

# 5 Student reactions to using interactive tutorials as part of the proPIC study programme

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#### 1. Introduction

In this chapter, we outline the use of interactive textbooks or tutorials in the form of iBooks that were developed as a major output of the proPIC project. All of these iBooks can also be retrieved on the accompanying project website<sup>3</sup>. Interactive textbooks or tutorials are documents, software, or other media digitally created for the purpose of (interactively) presenting any kind of content and can further comprise a wide variety of tasks for the reader. This chapter focuses on so-called iBooks, a distinct form of e-books available exclusively for the Mac Operating System (OS – by Apple).

Generally, an e-book can be defined as an "electronic book, containing a body of text and images suitable for distributing electronically and displaying on-screen in a manner similar to a printed book" (Attwell, 2022, n.p). In contrast, iBooks published with iBooks Author are usually more advanced digitally published texts which often include multimodal content such as embedded videos, images, interactive links, and sound files. The application supports the use of different multimodal content and third-party widgets. Those additional small applications can help the writer of an iBook to make the publication more flexible and interactive. The iBooks Author application is not available from Apple anymore.

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The company is now only supporting the software Pages, where you can find some of the features in iBooks Author.

After providing some background information on the project and e-books in a wider context, this chapter focuses on illustrating and exemplifying the iBooks that were created in the proPIC project. Moreover, it presents and discusses some of the student reactions to using the eight iBooks, as well as subsequent practical implications of using such digital tools effectively in teacher education.

## 2. The context: the proPIC project

The tutorials that are central in this chapter were developed as part of the proPIC project and were one element of an adaptable and innovative study programme<sup>4</sup> for language teacher education, which was developed by the project partners. It is designed to be integrated in different international curricula in higher education systems in the field of language teacher education and beyond. The study programme is described in more detail by Hoinkes and Clausen (2022, Chapter 2 of this edited volume).

The study programme includes a theoretical framework of Continuing Professional Development (CPD) in the context of language teacher education. This framework is presented in the form of an interactive online handbook (see Mann & Webb, 2022, Chapter 1 this volume). The handbook includes theory and practice examples, which are supported by a range of interactive and research-oriented tasks, integrating the use of digital tools and applications.

In addition, eight interactive tutorials in the form of interactive electronic books (iBooks) were created, using the application iBooks Author. These iBooks promote the use of mobile technologies and digital methods in foreign language learning, the application of various research methods and instruments, as well as reflective practices. They were developed and designed collaboratively by the

<sup>4.</sup> http://www.propiceuropa.com/io3-study-programme.html

project partners and were modified during the project-based feedback from other partners as well as student evaluations.

# 3. Using e-books in language teacher education

In a rapidly changing world, teaching professions require an increasingly broad and more sophisticated set of competences than in the past. The growth in the number of digital devices and applications as well as the need to help students become digitally competent requires educators to develop their own digital competence in order to meet these challenges. These needs are no less important in the area of second language teaching and learning. There is a widespread gap between student needs and current teacher levels of competence. The challenge is to reduce this disparity. According to Kirkgöz (2014), "[a]cknowledging that teacher candidates should be encouraged to experience and be empowered by developing their technology skills to produce instructional materials is a challenge, but one which is essential for teacher educators to meet" (p. 160).

There are more and more digital tools and apps available to the teachers and learners. One possible tool for the use in the classroom is interactive textbooks or tutorials. Interactive tutorials are described as:

"a document, software, or other media on the Internet created for the purpose of instruction for any of a wide variety of tasks. Interactive tutorials usually have the following characteristics: a presentation of content, a method of review where the user follows on screen instructions (and in some cases watch short instruction movies) whereupon user does tutorial exercises and gets feedback depending on his actions, and transition to additional modules or sections" (Hansson, 2008, p. 115).

Interactive tutorials combine several features, multimodal resources, and different instructional designs, for example having the facility to integrate interactive widgets or apps amongst other things. The advantage over traditional

textbooks is the "overt interactive content" that interactive tutorials allow (Baldwin, 2015, p. 2).

One example for an interactive tutorial would be so-called e-books. E-books are publications made available in digital form consisting of text, images, or both, that are readable on computers and other electronic devices (e.g. Amazon Kindle). However, many e-books lack certain features that more advanced interactive tutorials have as they do not include a number of touchpoints where the reader can interact, watch videos, listen to audio sequences, click on links, answer quizzes, and consume other interactive content.

