GOLD - Goldilocks-based learning Overcomes Learning Disabilities

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Background

This fact sheet reports on the project GOLD, implemented between 2012 and 2014. GOLD was part of the *Leonardo da Vinci* initiative on vocational education and training, funded by the European Lifelong Learning Program. The consortium consisted of 4 partners. Three of them were specialized in educating people with (learning) disabilities, with the aim to get a job on the open labour market and/or participating (more) independently in society: Rea College Pluryn (Netherlands); CRPG - Centro de Reabilitação Profissional de Gaia (Portugal); The Orchardville Society (Northern Ireland). The fourth one was the University of Groningen, responsible for the development and testing of SlimStampen which became an evidence based tool.

GOLD stands for **Goldilock-based Learning Overcomes Learning Disabilities**. In the fairytale Goldilocks, a young girl visits the house of 3 bears. She tastes the food of the bears. The first was too hot, the second too cold, but the third one is just right. Like in the fairytale, in the GOLD project, the partners wanted to train students with learning disabilities; not too easy, not too difficult, just right. To accomplish this purpose, the University of Groningen developed a method called SlimStampen.

This method is used as a tool to help students learning facts, words, topography, etc. It is based on scientific models and formulas which take into account the individual knowledge the student already obtained and the way each individual remembers facts. This makes studying more efficient, more effective and more encouraging.

The method was already tested in mainstream education with good results:

- higher grades;
- more efficient/faster learning (because it supports students on an individual basis);
- more motivated students (because it supports students on their individual level: no too easy and not too difficult, with tangible results).

In the GOLD project, the aim was to test if students with learning disabilities, like autism and dyslexia, could also benefit from this individual tailor-made method.

Activity Report

The project most relevant undertaken activities were:

- Inform about the SlimStampen application.
- Define the outlines of the test (target group, control group, curricula, length of the testing period, etc.) and discuss the specifications and special needs of the target group.
- Insert data of the curricula in the SlimStampen application.
- Test the effectiveness of the SlimStampen methodology in terms of learning gains in comparison to a traditional (but computerized) Flashcard system.
- Test the motivation of learners while using the SlimStampen methodology.

- Evaluate the use of the SlimStampen system: identify improvements for the SlimStampen system from an educational perspective, make adjustments in the way SlimStampen is implemented in the curricula of the Vocational Education and Training (VET) partners.
- Inform the international VET sector about SlimStampen, as well as the results of the project, namely via national events.

The test phase involved 110 learners (54 using SlimStampen and 56 using Flashcard) in the three service providers' partners. The themes learned were different among groups/ partners:

- CRPG: ICT course and legislation course;
- Orchardville: first aid course;
- REA College: ICT course.

The data analysis showed there is no difference regarding knowledge retention between the two learning methods (SlimStampen and Flashcard). Due to the small sample size and the variability among groups, further research is recommended.

Conclusions

The project was successful in addressing practical concerns of administering SlimStampen to students with disabilities. The computer learning sessions were very well received by both trainers and trainees and emerged as a promising new classroom tool. However, results regarding the benefit of SlimStampen remained inconclusive. Nevertheless, it has been proved that learners prefer to learn using electronic learning environments which should be taken into consideration by VET professionals.

References

Project website: http://www.gold-leonardo.eu/project

The Final report is available at:

http://www.adam-europe.eu/prj/10185/prd/16/1/RUG-final-report-testing-GOLD.pdf

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