

French-Spanish service learning as a pedagogical tool:an overview of the MIGPRO Project

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Abstract

The MIGPRO project aims to inspire and engage university students in a silent reality the world currently faces: migration. Through a collaboration between an NGO (Red Cross – Castellón) and students from the Translation and Interpreting degree (Universitat Jaume I, Castellón, Spain), the main goal will be to use the service learning pedagogical strategy. To do so, we will refer to the learn it, link it process (Oakley and Sejnowski, 2021), whereby students make connections and link theory with practice. Specifically, glossaries and Spanish didactic tools are offered to the Red Cross - Castellón. Learning resources are co-created based on refugees' needs. As a consequence, the acquisition of language and culture mediation strategies are targeted. Furthermore, connections between students' reactions and their (non-)existent migration background is established. Plans for a long-term project—seeking to enroll all generations of students with French as a second language—are devised.

Keywords: *Teaching tools; co-creation; language education; service learning.*

1. Introduction

At a time when migration is an everyday reality that requires our attention, we provide an enriching activity for students from the Translation and Interpreting degree with French as a Second Language (FSL) at the Universitat Jaume I. We are pioneering a MIGrant PROject (MIGPRO) in which students experience authentic assessment (Brown, 2015) and performance assessment (Fernández, 2010). Our ultimate goal is to help students acquire the skills required in the subject in which we are developing the project—with the pedagogical strategy of service learning being prominent. We also resort to other research-pedagogical tools, such as surveys administered at the end of the learning experience. Twenty-eight students in their 20s are taking part in this project, which is not an “extracurricular activity” (Eccles et al., 2003), where they face tasks that emulate difficulties found in an authentic professional context. The project was not initially contemplated in the course syllabus, but given the inherent benefits from this project, we decided to do it as a course activity where students later decide if they want to donate the materials to the Red Cross. However, even if they do not donate the materials created, they would still benefit from the service learning. The project is scheduled to last four months, in which students create materials for Spanish learners in an environment monitored by the lecturer.

2. Brief description of the project

As part of MIGPRO, we worked with the 28 students (in their 20s) enrolled in Translation C (French) -A1 (Spanish) (I) (code: TI0936) during the 2021–2022 academic year. In this subject, students are exposed to an upper-intermediate level of French that is used both for communication and language mediation.

Essentially, MIGPRO facilitates the provision of a learning service by Translation and Interpreting undergraduates to the Red Cross. This learning service aims to assist with French-speaking migrants acquiring basic Spanish.

MIGPRO consists of the following stages:

1. Initial survey (see below).
2. Learning about MIGPRO.
3. Analyzing the profile of (18–21-year-old) migrants.
4. Choosing a topic and working methodology.
5. Reflecting on proactive intervention.
6. Sharing proactive intervention.
7. Refining results with common feedback.

After introducing the students to the reality of migration and explaining the purpose and stages of MIGPRO, the project starts with an initial survey (conducted in Qualtrics)—a key

element on their learning path. Students sign an informed consent to express explicit agreement with the sharing of their answers (and subsequent materials) with the Red Cross. With this survey, we gather essential information to reflect upon results in MIGPRO-II.

SURVEY	
1.	Where are you from?
2.	Do you have any migrant background?
3.	Do you have friends who were born in a different country?
4.	Do you think your level of French is good enough for the course you are currently in?
5.	Do you speak or practice French outside the classroom? How do you practice it?
6.	Do you think practicing French outside the classroom is needed?
7.	Do you think the French language needs more space in the degree program to improve your linguistic skills? If wanted, you can specify which aspects should be included.
8.	As a Translation and Interpreting student, do you think it is important to know the reality of migration? Why?
9.	As a Translation and Interpreting student, do you think this experience could help you get to know new working prospects?
10.	What kind of activities would you perform in this project to improve your translator and interpreter competences?

Figure 1. Survey to be undertaken before starting the project.

Students are provided with introductory information about the project and are trained in the basic skills to achieve maximum success. For instance, the underpinnings of glossary building and lesson planning are provided here. Students must understand what they want the migrants to achieve (i.e., goals) and how they will make this possible (i.e., content and methodology). Therefore, students have to reflect on this before designing the glossaries or learning materials, as we see in the following schema:

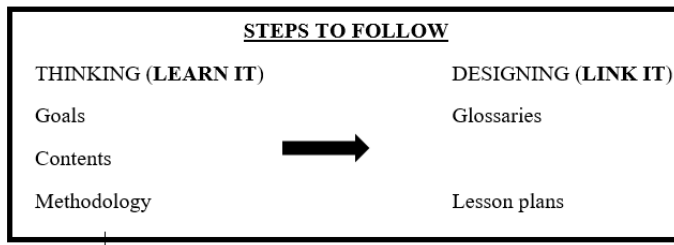


Figure 2. Structure for designing glossaries and lesson plans.