From the perspective of teacher training at university level, there are still many advantages to working with interactive e-books. Fyfe (2014) states the following:

"[e]-books have the potential to engage with three key strategic priorities common to most universities: to enhance the student experience and academic outcomes within an increasingly competitive environment; to drive innovation in learning, teaching and research; and to help to use space and human resources more effectively and efficiently" (p. 2).

The creativity of the teacher, and the content of the e-books created are key elements for the successful integration of e-books in the classroom (Johnson & Vanspauwen, 2015).

Interactive e-books have been shown to be popular with students because of their convenience (Walton, 2014) and the fact that they are portable (Frederick, 2015) and always available (Jeong, 2012). E-Books in particular correlate with the definition of 'mobile learning' due to their accessibility on mobile devices (Gitsaki et al., 2013). Having access to several e-books on a single device creates an uncomplicated arrangement for the learning process of students. Other benefits include the possibility of searching content through key words, the possibility of creating links to other digital content, and the ability to copy and paste sections directly from the text (Wu & Chen, 2011). E-books reinforce

both distance and part-time learning modes and can meet high demand reading list access (Riha & LeMay, 2016).

From a specific language learning perspective, interactive e-books can help students with all the language skills because presentation materials are more understandable and facilitate long-term memory "by using multiple sensory channels to put forward information" (Kim, 2014, p. 311). Interactive e-books can contain diverse presentations of multimodal content that not only help students enhance their listening, speaking, reading, and writing skills, but also their understanding of how information and communications technology can support learning. Furthermore, e-books can encourage flexibility in teaching as students can work individually at their own pace.

As Rao (2019) and others (Gaskill & Hansen, 2014) have pointed out, Apple's iBook (usually in combination with an iPad) can be considered as one of the most advanced e-books currently available, as it provides many of the interactive features described above. Even more, educators can also become authors themselves and create iBooks with their own content and materials, for instance using the application iBooks Author. iBooks Author is an iBook authoring application from Apple Inc, only available for Mac OS and thus only accessible on Apple devices. By using the application, an educator "need not be a technology genius or have experience with textbook layout since templates are provided for several types of organisation" (Baldwin, 2015, p. 4).

Based on all these assumptions and longstanding experience with iBooks, the project consortium decided to use these interactive e-books as our main tool for providing background knowledge and in-depth insights into the specifics of the project.

## 4. The iBooks created in the project

Eight interactive tutorials in the form of iBooks were made available to students who took part in the project. Three of the iBooks were mandatory for the students,

while the others were optional. It was estimated that the students would spend about five hours in total reading and working with each iBook.

The eight iBooks were designed to help students complete the study programme, and as such promoted the use of mobile technologies and digital methods in foreign language learning, the application of various research methods and instruments, as well as applications for reflective practices. More generally, the iBooks contained information, as well as hands-on activities and best-practice examples on a range of topics connected with the use of digital tools and applications in the area of language teaching education. Some of the activities promoted collaboration between the students of the partner institutions, where students needed to obtain information from and about the partner universities.

Working with the iBooks, the future teachers had the chance to reflect on their own learning process as well as the advantages and disadvantages of the use of digital tools in the classroom. The books are designed using a variety of diverse widgets, e.g. Bookry and Book widgets<sup>5</sup>, which create a virtual learning environment where students can have fun while working with tasks. The widgets that can be embedded in an iBook are the key element of interactivity. They can support the use of audio on a page so the reader can listen to texts being read by a recorded voice. The widget can also create a quiz or a poll within the book. Images are integrated into the layout which underline important information. There are also links to informative websites or integrated videos, enabling the reader to find new information and ideas. Finally, every book has a feedback section at the end where students can leave comments and recommendations for improvement. The iBooks encouraged some kind of reflection task, such as a video or text, which was to be added to the student's e-portfolio.

All final versions are now published on Apple Books (links to the books can be found in Table 1).

