

Bila-Train / Bila-Learn

Bilingual training in vocational education

GERMANY

Language Training



Executive Summary

Bila-Train Analysis, Bila-Train and Bila-Learn is a series of three language learning programmes for bilingual learners engaged in VET and for migrants and multilingual groups.

Bila-Train Analysis, a Leonardo Da Vinci programme, extended between 2003 and 2005. Over 1.000 experts, owners of enterprises and trainees in Europe were interviewed on bilingual programmes for initial vocational training. Research carried out in six EU member states showed that there was a need for bi-lingual vocational training, but the number of existing programmes was very low. This research was used to establish the other two programmes, Bila-Train in practice and Bila-Learn.

Bila-Train in practice, developed between autumn 2006 and September 2008, was also a Leonardo Da Vinci programme within a partnership of institutions located in Austria, Germany, Greece, Romania and Turkey. Bila-Train in Practice created and piloted bilingual learning modules for initial vocational training in selected professional fields. These fields were legal assistants (working in lawyers' offices) in German and Greek, Insurance Broker in German and Turkish and Mechatronics (automotive mechanics and electronics) in German, Italian and Romanian. All modules are based on the needs of trainees and trainers identified through the Bila-Train Analysis and were piloted in selected companies. The modules accompany existing mono-lingual vocational training courses with specific bilingual elements in learning fields of special importance towards selected professional profiles.

Bila-Learn is a project that was co-funded in the framework of the Grundtvig programme. Main target groups included adult migrants, members of ethnic minorities and other bi- or multilingual groups in Europe. It aimed at creating innovative materials helping bilingual adult learners to simultaneously improve their language skills in two languages. Main target groups are adult migrants, members of ethnic minorities and other bi- or multilingual groups in Europe. Project products included bilingual classroom modules, bilingual modules for mobile phones and a bilingual self-learning cdrom.

Council of Europe literature suggests that there is a need for language learning methods that rely on and that seek to increase multilingual competence. Educational systems in most EU member states do not actively support bi- or multilingual skills. Primary and secondary school education and vocational training mostly consist of courses where a country's national language is used for teaching. Learners of bilingual background lose their linguistic skills due to educational concentration on one language only. Language learning material for adults also need to take this into account.

Bila-Train in Practice and Bila-Learn are based on an up-to-date didactic framework. Retroaction was taken into account through extensive testing of Bila-Train in Practice material and associating Bila-Learn target group of learners to the development of the material. Outputs are available on the web (<http://www.bila-train.de/>), but some modules have also been published by a commercial publisher and can be found at libraries and bookshops in Germany and Austria. The learning material takes into account diversity and learning styles. In principle, the grounding principles of Bila-Train Analysis, Bila Train in Practice and Bila-Learn can be unrestrictedly transferred to create new material in new languages or to suit the needs of learners within and outside VET.

1. Needs analysis

A research report on bilingual vocational training was carried out in the project partner countries. Modules are based on the needs of trainees and trainers and were piloted in selected companies. The modules accompany existing mono-lingual vocational training courses with specific bilingual elements in learning fields of special importance towards selected professional profiles. Three bilingual vocational training courses were created:

- Legal assistants in German and Greek;
- Insurance brokers in German and Turkish;
- Mechatronics (automotive mechanics and electronics) in German, Italian and Romanian.

The needs analysis was fully part of the project. It was funded through the Leonardo da Vinci reference scheme under the name of Bila-Train-Analysis. It was carried out between 2003 and 2005 and comprised several distinct actions:

- It identified and analysed bilingual initial vocational training courses in Europe. The target was young migrants and young adults with bilingual background, trainers, SMEs and large companies.
- Using standardized questionnaires, project partners in Austria, Germany, Greece and Italy interviewed more than 1.000 trainees, trainers, owners of companies, educational experts and political decision makers. According to Bila-Train promoters, over 50,000 relevant elements of data were integrated into the final analysis

The results of the analysis of existing courses and the needs analysis revealed that:

- 1) young adults with a migration background and bilingual youths needed bilingual initial vocational training courses. They expect to gain intercultural vocational competence as well as better qualifications for their later career and their mobility. Young trainees very much regret the lack of bilingual vocational training courses. Such courses, when they exist, depend on the motivation and efforts of a company owner or a single trainer;
- 2) enterprises of all sizes in any EU member state do not receive any form of official support for bilingual initial vocational training programmes. Vocational schools and training institutions often refrain from setting up bilingual training courses which are perceived to be costly, time-consuming and would require considerable adaptation of the national curriculum;
- 3) educational experts and economics specialists recommend an increase of linguistic competence and skills in vocational training programmes

- across Europe. Specific training programmes and bilingual curricula have to be developed and certified for selected professional profiles;
- 4) As of autumn 2005, no certified or approved bilingual learning material for initial vocational training was available in Europe. Many SMEs offered some form of bilingual training – often depending on a trainer’s own linguistic background.