Since the materials are meant for migrants, students are asked to include the final design of their glossary or lesson plan (i.e., we assess how they link their learning). The goals and methodology will not be assessed due to the fact that students are designing a lesson plan for the first time.

As part of these initial stages, students are given anonymized data about 18–21 year-old migrants, with whom they will subsequently work. It is crucial to highlight that the students

and migrants are of similar ages to enhance empathy and learning. Students are then given the option of creating a glossary with the terms that migrants view as important for their integration in society. Alternatively, they can plan a learning lesson that works with language and cultural aspects of considerable difficulty. Final reflection-feedback activities close the project.

Notice that all these stages are performed individually and in pairs (Cano et al., 2020) in the classroom under the lecturer's constant supervision (and subsequent feedback).

As can be seen, MIGPRO reinforces the abilities targeted by TI9036:

Competences and learning outcomes
Generic and specific competences
CE01 - Command of translation techniques and strategies
CE05 - Command of the second foreign language and its culture for translating and interpreting
CE07 - Command of computer tools applied to translation/interpreting
CG01 - Analysis and synthesis skills
CG02 - Problem-solving
CG06 - Autonomy
CG07 - Decision-making
Learning outcomes
Assimilating the factors to be considered in decision making
Consolidating the use of electronic resources for documentation
Consolidating and extending skills in the use of basic reference works and other documentation resources
Developing problem-solving skills
Increasing theoretical knowledge with regard to the language combination in question
Ability to apply different strategies to reading comprehension and the identification of translation problems
Ability to apply the theoretical knowledge acquired in language B subjects
Ability to apply appropriate translation techniques and strategies
Ability to apply autonomous work methods
Ability to identify and understand how the different text types work in languages C and A, as well as their incidence on translation

Figure 3. Competences and learning outcomes expected from the course syllabus of the subject TI0936 – Translation C-A1 (French-Spanish) (I) (Universitat Jaume I, 2022).

Nevertheless, MIGPRO adds what we consider to be a fundamental (and missing from the previous list) competence for our 21st century classroom: empathy with world realities. It is imperative (or so we think) that students develop an awareness of the importance of their proactive role in society. Thus, MIGPRO establishes connections between undergraduates and migrants living in Castellón (Spain). We firmly believe this is a potential way to encourage students to learn and react to society, in which they have rights and duties. Furthermore, MIGPRO aims to create synergies between the Degree of Translation and Interpreting and the Red Cross. It is high time the university abandons its academic cocoon.

3. MIGPRO's underlying aims and planning

The most immediate goal of this project is to improve students' abilities in French and in French-Spanish translation using the pedagogical strategy of service learning. The project ultimately seeks to make students aware of the reality of migrants who come to Spain with no resources for job hunting, and to react as a consequence of this learning. A key result would be for students in future academic years to follow suit and participate, so both migrants and students benefit from the experience in the long run. The research questions (RQs) we put forward are:

1. Is there any improvement in participants' competences (including empathy) with the service learning strategy?
2. Do students experience any improvement in their French and Spanish language competences?
3. Which learning task and materials are chosen by students when proposed to do so?
4. Do they veer toward glossary creation or syllabus creation?
5. Is there any difference in materials created by participants with (or without) a migrant background?

To answer the RQs, we compared the answers given in the initial survey as well as the resulting glossaries and didactic tools created by the students. Due to most data in the materials created being qualitative, we will quantify the number of glossaries or lesson plans made, but a rubric is to be designed and introduced in MIGPRO-II to analyze the contents found in each glossary and lesson plan proposal and its connection with the initial survey. To do this, we will code the chosen topics and the surveys numerically so as to link the results with their background.