<sup>5.</sup> https://bookry.com/account/login

#### Table 1. Overview of interactive tutorials

As far as the contents of the iBooks are concerned, the first iBook, which was mandatory, concerns the use of e-portfolios. The book discusses the definition of the term and key concepts of what teaching e-portfolios are based upon, as well as the digital communicative features that characterise e-portfolios. The tutorial also shows how to set up, create, and develop an e-portfolio. https://books.apple.com/se/book/propic-interactive-tutorial-1/id1525353237



The second iBook, which was also mandatory, covers approaches to teaching and learning with technologies. The tutorial addresses the questions of what it means to teach and learn with technology and how to approach teaching and learning with technology in an informed way. https://books.apple.com/se/book/propic-interactive-tutorial-2/id1525354025



The third iBook, which was the last of mandatory iBooks, covers the subject of how to use research in language teacher education in order to develop professionally. The main focus of the tutorial is action research and the use of observation and interviews to collect data. https://books.apple.com/se/book/propic-



iBook Four, which was an optional choice for the students, focuses on the use of Video Enhanced Observation<sup>6</sup> (VEO). The tutorial explains how to use technology for peer observation and the role of feedback in the professional development of teachers. https://books.apple.com/se/book/propic-interactive-tutorial-4/id1525355755

interactive-tutorial-3/id1525354901



<sup>6.</sup> https://veo.co.uk/

The fifth iBook, which was also optional, is about the use of video production in the context of language learning and teaching. The tutorial explains how to record and edit videos with the aim of helping students produce their own videos in order to integrate them into studies and future teaching. https://books.apple.com/se/book/propic-interactive-tutorial-5/id1525680492



iBook Six was optional and covers the area of using innovative digital tools and methods. A number of digital tools are presented. The challenges of using mobile technologies are discussed, as well as ways of conceptualising the changes that technology can make to pedagogical practice. https://books.apple.com/se/book/propic-interactive-tutorial-6/id1525356644



iBook Seven, also optional, looks at how to use iBooks and iBooks Author in language teacher education. The possibilities of using e-books in second language learning and teaching are presented and exemplified. https://books.apple.com/se/book/propic-interactive-tutorial-7/id1525360479



Finally, the optional iBook Eight relates to the framework of CPD and discusses some further aspects of it in the context of language teacher education. https://books.apple.com/se/book/propic-interactive-tutorial-8/id1525357929



#### 5. Student reactions

In this section, we present some student reactions to using e-books generally, as well as the specific iBooks created as part of the proPIC study programme. Data

was collected from student replies and comments to an online survey comprising ten mostly open questions. Another source is an online survey carried out by one of the participating students and as part of a Bachelor's thesis from the University of Education Karlsruhe, mainly looking at the use of the interactive tutorials (Avṣar, 2018). Finally, the data includes input during short (online) interviews with some participating students, and discussion groups held at some partner universities as part of local courses.

Data collected from students express many positive arguments for the use of iBooks generally, such as an increase in pupil motivation, the benefits of using iBooks to cover the various language skills, the high levels of interactivity, the exposure to authentic language use, and the fact that e-books addressed all learner types and their different study habits. Allowing students to make their own iBooks was seen as a way of increasing student levels of motivation. As far as the learning activities that could be used in an iBook for language learning, a wide range of suggestions were made. These included podcasts, digital storytelling, videos, audio books, games, pictures, vocabulary and pronunciation practice, grammar tasks, writing, quizzes, and questionnaires, as well as other types of interaction between students.

The students regarded accessibility as one of the positive reasons to use iBooks, along with the fact that they take up less space than printed books. Respondents stated that they like the design and layout of iBooks, especially their interactivity and multimedia integration.

The majority of students felt that iBooks were effective tools in the field of language education. Reasons given were the high level of interactivity, a user-friendly design, and the multimodal features of most e-books. The multimodal features were also felt to foster student motivation. Many argued that the interactive nature of iBooks, and the fact that they can be shared online, meant that students are able to exchange ideas and work collaboratively.

Most of the respondents mentioned that they had no experience in creating an iBook. In addition, a number of other challenges in using iBooks were mentioned.

These include the time needed to create an iBook, finding or creating iBooks that fit the curriculum, getting pupils to use new media, and the availability of devices as well as technical problems and issues. Students stressed the importance of teacher support when integrating iBooks into the classroom. One respondent stressed, for example, the importance of explaining the functions of an iBook to the students but recognised too that this is time consuming.

The students also provided their thoughts on the specific iBooks created as part of the proPIC study programme. More generally, the contents of the iBooks were seen as relevant to the aims of the study programme. The students liked the choice of material in the tutorials and appreciated, too, the fact that the tutorials contained an overview of tools that are available for creating a digital portfolio, and for language teaching connected to mobile technology. The tools that were most appreciated were VEO and the tools and methods which the participating students had tried during the study week. Most respondents regarded the multimedia integration within the tutorials as very helpful.