Some outputs of Bila-Train Analysis were:

- A scientific final report (DE)
- recommendations for bilingual trainers, in German, English, Italian, Turkish and French
- a questionnaire for bilingual trainees
- a questionnaire for trainees without bilingual background
- a questionnaire for trainers
- a questionnaire for experts
- a list of recommendations for decision makers

Small pilot modules for bilingual vocational training in German-Turkish, German-Greek and German-Italian language were then developed and tested. Observations and interviews with learners and trainers were used to develop recommendations for providers of initial vocational training, curricula developers and policymakers. Project results were then exploited and disseminated among chambers of commerce, ministries, social partners, curricula planers and migrants' organizations.

However, information is missing as to whether:

- the needs analysis was not just relying on compiling employers and/or employees’ perception of their needs
- employees and employers had been questioned on the competencies that need improving based on the CEFRL and the level at which these competencies are expected
- samples of input (recordings, letters, brochures, etc.) relevant to the training needs and possibly output by prospective trainees were collected
- analysis was carried out in terms of discourse domain, topic, type, register, length, vocabulary, grammar, speed, accent, clarity of articulation, etc..

2. Training is focused on the acquisition of the needed competencies identified through the needs analysis.

Bila-Train in Practice (for VET) and Bila-Learn (for bilingual adult learners from migrant backgrounds) were then set up to help bilingual adult learners to simultaneously improve their language skills in two languages were then developed.

Bila-Train in Practice output is available on the project’s website:



It can be downloaded free of charge.

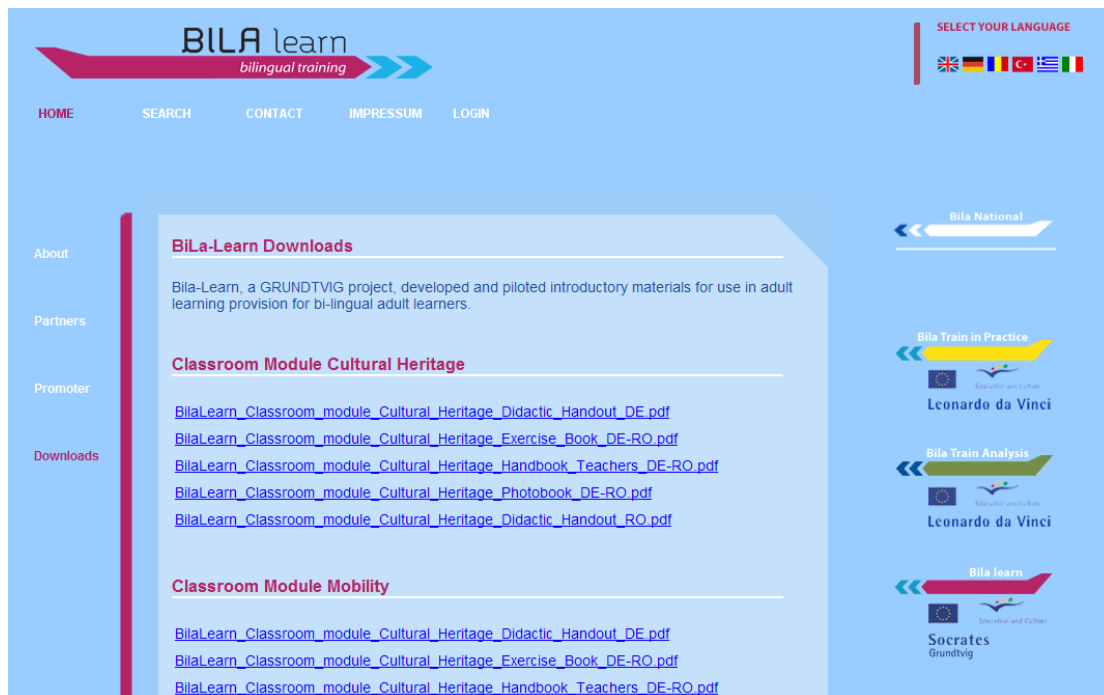
Training is based on the linguistic traits identified in the discursive genre analysis carried out in needs analysis. This implies that seeking validation through external language certifications may not always be a valid training objective unless proven that the construct of the certificate and the detailed needs analysis coincide.

Training material incorporates as many appropriate documents collected in the analysis as possible, and have priority over general-purpose material. Press conferences and media coverage on the Bila-Learn products also led to such high numbers of inquiries for bilingual products that publisher Akzente, decided to take care of distributing subsequent project products.

The next project, Bila-Learn, led to the development of more materials:

- bilingual classroom modules
- bilingual modules for mobile phones
- a bilingual self-learning cdrom.

Again, such material can be downloaded free of charge:



The screenshot shows the BILA learn website interface. At the top, there is a navigation menu with links for HOME, SEARCH, CONTACT, IMPRESSUM, and LOGIN. A language selection dropdown is visible on the right, showing flags for various countries. The main content area is titled 'BiLa-Learn Downloads' and lists two categories: 'Classroom Module Cultural Heritage' and 'Classroom Module Mobility'. Under each category, there are several PDF download links. On the right side, there are promotional banners for 'Bila National', 'Bila Train in Practice', 'Bila Train Analysis', and 'Bila learn', each featuring the Leonardo da Vinci logo and the Socrates Grundtvig logo.

