Teaching and Team Building: Lessons from International Academic Collaboration in the IIDEMIC Project (Inclusive and Innovative Digital Education for Migrant Community)

Can an online course be co-designed when its authors, designers and future learners live in entirely different cultures, education systems and technological conditions? The IIDEMIC project shows that it can – but this takes far more than dividing tasks among partners. It requires a shared understanding of learning goals, openness to different perspectives and a readiness to seek solutions that work not only in theory but in real learning conditions. In an international educational project, diversity is both an organisational challenge and one of the most valuable resources: it reveals needs, constraints and ways of learning that a single institution might easily overlook.

Different Countries, Different Perspectives, One Goal

IIDEMIC (Inclusive and Innovative Digital Education for Migrant Community), implemented by partner universities from Poland, Türkiye, Kenya and Somalia, created a space for exchanging academic, andragogical and cultural experience. Its shared aim was to develop digital learning materials supporting the professional development of teachers working in diverse settings within refugee and migrant communities.

The project aims to develop digital and social skills, entrepreneurial attitudes and competences for inclusive education, taking into account local communities and the conditions of teaching in refugee camps. From the planning stage, the partners had to accept that solutions regarded as standard in one country would not necessarily work in another – not only in terms of technological infrastructure, but also teachers' experience, the organisation of teaching, the language of communication and the social context of education.

A course designed from the perspective of a European university may assume stable internet access, computers on campus and freedom to schedule independent study. Some IIDEMIC participants, however, rely mainly on mobile phones, have limited mobile data, and their professional and family responsibilities make regular attendance at synchronous (scheduled, real-time) sessions difficult. This does not make one form of education better than another; it shows how important it is to design for learners' actual circumstances.

The project's success was undoubtedly shaped by involving local educational communities in the dialogue. Meetings in Bosaso, Somalia, and in the Dadaab and Kakuma camps in Kenya brought together representatives of local communities, educational institutions and refugee support organisations. They laid solid groundwork for the roll-out of the courses and helped the team better understand the conditions in which teachers would use them. International collaboration could not, therefore, be limited to handing over ready-made materials; it required a dialogue on how to make education comprehensible, useful, effective and as accessible as possible to learners in different social and cultural contexts.

From Subject Expertise to Learning Experience

A key element of the project was combining the knowledge of content authors with the experience of instructional and technological designers. Subject-matter experts appointed by each partner university contributed specialist knowledge, while instructional design translated it into a learning experience that would enable participants not only to become familiar with the content, but also to understand it, practise it and apply it at work.

This is not an automatic process. Even excellent expert material does not become a good online course simply by being divided into screens, illustrated and uploaded to a platform. This is especially true of asynchronous education, where learners have no ongoing contact with an instructor: instructions must be clear, activities must lead to specific learning outcomes, and materials must allow learners to progress through the course independently. To support authors, a series of training and consultation meetings (face-to-face and online) was held on preparing content for online courses, with a focus on building a shared understanding of how developing subject content differs from designing a learning activity. A standardised content template, reflecting the course structure and the capabilities of Articulate Rise, allowed authors to plan not only the scope of knowledge, but also learner activities, knowledge checks, supplementary materials and ways of presenting information. Responsibilities were divided to reflect the range of competences required: WSB Merito University in Poznań developed the courses, Red Sea University coordinated the pilot, and two Kenyan partners – Kenyatta University and Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology – helped prepare teachers to take part in the programme. This model combined experience in digital learning design with knowledge of the local settings in which the materials would be used.

Why Does Sequence Matter?

A key methodological decision was to focus first on learning activities and only later on audiovisual materials. In the traditional approach, online course development often starts from lecture material: the expert prepares a presentation or records a lecture, and the designer then adds exercises and questions. IIDEMIC adopted a different logic, taking as its reference point what the learner should be able to do after completing a given part of the course. Content, examples, tasks and forms of presentation were selected on this basis, and recordings were produced later so they could be closely aligned with the planned activities. This helps to avoid a common e-learning problem: learners receive a great deal of information but have few opportunities to apply it. For the teachers targeted by IIDEMIC, the aim was not merely to build knowledge, but to develop competences they could use in their everyday work with pupils in refugee camps.

