Erfahrungsbericht: „Digitalised German Language Teaching in Nigeria - My Experience“. Luke Akinremi, Goethe Institut, Nigeria

1. Introduction

Digitalised German language teaching has gained more popularity among teachers and lecturers of German in Nigeria in recent times. The Covid-19 pandemic and the stringent government-enforced measures - such as delimiting the percentage of employees and clients who could be present within a workplace at the same time, and partial or total lockdowns - to curb the spread of the Covid-19 virus necessitated the adoption of alternative measures to onsite teaching. It was this necessity that informed the introduction of online courses at the Goethe-Institut Nigeria, where the author of this paper worked for 3 years as a teacher and examiner. This paper highlights the experience of the author with the transition from face-to-face classes to online teaching and the adaptations that were made to master teaching German online.

Goethe-Institut Nigeria is Germany's cultural institute in Nigeria (About us, https://www.goethe.de/en/uun.html) and one of the 158 centres across 98 countries (Locations, https://www.goethe.de/en/wwt.html). Situated in Lagos, the institute through its language department offers German language courses from A1 to B2 levels and exams A1 through C1 level based on the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR) (Course Levels, https://www.goethe.de/ins/ng/en/spr/kon/stu.html). Prior to the global outbreak of Covid-19, the institute had offered only on-site courses for all available levels with flexible schedules such as morning, early afternoon, late afternoon and evening classes. However, this flexibility still could not meet the need of every interested learner of German. On one hand, the constant heavy traffic to and from Lagos Island – a business hub in its own right – meant several hours of commuting for many potential course participants, and in some cases that was enough discouragement. On the other hand, the only Goethe-Institut centre in Nigeria is in Lagos, leaving the remaining 35 states in the federation without a Goethe-Institut centre. While travelling from other states to Lagos for the Goethe-Zertifikat exams is realistic, doing the same 3 to 5 times a week over a period of 12 to 16 weeks in order to attend physical classes is less practical.

Thus, from time to time the language department received enquiries about and requests for online courses. Besides not having trained personnel to meet such requests, the requests were also rather infrequent and less than the institute's minimum policy of 8 course participants in a class at the start of a course. As a result, such requests were usually forwarded to the sister institute in Nairobi – Goethe-Institut Kenya, where they already had online courses and

personnel with the required training.

This paper is divided into five chapters. Following this introductory chapter, the second chapter describes the transition from onsite to online classes. Chapter three discusses the Goethe-Institut online course formats, chapter four discusses the challenges which were encountered in the process and chapter five summarises this paper.

2. The transition

With the rising number of recorded Covid-19 cases globally threatening the shutdown of many institutions, as a contingency arrangement should the Goethe-Institut have to be closed or course participants be unable to attend onsite classes there, Goethe-Institut Nigeria enrolled its teachers in short courses on online teaching and online teaching tools. This was to be supplemented by distance courses such as the 6-week Online Tutoring course and the 8-week Online Monitoring which commenced in March and May 2020 respectively. As far as the short courses were concerned, Adobe Connect was the main application which was introduced and the training explored adapting Adobe Connect tools for didactic purposes.

It was advantageous that the teachers had had varying degrees of familiarity with Adobe Connect as participants in online workshops where Adobe Connect was used. Thus, they were not completely new to the interface. Knowing the interface well from the guest's view would prove useful later in assisting participants who were new to Adobe Connect and had a question or experienced some technical difficulties while using it. As such the goal of the training was to help the teachers learn the most important tools that could be adapted for an online classroom.

For the language department, the immediate mission was to conclude the first trimester successfully. As the first lockdown was announced to begin on March 30, 2020, the transition took place, albeit not without some challenges. One of them was adapting the existing course format and resources to the online format. This was because the onsite course format was textbook-based, supported by digital media such as the electronic whiteboard and pre-installed course materials such as the electronic versions of the course books and the audio files. This meant there were no readily available documents to share on Adobe Connect meetings when the online classes commenced. Thus, teachers had to decide between scanning the coursebook, in order to share it during meetings and asking each student to have their coursebook by their side for use during the online class session. Besides, the audio files had to be downloaded from the publisher's website, although there were a few cases where the audio materials were not available online. Thus, with such adjustments, the immediate goal of concluding the first trimester was achieved.

With the institute unable to reopen ahead of the second trimester, the trimester began with only

online courses being offered. The courses consisted of asynchronous independent tasks with automatic feedback and supplementary feedback from the tutor on the Goethe online learning platform which is powered by Moodle, as well as online live sessions which were initially held on Adobe Connect. However, after a series of complaints about the interface and user-friendliness of Adobe Connect, it was replaced with Zoom as the medium for hosting live sessions at the start of the third trimester which began in September 2020. The ongoing plans in the third trimester to restart on-site courses however suffered a setback when the Goethe-Institut Lagos and other offices within the Lagos City Hall building were vandalised by thugs in October 2020 (Goethe-Institut Lagos, 2020). This led to the indefinite continuation of the online courses, but since the relocation of the institute, some on-site courses are once again being offered, while the online courses remain.

3. Course formats

Prior to the pandemic and the series of total and partial lockdowns that accompanied it, the Goethe-Institut Lagos had only offered an on-site course format and had to adopt one of the already existing online formats within the Goethe-Institut. At the time of the transition and for the second trimester of 2020, the **pure online course** format was adopted. The format entails asynchronous independent work and independent tasks on the part of the course participant – which is in part automatically evaluated and in part evaluated by the teacher – on the Goethe-Moodle online learning platform. This was coupled with some live sessions usually not more than 8 in total, of which the first is a welcome session where the course, the online learning platform and the Adobe Connect tools are introduced. The subsequent live sessions focus on putting the topics learnt on the online learning platform into practice. For the transition phase, the teachers had made use of some model PowerPoint presentations that had been prepared for the A1, A2 and B1 levels for the 8 live sessions. Thus, the teacher could choose to edit the presentations or use them directly. The pure online course had a duration of 16 weeks and the online live sessions were held at a 2-week interval.

