

The role of higher education institutions and support entities in creating open technological solutions for language learning by refugees and migrants

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This chapter discusses the ways in which support entities and higher education institutions can collaborate in order to help refugees become integrated into the host society, notably Spanish society. While support entities play a crucial role at the early stages by providing refugees with aid addressing some of their most basic needs, these early interventions often serve as a springboard for the later access of refugees to higher education. While there are abundant volunteering efforts, mostly revolving around the work done by support entities, the aid coming from institutional agents is far from sufficient. This should not be put down to a lack of compromise from such institutions but rather to the difficulties involved in setting the bureaucratic machinery in motion. On the other hand, an example of how research groups at universities can help refugees and migrants is that of the MOOCS created in the context of the MOONLITE project, which have obtained official recognition by the UNED. In this way, before actually obtaining access to tertiary degrees, refugees can reap benefits from their efforts to learn the language by receiving an official certification for the MOOCS completed.

Keywords: Higher education institutions, support entities, MOOC, language learning.

El rol de las instituciones de educación superior y de las entidades de apoyo en la creación de soluciones tecnológicas abiertas para el aprendizaje de lenguas para refugiados y migrantes. En este capítulo se analizan las formas en que las entidades de apoyo y las instituciones de educación superior pueden colaborar para ayudar a los refugiados a integrarse en la sociedad de acogida, especialmente en la española. Mientras que las entidades de apoyo desempeñan un papel crucial en

las primeras etapas, proporcionando a los refugiados ayuda para cubrir algunas de sus necesidades más básicas, estas primeras intervenciones suelen servir de trampolín para el posterior acceso de los refugiados a la educación superior. Si bien existen abundantes esfuerzos de voluntariado, que en su mayoría giran en torno a la labor realizada por las entidades de apoyo, la ayuda procedente de los agentes institucionales dista mucho de ser suficiente. Esto no debe achacarse a la falta de compromiso de dichas instituciones, sino a las dificultades que supone poner en marcha la maquinaria burocrática. Por otro lado, un ejemplo de cómo los grupos de investigación de las universidades pueden ayudar a los refugiados y migrantes es el de los MOOCS creados en el marco del proyecto MOONLITE, que han obtenido el reconocimiento oficial de la UNED. De este modo, antes de acceder a las titulaciones terciarias, los refugiados pueden obtener beneficios de sus esfuerzos por aprender el idioma al recibir una certificación oficial por los MOOCS realizados.

Palabras clave: Instituciones de educación superior, entidades de apoyo, MOOC, aprendizaje de lenguas.

1. Introduction

Support entities have for a long time helped migrants and refugees in the never easy and often dangerous task of trying to make themselves at home in EU countries in general, and in Spain in particular. The Spanish Constitution of 1978 declares in its article 13.4 that “[...] citizens from other countries and stateless persons may enjoy the right to asylum in Spain”¹. This led to the development and consolidation of the national system for the reception and integration of asylum seekers and refugees by the Spanish government in the 1980s (Ministerio de Trabajo, Migraciones y Seguridad Social 2018: 5).

The journey started at the end of the 1980s when four Refugee Reception Centres (henceforth CARs, after Spanish ‘Centros de Acogida a Refugiados’), managed directly by the Administration, were opened in Madrid (Vallecas and Alcobendas), Sevilla, and Mislata (Valencia). Later, in the 1990s, the Ministry of Labour and Social Security signed a collaboration agreement for developing a comprehensive assistance programme (social, legal and health) for asylum seekers and refugees, with three large non-profit organisations: Cruz Roja Española, Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR) and Accem (Piera Ansuátegui 2018: 16-17). Other NGOs, such as Rescate, La Merced Migraciones, Comrade, or Karibu, have since joined the agreement.

What is the relationship between those endeavours and language? As part of the comprehensive assistance programme previously mentioned, most of those organisations are very involved in training and professional development. It should be recalled that applicants for international protection may work from the sixth month after they apply for asylum (Real Decreto 557/2011 Disposición adicional vigésimo primera). For this reason, during the first six months in which asylum seekers and refugees live their first phase of reception in our country, actions are focused on carrying out training activities that improve each person's work skills. This also allows them to acquire the basic social skills that prepare them to undertake the search for occupational training or a job. In the case of non-Spanish speaking applicants, the focus is especially on language learning, with the aim of enabling these refugees to achieve the necessary language skills to facilitate their social inclusion and access to training, so that they can get a job in the future. In other words, as the Spanish Ministry states, "the first phase will focus on activities of cultural and formative orientation, with special emphasis on language teaching and pre-employment and job training, so that the recipients can acquire the necessary skills to access the second phase of the itinerary in a short period of time (Ministerio de Trabajo, Migraciones y Seguridad Social 2018: 17)².

On a national level, CEAR, Accem, and Cruz Roja are the specialised and subsidised non-governmental organisations with the greatest reach in the teaching of Spanish as a second language, due to their presence in large parts of the country.

