisition adds to creativity; it broadens knowledge and creates strong social position. Verbal eloquence is essential for many public figures. A clear, diverse, appropriate and understandable register helps communicating more effectively. As for the scholar environments, there have been cases where words, such as scientific terms, are not fully explained to the student thus limiting their perception. In addition, social networking technologies have a tendency to oversimplify the language and to convert human users into stereotypical characters; emoticons and acronyms (LOL, BRB, etc.) are fair examples. Such characters limit thinking, creativity and the language itself. Most of the students who fail their first major exam in Romanian schools, at the age of 14 (after the 8th grade), do so because of language issues.

The Romanian system of education is, according to the questionnaires, still “too rigid” and does not appeal to the children's creativity and imagination, rather than memorization. Attempts have been made by modern teachers to introduce non-formal language teaching methods in the first and second grade, such as crosswords and other small games, quizzes, puzzles etc. However, none of these are as effective for language acquisition as reading books. The selection criteria of the books for the official compulsory reading lists for each grade are primarily their plot, message, importance of the author et al., and secondarily for the language and their vocabulary. In higher grades, vocabulary is a part of the lesson, but the method of learning refers only to transcription and memorizing. It is agreed, nonetheless, that a person who reads is more likely to be more advanced as far as language acquisition is concerned.

As seen in the Romanian reports, NGOs have little or no part of the informal settings of education in Camena's locality. The projects dedicated to young people are more related to their personal development, leaving the issue of language acquisition somehow behind, even if it is obviously strongly related to a young person's development. Apparently, the themes of the projects and the usage of modern tools such as social media websites are of great importance when it comes to attracting the young people's interest. However, the state of the lingual development initiatives in the whole of Romania remains unknown. Some indicators show that there are, in fact, projects that address the needs of young people, even indirectly. Apparently, though, there is little support by the media; for instance, there are not any TV shows aiming to help people improve their language. Moreover, the parents do not always provide their children with explanations after they have corrected their misnomers.

Keeping in line with modern technologies, many young people use informal online tools of questionable credibility to help them with definitions or other explanations rather than the Romanian Academic printed dictionary, which is the official language tool. A number of causes and effects related to the language misuse and lack of development have been identified:

- Children and youngsters do not read or, worse, they do not understand what they are reading; they are usually forced by their teachers or parents
- Children and youngsters spend too much time on TV, where the language is simple, at times vulgar and project a deliberated misuse of words
- Formal education is full of notions which are used without explanation
- Children of families with lower culture are less likely to develop their own culture (as well as language)
- Imported words, generally referring to technology and IT, have often no equivalent in the national language. The young people use this technology "slang" which is sometimes not understood by the older generations thus creating a gap in the communication of these generations.

Camena is highly interested in projects in the field of Lexipedia. The experience will strengthen their international partnership and help them improve on their future endeavors, as well as replicating the model of Lexipedia. In addition, Camena intends to link the dissemination of the project with the yearly meeting of the Romanian language teachers (the Pedagogical Seminar) which usually takes place in May.

Lexipedia is expected to influence Camena's local region in a positive way. The project will give the opportunity to children 13–14 years old to take part in an extracurricular activity and it will raise the level of education and the value of competitions in the local community. It is hoped that Lexipedia will give an impulse to teachers, schools and other NGOs to replicate the idea by organizing similar activities at smaller level or inter-school competitions, with the support of Camena, if asked. In addition, some money will be spent in the local business (coffee shops, restaurants etc), not involved with Lexipedia.

4. SWOT Analysis

The Lexipedia SWOT analysis was conducted to identify the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieving project's objectives and to evaluate the strengths and weaknesses which usually arise internally and opportunities and threats which usually arise from external sources. The four modules of the analysis are strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, as explained below.

- Strengths: characteristics of Lexipedia that give an advantage over others.
- Weaknesses: characteristics that place the project at a disadvantage relative to others.
- Opportunities: elements that the project could exploit to its advantage.
- Threats: elements in the environment that could cause trouble for the project.