4. MIGPRO theoretical platform

As students are learning, neurons are linking and strengthening. We refer to this process as *learn it, link it* (Oakley and Sejnowski, 2021: 3). In other words, lecturers aim to get students to learn something and make connections afterwards to put the acquired knowledge into practice. Being exposed to and working with sample problems can be invaluable in allowing students to begin to form mental templates that enable them to understand and solve a wide range of issues (Chen et al., 2015). With this in mind, we consider service learning to be the most suitable strategy. We understand this term as this "reciprocal learning" (Sigmon, 1979) where providers and recipients of services benefit from the activities (Furco, 1996: 2).

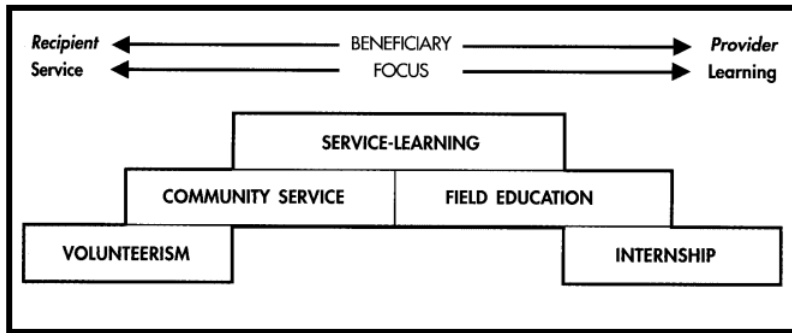


Figure 4. Distinctions among service programs (Furco, 1996: 2)

We believe that turning students into providers and content creators is a particularly good idea. This allows them to absorb initial knowledge (the *learn it* phase), and enables them to create materials and reflect upon associated competences (the *link it* phase).

We favor teaching all students the same content knowledge and skills but using different approaches to meet individual needs. In this respect, we agree with Oakley and Sejnowski when they argue that “different learners need different approaches to succeed” (2021: 21). Oakley and Sejnowski (2021:16) state there are (at least) two types of learners:

- 1) “race-car (i.e., fast thinkers) learners”: students who are quick in their answers and fast in their learning connections, and
- 2) “hiker (i.e., slower) brains”: students who benefit more from a flexible way of thinking.

To cater to these two types of learners in MIGPRO after giving students preliminary information, they are encouraged to choose the kind of proactive task they find most suitable to liaise with Red Cross migrants. On one hand, they can put together a glossary with the most basic Spanish terminology still needed and the French equivalent. Conversely, they can devise a lesson to aid migrants in acquiring the abilities they need. Both glossaries and lessons will be grouped in units to unify the Spanish contents presented in the learning materials.

It seems to us that the task of glossary building is most suitable for race-car learners because they are faster in the linking process.

It is logical therefore that the lesson planning task is most suitable for hiker learners because organization and a slower thinking process would result in a good presentation of the contents to be learned.

By offering students two options to pursue the *learn-it-and-link-it* circle, we believe we contribute to optimizing conditions for the acquisition and reinforcement of competences. Motivation and peer-to-peer work—which are undoubtedly decisive in the learning

process—are also maximized. As MIGPRO is student-centered, students practice problem-solving, decision-making, and autonomy in addition to the lecturer monitoring the whole process.

5. Future evaluation

Seeing the evolution (before, during and after) of students' attitudes and results in the classroom will be helpful. We completed the latter with the data obtained from the aforementioned survey. Since the project emphasizes skills, we will focus on them, focusing on our newly added empathy competence. Since MIGPRO is envisaged for the long run, we expect to carry out a future longitudinal evaluation. The impact of the project will be evaluated in MIGPRO-II.

5.1. Future expansion

An increased scope of the project is planned. Subsequently, we aim to hold an event where students can teach and present the main contents to refugees from the Red Cross. This event may include talks or lessons, and will be a valuable opportunity to empower both students and refugees.

6. Conclusion

We have developed an engaging project in which we are willing to have increased participation whereby students become providers. This project is built upon the *learn-it-and-link-it* theoretical platform with a view to boosting empathy, a newly added competence that we consider crucial in the 21st century. The expected benefits from this project are:

- Connecting students with the reality of migration and encouraging a proactive attitude vis-a-vis individual and social realities.
- Encouraging students to choose their learning path according to their learning (race-car/hiker) profile to enhance their French to Spanish translation competences and their FSL knowledge.
- Providing an exciting and innovative opportunity for students to be exposed to authentic learning.

Further conclusions (based on the student surveys and their lesson plans and glossaries) are outlined in the future MIGPRO-II. We also plan to extend this project into an annual program where more students could get involved and more migrants may join to contribute to learning.

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