Design Is a Team Process

The authors' materials were only one stage of course development. The content then underwent instructional and technological development by two instructional designers, which meant looking at the course from several perspectives at once. The author focused on accuracy and subject-matter value; the instructional designer examined whether the activities genuinely supported learning; the person responsible for technological development ensured that solutions could be implemented effectively in the chosen digital environment. These perspectives do not compete – combined, they increase the likelihood of material that is valuable, comprehensible and functional. The courses were then returned to their authors to verify that the original meaning had been preserved. Design thus became iterative: each stage was not just a hand-over, but an opportunity to review and refine. The process did not end with publication. During the IIDEMIC pilot, data on the platform's performance, the use of materials and teachers' experiences were collected through surveys, interviews and user activity data, and the report on the first pilot phase in Dadaab indicates that the system was improved in response to this feedback. This complements the author review: authors assess the accuracy and coherence of content, while pilot participants show how solutions work in practice. Quality assurance needs both, as a course can be accurate in content yet difficult to use, insufficiently clear or poorly suited to the learner's technical conditions.

Artificial Intelligence as Support, Not a Substitute for Experts

AI-based tools were used in developing the courses, but in a supporting role: they helped to edit and organise content and adapt its presentation to the needs of the course. They did not replace

expert knowledge or responsibility for the accuracy of the materials. This distinction is particularly important in international projects. Generative models can produce linguistically correct texts, but that does not mean they account for local educational realities, the nature of teachers' work or the cultural meaning of particular examples. The final judgement on the suitability of material must therefore remain with humans. The IIDEMIC experience shows that AI can streamline selected stages of content production, but the quality of education still depends above all on the competences, collaboration and decisions of the people involved.

Intercultural Collaboration Begins with Listening

International academic collaboration is often associated with exchanging experience, mobility and joint publications. In projects such as IIDEMIC, it also has a practical dimension: agreeing on how to talk about education without imposing one perspective as universal. The partners from Poland, Türkiye, Kenya and Somalia represented different social, cultural and religious contexts, which calls for care in choosing examples, communicating and making assumptions about learners. Educational practices are embedded in specific communities: what is a neutral teaching example in one setting may, in another, need explanation or adaptation to local norms and experiences.

Respecting religious and cultural diversity does not mean abandoning shared educational values. On the contrary, it can strengthen a dialogue grounded in dignity, equal treatment, openness and the right to learn. Intercultural collaboration is thus not about avoiding differences, but about recognising them and taking them into account in design decisions.

Partners familiar with the local educational context play a particularly important role here, as they can view proposed solutions from the perspective of future users rather than only that of the institutions developing the materials.

This perspective also mattered during the pilot. In Dadaab, the first testing phase involved schools serving both refugee and host communities, bringing in the experience of people working in different organisational and social conditions.

The pilot report also highlights cooperation with UNHCR, local education authorities and partner organisations, showing that digital education in refugee settings requires coordination beyond academic institutions.

This reflects a core principle of co-design: those who know the local context should be partners in shaping solutions, not merely recipients of ready-made ones.

Translation as a Further Stage of Design

One of the most interesting aspects of IIDEMIC was the preparation of local language versions of the courses. Materials originally developed in English were translated into Swahili and Somali. This may seem a purely linguistic task, carried out once design is complete, but in practice translating educational content serves a much broader function. Not all concepts have direct equivalents in other languages; some phrasings need clarification, and examples or instructions may be understood differently in another educational environment. Work on the local versions was therefore also an opportunity to re-examine the content for clarity and relevance – an additional review that was not only linguistic, but also contextual.

