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European shared experiences to support and develop the IRENE innovative approach to adults facing difficulties in learning foreign languages.

IRENE project partners have developed a Comparative Desk Research to analyze the topics of foreign language learning and learning difficulties of adults in their countries. The authors have examined the current literature about the needs of the target group and have collected experiences in the application of E- learning methodologies. The focus has been laid on the needs of foreign language teachers and trainers and a common basis has been established, leading to the next step of the project: development of innovative approach to adults facing difficulties in learning foreign languages.

Hereunder we offer you highlights from the partners' researches. The full version of the Comparative Desk Research can be downloaded via www.irenelearning.eu.

Studies have shown that psychosocial barriers to education often are experienced as more significant than the impairment itself. Dyslexics experience high levels of academic and social anxiety. Disrespectful social interactions are more difficult to overcome compared to academic failure. Harmful experiences from early education are prevalent among adults with dyslexia, and the feelings of failure and stigmatisation experienced at school often lead to a non-disclosure of dyslexia as an adult. Guiding persons with learning disabilities to become more self-determined helps to break the cycle of dependence that often can be fostered by education, employment, home, and community environments.

Abstract from the Austrian context





In Denmark, compared to other specific learning disabilities, dyslexia is well-defined and documented. It is known that dyslexia from childhood, can impact a person's ability to build a vocabulary, due to reduced reading capabilities, and acquire background knowledge, which in adulthood can lead to challenges in terms of educational choice and vocational possibilities. There is an education for learning how to identify and teach adults with dyslexia, and in 2018 a similar education was established for children. But, there is a prominent lack of people trained on both the aspect of dyslexia, learning difficulties in general, and the one of second language learning. Establishing this kind of expertise is also found to be a recommendation in various reports.

Abstract from the Danish context

It is known that learning difficulties that are diagnosed during childhood can be treated in a more efficient and effective way. Of course, this depends not only on the level of severity but also on the individual in question. Nevertheless, specific learning disabilities that remain undiagnosed pose additional difficulties to the person exhibiting it, as they may have never "learned" how to cope with it and successfully integrate it in their life. Moreover, it may be the case that, because of the lack of diagnosis, the person develops additional health problems later in their life. Concerning foreign languages, adult learners are usually challenged by the following; difficulty with spelling, memorization, and possibly reading. Additionally, they may exhibit difficulties in regards with concentration and producing written word. Specific learning disabilities in adults are usually accompanied with certain types of mental issues related to emotional or professional aspects.

Abstract from the Greek context





For adults, having an undiagnosed learning disability can affect career choice, limit job advancement and lead to a number of psychological and emotional issues, including depression and feelings of low self-worth. This is particularly true when the person interprets his or her past educational failures as personal faults and experiences feelings of embarrassment and shame because of a perceived intellectual deficiency. To add to this the percentage of undiagnosed and unreported cases is said to be extremely high. The tragedy is that with the right diagnosis, coping strategies and accommodations can be put in place to help every individual with a learning disability achieve their full potential.

Abstract from the Irish context



To support an adult with learning disorders/difficulties in a foreign language learning it is necessary to adopt an approach: structured and sequential, multi-sensory and empowerment oriented. From a practical aspect, the teacher can reinforce skills through the use of images, conceptual and cognitive maps, graphs, schemes, bills also in digital form. Regarding this aspect, the use of digital and web resources can be a valid support. From a relational aspect, a motivating and engaging teaching is necessary, based on oral communication and on development of practical communicative skills. The use of cooperative learning, roleplaying and storytelling are usually suggested for a good success in a foreign language learning and this can also fit with adults. Regarding the setting, a learning environment that allows student to be included, supported and stimulated, encouraged and non-discriminated is necessary. This reduces the emotional and cognitive effects he/she suffers.

Abstract from the Italian context



In the Netherlands there are various methods for diagnosing and measuring of learning difficulties, specially dyslexia, at an early age. Schools, both primary and secondary, are responsible for signaling (possible) dyslexia. In addition, it is their job to provide guidance and possible referring to a specialized treatment. Dyslexia is now being signalled more and more quickly. Schools can also offer more, and better guidance and dyslexia can be handled well through schools and health care. Because there is more and more openness about dyslexia among children, dyslexia is increasingly being diagnosed also in adults. Some parents / adults realize that they also have problems with reading and learning when their child shows the same symptoms.

Abstract from the Dutch context

In Spain, the term learning disabilities has been used for many years in a general sense. It has been considered synonymous with the broader concept of special educational needs. According to this conceptualization, learning disabilities were not considered a specific diagnostic condition; instead, the term referred to problems or difficulties a student could have with learning, regardless of their cause. However, the publication of the Ley Orgánica de Educación (Organic Education Law) and the Ley Orgánica para la Mejora de la Calidad Educativa (Organic Law for Improving the Quality of Education) marked a major change because the term special educational needs was replaced by the expression specific needs for educational support due to special educational needs, specific learning disabilities, giftedness, or late entrance into the school system. Developmental dyslexia falls within the category of specific learning disabilities. The educational response to learning disabilities takes place through different service arrangements in schools.

Abstract from the Spanish context

For more information on the project activities please, visit our website www.irenelearning.nl or contact one of the project partners.

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