3. Training objectives are realistic within the timeframe.

No information could be found on the subject.

4. Training is based on an updated didactic framework.

The modules accompanied existing mono-lingual vocational training courses with bilingual elements in fields of special importance towards selected professional profiles. Bila-Train in Practice VET trainers were provided with adequate didactic training. They were offered in-service training options based on the latest research. Time constraints were properly dealt with. Some time was provided for them to check on trainees' work and comment on it, using online learning management systems if they wished. Trainers were autonomous in deciding on suitable learning methods and could use their own learning material, not sticking to a recommended book or method if they found it to be unfit for that purpose. They had enough time to create their own learning material if needed.

The document presenting the programme and justifying the didactic stands contains a comprehensive, 23-page bibliography on language training for bilinguals. Online guidelines for trainers engaged in delivering bilingual training are also provided:

http://bila-train.eu/uploads/media/English_Guidelines_for_trainers.pdf

5. Training incorporates some element of retroaction.

Concerning Bila-Train in Practice, after two years, researchers carried out a survey, interviewing trainers, owners of SMEs, bilingual young adults in initial vocational training and vocational training experts on their experience with bilingual vocational training. 80 per cent seemed to be satisfied with accompanying bilingual learners in initial vocational training. They appreciated the fact that bilingual training improves their skills, competences and vocational mobility and found it was of special value for young adults and trainees with bilingual background due to migration or life in border areas. The survey also allowed to discover that bilingual training imposes special requirements on trainers. The materials apparently worked best whenever trainers were bilingual themselves. Many trainers with bilingual background clearly stated a demand for additional linguistic training in order to fully apply bilingual vocational training with their trainees.

Regarding Bila-Learn, learners were included in the development and testing of the material. Modules for mobile phones appear to have been particularly appreciated.

6. Training takes into account a maximal number of constraints: absence, diversity, time and place.

Trainees' diversity in terms of culture, level, gender, learning style, is taken into account. Using a language portfolio, either paper or web-based, to liaise with learners may give better indication of learners' linguistic and cultural profiles and of their learning styles.

Bila-Train in Practice learning material is widely available. It is distributed by Akzente Publishing, comes with ISBN-codes, is registered in library on booksellers' systems and is available for order by bookstores and on-line platforms. Material is also available for download on Bila-Train website.

Bila-Learn has also been piloting small software package for mobile phones to learn new vocabulary, train grammar and sentence structures in a bilingual environment. This builds on the fact that over 80 percent of all Europeans possess a mobile phone. Besides making phone calls or sending SMS, many use their mobile phone to manage their contact data, their agenda and schedule, and use them as MP3 player, radio receiver and digital cameras. Mobile network provider The website of the Bila-Train projects mentioned, in October 2010, that Vodafone considered including Bila-Learn modules in its service platform for Vodafone clients and plans to develop the software for the next generation of mobile phone operation systems.

7. Transferability assessment

7.1. Evidence of transfer

To our knowledge, the training has not been transferred to other places or sectors.

7.2. Innovation

To our knowledge, no such bilingual language training programme in a VET context aimed at borderland citizens exists. The combination of language training modules aimed at bilinguals in a VET context makes the programme quite unique. Yet, Angel Gurría, OECD Secretary General, claimed in 2007 that “VET systems are just not delivering for the children of immigrants” and also that “VET systems as a transition mechanism from school to work have to adapt to the growing share of young people with a migration background”¹. Yet, data for Denmark hint at immigrants having weaker education outcomes with a 60% dropout rate for those in VET, which is twice as much as for native Danes².

Barriers to potential transfer may include a lack of political incentive to promote programmes aimed at immigrants, although such programmes would probably contribute to reduce immigrant frustration and promote social inclusion.

7.3. Dependence on political context

Transferability clearly depends on specific assumptions relating to political context, particularly where little incentive exists regarding promoting programmes targeted to immigrants.

7.4. Flexibility

Such policy appears to have some degree of flexibility. Bilinguals with the same languages exist across the EU. For instance, the same material could be used in several Anglophone countries, or in many Francophone countries or regions. The current programme and method remain transferable across sectors.

¹ Angel Gurría, *Opening remarks to the Informal Meeting of OECD Education Ministers on Vocational Education and Training*, Copenhagen, 22 January 2007 http://www.oecd.org/document/60/0,3343,en_2649_201185_37969852_1_1_1_1,00.html

² OECD Review of Migrant Education, Denmark, OECD, March 2010, <http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/54/17/44855206.pdf>

7.5. Multi-region transfer

Not only does the policy or programme allow for multi-regional transfer, but delivering on a pan-regional basis on the strength of a global or European partnership would contribute to lower delivery costs. This would also allow for the effective exchange of expertise and resource and encourage international collaboration.

In principle, it can be transferred to any global region, to any region within the EU and to an unlimited number of EU regions. Transfer is not limited to regions or to national boundaries. A network of regions could consider creating a partnership to set up such a programme. The target sector or audience does not limit multi-region transfer.