A correct translation does not guarantee that material is equally comprehensible and useful for all learners. This is why digital education increasingly emphasises localisation, i.e. adapting content not only to the language but also to the social and cultural context. In IIDEMIC this mattered because of the target group's linguistic diversity: although English is used in academic and professional communication, it is not the only language of the teachers and communities involved. Local language versions could thus improve both comprehension and the scope for wider use. The IIDEMIC experience suggests treating this stage as an integral part of quality assurance rather than a final technical task.

Asynchronous Education as a Shared Compromise and a Deliberate Choice

One of the project's key assumptions was the use of asynchronous learning. For academic teams used to direct contact with learners, this may require a shift in thinking about teaching. In an asynchronous course, the teacher cannot clarify an unclear instruction on the spot, supply missing context or adjust the pace to the group's responses. Many of these decisions must be made in advance, at the design stage. This requires careful planning of instructions, activities and feedback – but it also allows learners to study at a time and pace of their choosing, which is especially important where technological infrastructure is limited.

In IIDEMIC, the asynchronous approach became a common point of reference for the partners, requiring them to reconcile different teaching experiences with the needs of the target group. Openness to this form of education was an important precondition for collaboration. The aim was not to recreate traditional classes online, but to design a learning process that uses the possibilities of online education while accounting for its limitations. The pilot confirmed the importance of these decisions. The report on visits to the refugee camps identified a user-friendly interface and access to some resources under limited connectivity as strengths, while the challenges included poor internet access in some locations and the need for ongoing support in developing participants' digital competences. The first pilot phase also included hands-on training in Dadaab for 50 teachers and 11 school leaders. This shows that even in

courses designed for self-directed learning, preparing participants to use the technology can play an important role: flexible timing alone does not remove barriers related to digital competences, access to devices or connection quality.

What Has International Collaboration Taught Us?

The experience of designing and piloting the IIDEMIC courses yields several conclusions that may be useful for other international educational initiatives.

1. A shared goal does not require identical solutions. Partners may agree on learning outcomes while proposing different ways of achieving them. Such diversity enriches a project, provided it is accompanied by openness to discussion. Working with teachers in Kenya and Somalia is a reminder that effective solutions must reflect local conditions and needs.
2. Instructional coherence does not emerge by itself. It requires shared working principles, appropriate tools, consultation and successive rounds of review. Standardised templates can support this, but should not restrict authors' subject-matter autonomy.
3. Course quality is a shared responsibility. Subject expertise, instructional design, technological development and language localisation complement one another, and none should be treated as fully independent. Feedback from future users is an important addition, allowing solutions to be tested in real conditions.
4. Cultural diversity can be a design resource. It helps to identify assumptions that seem obvious to a single institution but may not reflect the experiences of all learners. Working with partners who know the local communities helps to understand these differences.
5. International collaboration develops the competences of designers and authors themselves. Having to justify one's decisions, confront them with other perspectives and seek common solutions leads to more reflective instructional design.

What Next? From a Joint Project to Lasting Collaboration

International educational projects have a defined timeline, budget and set of deliverables, but collaboration between partners need not end when the project formally closes. IIDEMIC demonstrates the potential for further cooperation between institutions representing different academic and educational communities. The relationships built, the experience of designing asynchronous courses and a better understanding of local needs can be a starting point for new joint initiatives. The project is also a reminder of something easily overlooked in debates on the digitalisation of education: technology is only a tool. The quality of learning depends above all on people – their competences, mutual trust and willingness to work together.

Well-designed digital education can cross geographical borders. Yet to meet the needs of different communities, it must be developed in dialogue with those who know their realities best. Therein lies one of the most important values of international educational co-design.

Agnieszka Goncerzewicz
WSB Merito University in Poznań

*The editorial revisions and the translation into English were carried out using artificial intelligence tools: Claude Opus 5.5. – accessed on 26 October 2026