A pragmatic approach to the definition of 'language' can be seen in business environments, where the term "communication tool for career" is regarded as more accurate.

The partners have already conducted a preliminary evaluation of the problems regarding the linguistic poverty and the vocabulary gap in their local communities. The results have been taken into consideration for this analysis and they will be put to good use to leverage the positive aspects and eliminate or subdue the negative aspects of Lexipedia.

4.1 Strengths (internal factors)

The key strengths of Lexipedia can be grouped in the following keywords: experience, innovation, organization and spectrum of operations. The strengths of the project are outlined as follows:

- Experience. All members have good experience on project management working with young people, organizing events, etc. Part of the team comes from the field of education, which adds to the project. Debrecen Summer School has a lot of experience in language teaching and in organizing learning and cultural environments; approximately 1000 foreign students per year take part in the School, making it one of the best services in the field.
- Partnership. The Romanian partner Camena has already a good reputation in the local community, which can guarantee high-quality implementation as well as great interest. Debrecen Summer School has more than 50 teachers in their network and they collaborate with more than 20 companies. Participants from Debrecen are easy to be found, since the city is full of schools.
- Good and fail-proof management of the project with backup solutions, including document and data protection mechanisms. The people involved have a good relationship and proper communication.
- The innovative character of the project; Lexipedia is the first of its kind in the local community of the Romanian partner.

4.2 Weaknesses (internal factors)

The internal factors that may constitute the weaknesses of Lexipedia could be the following:

- Problems of financial nature: cash flow problems from the National Agency, lack of sufficient investment capital, reduction of staff.

- Marketing and promotion problems: insufficient/improper media collaboration and collaboration with the authorities; failure to attract schools and teachers, as sometimes they are not interested.
- Bad time management: accomplishing tasks in the last minute, which can lead to inferior quality; superposition of tasks from different jobs; delays and no respect of the deadlines.
- Internal problems: failure of communication among team members, lack of transparency between partners and taking decisions without consulting with the partners; wrong choice of young people to participate in the project

4.3 Opportunities (external factors)

The opportunities derived from Lexipedia are the following:

- Networking. The contact lists of the partners will include both local and European institutions in the field of education
- More activities based on non-formal education will be offered in schools and in age groups (13–14) which have never been targeted before in the local communities; the increased interest of parents and teachers will help for follow up projects inspired by Lexipedia. Since today there are more and more opportunities for nonprofit organizations to apply for additional funds, follow up projects are well expected.
- The teachers involved are eager to involve their students in international projects, as this usually helps them with their annual evaluation.
- Voluntary help in community and cultural affairs may support our activities.

4.4 Threats (external factors)

Lexipedia's operations are generally expected to run successfully and are only threatened by the following, not necessarily in that order:

- Financial threats (legislation alterations that might affect the European funding, changes in the tax system that can affect the cash flow, delays in the payment of the first installment; lack of financial resources—student payments—for Debrecen Summer School)
- Competition (another agency/institution may organize similar activities, which could draw public interest away from Lexipedia)
- Insufficient promotion (general promotion, media promotion, local and European level)
- Delays (delays in the delivery of products/services, delay in the final dates of the contest)
- Unforeseeable events (political crisis, strikes, war, etc.)

5. Recommendations

The effective and widespread dissemination of the final results and the general outputs of a project is generally a demand rather than a mere asset for projects like Lexipedia. It is therefore crucial that the partnership will develop their network and their marketing strategies which, in turn, will support the high level of dissemination Lexipedia requires.

The coordinator and the partnership must ensure that all financial threats are eliminated to the highest extent possible by thorough controls and investigations where deemed necessary, total elimination of reckless expenses and relentless tracking of the cash flow.

Modern technologies, although presented as one of the causes of bad language acquisition, should be used in favor of it. Social networking websites are valuable tools with vast capabilities and a large number of members, many of which belong to the same target age of Lexipedia (13–14 y.o.).