Despite these positive remarks, many student comments concentrated on the fact that the participants who did not have an Apple device had difficulties accessing the iBooks. If students did not have an Apple device, they could only work with PDF formats of the tutorials and as a result lost the interactivity of the original iBooks. Spelling errors in the iBooks, as well as problems with links to videos not working – especially in the first version – were also mentioned by students.

#### 6. Discussion

The findings presented here show that because of participating in the programme, the majority of the prospective teachers had in general a positive attitude towards the use of iBooks in the classroom with a majority stating that they would appreciate using iBooks in other university courses in the future. The respondents were aware of the benefits of iBooks in the field of education and

were positive about the possibilities, tools, and features that iBooks can offer, both generally and for language learning and teaching in particular.

Many of the comments on the advantages mentioned by respondents mirror those found in previous research, with aspects such as convenience, portability, accessibility, and interactivity being mentioned (Frederick, 2015; Gitsaki et al., 2013; Jeong, 2012; Walton, 2014).

The findings also show that the majority of the prospective teachers enjoyed working with the iBooks and felt that many of the tutorials in the iBooks were useful in helping the students navigate the proPIC study programme. The contents were perceived as high quality and relevant to their professional development. One student commented, for example, that "[e]verything is evaluated by teachers and trainers. There is a good mix between theory and practice". In line with Baldwin's (2015) comments on the interactive content that these tutorials allow, students appreciated the multimedia integration within the tutorials. One respondent, for example, liked "[t]he different media and methodology. It was [a] really diverse way of working, watching a video, then reading a text and afterwards filling in a mind map". Another commented that they appreciated the integration of videos and audio files, because "I am a learner who learns very well when the material is supported by audio examples".

Despite these positive comments, however, many of the participants did not feel prepared to use iBooks in their own teaching and consequently felt unsure as to whether they would use them in future or not. This finding reflects conclusions in earlier research which has shown that students continue to indicate a preference for using the printed book (Myrberg, 2017; Walton, 2014). Another issue that many students commented on concerned the fact that the participants who did not have an Apple device had difficulties accessing the iBooks. For one of the students, not having early access in the beginning of the project meant that they were "unable to do at least half of the activities included in the interactive tutorials during the course". Here, teacher educators need to be more concerned with providing students with access to a wide range of online tools and digital devices, when, at the same time, students should be given more support as well

as more and better training on using mobile technology at schools. We will discuss some of these issues below and explore some other lessons we have learned from creating and using the iBooks during the proPIC project.

# 7. Reflections after the creation and use of iBooks during the proPIC project

After discussions amongst partners and feedback given on the iBooks from students, we have the following thoughts on the creation and use of the iBooks during the proPIC project.

- Prospective teachers have a positive attitude towards the use of iBooks in the field of education and these tools can offer many possibilities for language learning and teaching in particular.
- There is a widespread gap between student needs and current teacher levels of competence in this area. Many of the students in this study felt unsure about how to create an iBook and needed more hands-on experience in how to do so.
- The fact that iBooks published with the help of iBook Author are only compatible with Apple devices adversely affected the learning process of the students and their perception of possible advantages of iBooks. The use of other tools would overcome this problem.
- iBooks should not be like normal printed books. They should not be too long and contain too much text.
- The videos included as links in iBooks should not be more than five minutes long.
- iBooks should use icons and symbols to signpost tasks, and a wide use of widgets.

#### 8. Conclusion

Based on our experiences and the feedback from students and project partners, we conclude that e-books, especially the more advanced devices such as Apple's iBooks, can play an important role in the professional development of prospective teachers. The students who took part in the proPIC project see the advantages of iBooks in terms of convenience, portability, accessibility, as well as interactivity. Those prospective teachers can also see the possibilities that iBooks can offer in the field of education in general and for language learning and teaching in particular. It is, however, important that students get more hands-on opportunities to create and use iBooks within teacher education in order to bridge the gap between student needs and current teacher levels of competence. The digital competences of prospective teachers are not as great as some teacher educators might think, which is why we see a need to include digital tools with different kinds of pedagogical functions in teacher education as well in the professional development of (future) teachers in general.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of cloud-based applications has been a great benefit. The students have been able to stay at home and still be part of a group assignment; publishing an iBook is only one example. The possibility of collaboratively editing a video online has also been a great positive option for the students. When working with such online cloud-based applications it is important that the students have access to the paid version of the application, which is normally necessary if you want them to be able to have complete possibilities to edit and save their work.

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