In the third trimester of 2020, the Goethe-Institut Lagos offered the **blended learning course** format for the first time. The blended learning format within the Goethe-Institut is one in which a language course consists of both on-site and online learning. The blended learning course runs under four popular models.

The **homework model** is one in which the main course work takes place on-site while the homework is given and done online. In the **80-20 model**, 80% of the total teaching units are conducted on-site while 20% of the total teaching units are completed online or vice-versa. Similarly, under the **60-40 model**, 60% of the course is held on-site while 40% is conducted

online. The **50-50 model** divides the teaching units in two, such that half of the teaching units are completed on-site while the other half is taught online.

However, due to the peculiar circumstance of the constantly changing lockdown regulations, the blended learning course was not introduced in the usual form of on-site and online learning. Rather, when the 50-50 blended learning model was introduced at the Goethe-Institut Lagos, the 50% of teaching units which should have been for on-site lessons were converted to live online sessions on Zoom. This meant that live sessions were held between 2 to 3 times a week depending on the total teaching units in the course. This meant a minimum of 24 online live sessions for such course, as the shortest ones had a duration of 12 weeks. This indicates a massive increase in the online live sessions compared to the 8 live sessions offered under the pure online course format.

With both course formats on offer, interested course participants had the opportunity to choose the online course format which suits their needs more. For example, course participants who wanted more practice and interaction could opt for the blended learning course while those who preferred independent learning and/or were not available for multiple live sessions in the week could opt for the pure online course.

4. Challenges

One of the earliest challenges encountered by the teachers was optimizing their teaching materials and methods. Many of the course materials in use before the online class were hard copy textbooks, printed documents that were usually copied for the students, as well as audio files. The teachers had to find ways to incorporate these into their PowerPoint presentations. Also, some group activities and games such as *Karussell* and *Kettenspiel* which involve physical movement could not be used in the online classes or had to be organised differently than they normally would be.

Due to the suddenness of the transition, there were cases of students who did not have the electronic devices for the best online learning experience. Although smartphones can access the online learning platform as well as Adobe Connect and Zoom, it was observed that the user experience with a tablet or PC was better. For example, when the course participants access the learning platform from a tablet or PC, they have a wider overview of the interface and the tools, while from a smartphone the user would have to scroll a lot more to access certain functions. In addition, at least two tools did not work on Adobe Connect on the smartphones of some course participants. Some course participants complained that they were unable to use the tools for drawing lines and typing text on the shared screen while attending the live session on their phones.

However, this problem was not experienced by the participants who used their PCs. Also, for the live sessions and for recording audio texts on the learning platform, it was recommended that course participants use headphones with microphones because this helped improve their audio quality. Some did not have these at the start of the online courses and this usually resulted in low-quality audio production and echoes, and sometimes their device's in-built microphone picked up noise from the course participants' surroundings. Over time, attempts were made to resolve the complaints, consequently both the course participants and teachers got more used to the platforms and tools and found ways to improve their experience. In one case, it was noticed that users of different browsers had different experiences – those who visited the online learning platform via Internet Explorer had more complaints than those who used Google Chrome.

Learning online posed some other challenges to the course participants. Maintaining the discipline to study independently on the online learning platform over a period of 14 to 16 weeks was difficult for some course participants. Thus, the teachers had to send reminders to them to enquire whether there were learning problems that they needed help with. The course participants' environment during live sessions was sometimes problematic – busy and/or noisy. During the live sessions, the teachers encouraged active participation from all course participants which ideally meant that their cameras had to be on and they had to be ready to speak.

However, during the lockdown, it was very common for course participants to be at home with their whole family, therefore there were cases where a course participant had no access to a room where they could be alone while attending the live session. They had to deal with distractions from family members who were moving around the house, chattering or engaging in other noisy activities. This did not only affect the course participant's concentration but also that of the others in the class because images of a busy background could distract others in the class. Besides, such an environment also hampered active participation in class as the noise from the surroundings caused a disturbance to the rest of the class. After the lockdown, there were instances where some course participants tried to attend live sessions while in a public place. In those cases as well, the surrounding hampered their attempts to make a contribution in the class.

Lastly, some problems were somewhat outside of the course participants' and teachers' control. A poor internet connection could interrupt the flow of the class but when it happened from the teacher's end, it could impair the learning experience of all the course participants. A solution was to identify the best network provider in the area and use their services. Some course

participants cited extended periods of power outage as a reason for not being able to work on the online learning platform or attend live sessions. Furthermore, some elderly course participants did not have the technical know-how to navigate the learning platform well and needed some help. The teachers had to create time to assist them one-on-one.

5. Summary

Prospective course participants had shown some level of interest in online courses, but due to the lacked of trained personnel, the availability of alternatives – such as the on-site courses and the online course at Goethe-Institut Nairobi – and a lack of urgency, online courses were not offered at Goethe-Institut Lagos before 2020. The pandemic sped up the adoption of online courses at Goethe-Institut Lagos while the vandalism of the institute's premise perpetuated it. The teachers' prior experience as attendees of online courses and the crash courses on teaching online facilitated the transition from on-site teaching to online teaching. The institute offers pure online courses and blended learning courses which both consist of independent work on the Goethe learning platform which is powered by Moodle, and live online sessions initially on Adobe Connect and now on Zoom.

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