**NATO-BILC 2024 Study Group**

**“Beyond the pandemic – experiences with perpetuated online-teaching at beginner and intermediate level”**

**Summary**

**Topic:**

“Beyond the Pandemic – Experiences with perpetuated Online-Teaching at Beginner and Intermediate Level”

**Facilitator:**

RDir Dr. Christoph Loreck, Federal Ministry of Defence, Germany

**Background Information**

Germany contributes to the strengthening of NATO’s defensive capabilities by setting up a brigade in Lithuania. This also results in a need for language courses on site for spouses of the soldiers deployed there.

While the soldiers and civilian personnel will undergo any necessary language training at one of the training facilities of the Federal Office of Languages in Germany, spouses will take classes after having moved to Lithuania. Spouses will mostly be beginners of Lithuanian and at a beginner or intermediate level in English. It is currently intended to offer classes in both languages on a part-time basis. A strong online-based approach would enable the spouses to spend more time with their families rather than commuting to the places where the language training will take place.

**Guiding Questions**

In the above context, the general question arises *whether classes for students at beginner and intermediate level can successfully be taught online, entirely*. This question has been discussed by members of the study group, relying on their experiences before, during and particularly after the pandemic.

Experiences during the pandemic are widely documented and numerous guide books as well as scholarly publications focus on teaching online in the era of Corona. Of interest is in this context, however, whether there are any established online-teaching routines at beginner and intermediate level that predate the pandemic. Yet the more important question is whether there has been any general perpetuation of online-teaching beyond the pandemic or whether training institutions have reverted mostly to classroom-teaching.

**Course of Action**

By comparing the various national approaches and discussing the pros and cons of a strong online-teaching approach at beginner and intermediate level, it should be determined whether this is actually a viable option at the levels described. Also, the NATO-BILC study group members were asked for recommendations regarding the particular situation of the spouses.

**Work-Phases**

The work of th study group was split into different phases:

1. Introduction Phase:

The members of the study group were asked to introduce themselves, stating amongst other things which country they were from, what their current job was and whether they had any teaching experience.

1. Preparation Phase:

The study group members were sorted into sub-working-groups of approximately equal size. A person was selected to present the groups findings at the end of the discussion phase. This person was also to take notes during the discussion phase.

1. Discussion Phase:

In the discussion phase the following questions were discussed by members of the sub-working groups:

* + What is the general experience with online-teaching in your country / armed forces / language training institution(s)?
  + Is there a marked difference in the degree of online-teaching at the various language proficiency levels?
  + Did strong online-teaching routines at beginner and intermediate level exist in your language training institutions before the pandemic?
  + How did teaching change during the pandemic?
  + Were online-teaching routines perpetuated into post-pandemic times and to which degree/in which manner?
  + How do you keep learners engaged during online-lessons?
  + How do your training institutions support teachers who teach online?
  + In your opinion, should there be a different teaching approach for soldiers on the one hand and for civilians on the other hand? Does this also concern online-teaching?
  + In your experience, how much “digital literacy” can you reasonably expect from language learners?
  + Do neuroscientific learning theories affect the way you teach online?

1. Presentation Phase:

In the presentation phase, the findings of the sub-working groups were presented to the other members of the study group and a course of action regarding classes for spouses was recommended.

1. Final Discussion Round:

The findings of each group were compared to each other and discussed. A final recommendation by the study group regarding classes for the spouses was made.

Results

The NATO-BILC study group on online-teaching approaches at beginner and intermediate level came to the overall result that while an online-teaching approach at beginner and intermediate level is technically possible, it is not to be recommended. In the first months of a course, in particular, the direct contact between teacher and learner is extremely valuable valuable and a decisive factor in motivating the learners in the long run. While a limited part of a beginner or intermediate level course might be taught online at a later stage, teaching in presence is definitely the means of choice for these levels, considering amongst other things the learning progression and individual motivation. By contrast, online teaching is conducted by the study group member states at an advanced level in various forms, e.g. hybrid.

In general, strong online-teaching routines at beginner and intermediate level did not exist in the study group member countries. Nevertheless, different language learning platforms had already been in use, for example, moodle. During the pandemic, these platforms were used to disseminate leaning material. Online-teaching mostly started with the beginning pandemic. To a certain degree, a strong online-teaching is still existent today, although it is mainly limited to learners who have already achieved an advanced level.

Teacher support, e.g. teacher training for online teaching, or technical support, seems to vary greatly. Overall, however, the teachers seem to have adapted quickly to the new situation during the pandemic. Likewise, the digital literacy of the language learners was not seen as a major area for improvement. Teaching methods were found to be mostly the same as used when teaching in presence.

Regarding the spouses, the study group recommended to teach them mostly in presence, although online lessons could be used to a limited degree at a later stage in the learning process.