In the case of CEAR, this organization has been offering classes with volunteers for many years, but it has been doing so in an official and subsidised way, with teachers on the payroll since 2017. Its language training program is established in Madrid, Canarias, País Vasco, Cataluña, Andalucía, Valencia, and Navarra. (Cobo Espejo 2019: 24).

Concerning Accem, this NGO offers a nationwide program called "Language Learning Service", also funded by the Ministry of Labour, Migration and Social Security, through the General Directorate of Integration and Humanitarian Care (Accem 2021). This service aims to promote the learning of the Spanish language and other co-official Spain as a basic instrument to facilitate the integration of refugees in the host society while enabling the exchange of cultural codes in a positive and critical way in order to overcome prejudices and stereotypes. This service is currently being offered in twenty-seven Spanish provinces.

As far as Cruz Roja is concerned, most of the linguistic training action is left in the hands of volunteers, who are sometimes trained and experienced, but not always. The service operates throughout Spain,

except in the Canaries, Jaén, Ceuta and Melilla, where the asylum programme has not been implemented (Cobo Espejo 2019: 24).

At a local level, and focusing on the Comunidad de Madrid, we find other organizations which also play an important role in language teaching, such as Asociación para la Integración Lingüística del Inmigrante en Madrid (Asilim), the NGO Rescate and La Merced Migraciones.

Asilim is an association founded by teachers of Spanish as a foreign language (Asilim 2021). Since 2001, it has exclusively been dedicated, without any type of aid or subsidy, to teaching Spanish to migrants without resources. Asilim collaborators must have training in the didactics of Spanish as a foreign language and/or second language as well as experience in working with immigrants and refugees. They carry out their function in an altruistic manner. The organisation operates from their headquarter in Madrid, as well as the CARs in Vallecas and Alcobendas, from La Casa Encendida (the social and cultural centre of the Montemadrid Foundation), and until June 2019, from all CEAR venues in Comunidad de Madrid.

The NGO Rescate is highly specialized in providing comprehensive assistance, including Spanish classes, to gender-based refugees (Rescate 2021). Lessons are taught by one person on the payroll as well as well-prepared volunteers with experience in teaching Spanish to immigrants and refugees.

Since 2013, La Merced Migraciones has been running the project “Aulas de aprendizaje de español como segunda lengua” (‘Classrooms for learning Spanish as a second language’), aimed at migrants and refugees who need to learn or improve their Spanish for social and labour integration (La Merced 2021). The program is operated by two instructors specialized in teaching Spanish to immigrants and refugees.

Thus, the role of support entities in relation to language is focused on providing the tools for newcomers to achieve their autonomy and integration, highlighting, in line with the words of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), that “Integration is inevitably a **two-way process**, requiring **mutual respect** and sustained effort between the host society and the immigrant population” (2006).

The invaluable work carried out by support entities is a constant battle that is better not fought alone. That is why they need to be backed by local authorities and institutions. When dealing with refugees with an educational background entitling them to pursue university degrees, higher education institutions are the obvious perfect partner for support entities. It might *prima facie* seem that access to higher education is not such a pressing matter to deal with as are other issues more directly relatable to basic needs. However, it is important not to underestimate

its role in the integration of refugees into target societies. UNESCO stresses the importance of higher education in the integration of refugees and migrants in the target societies. Among other things, they claim that “access to higher education contributes to solutions and post-conflict reconstruction, promotes social, economic and gender equality, and empowers refugee communities” (2017: 8). All this is, however, not easy to achieve, as their access to higher education is greatly hampered by several circumstances: “Refugees’ access to higher education is also challenging because of interrupted education, learning gaps, language, confusing application procedures, and other factors” (UNESCO 2017: 9). As a result of this, the successful integration of these groups into the target society is compromised: “Without access to higher education, refugees are condemned to passivity and may eventually lose their competences, which need to be used to be maintained. They may be unmotivated and frustrated, and the risk of some of them turning to violent extremism is greatly increased. Today less than 1% of refugee youth are able to access universities” (UNESCO 2017: 9).

In this line, showing a commitment to not remain indifferent to the refugee drama, the Conference of Chancellors of Spanish Universities (CRUE, short for the Spanish name), reached on 8th September 2015 the following threefold agreement:

- “1.- Facilitate access for refugee students who are university students in their country of origin.
- 2.- Facilitate the collaboration with Spanish universities of refugees who are professors in their home country.
- 3.- Promote voluntary actions among students, in collaboration with other administrations and agents, especially in those disciplines most directly related to this social drama” (CRUE 2015, translated by authors).

While the second of these three points has not yet really been tackled by Spanish higher education institutions, points 1 and 3 are to a larger or a lesser extent being dealt with by some of them. This is explained below in this paper, which is structured as follows: section 2 looks at the needs expressed by support entities in the data collection phase of MOON-LITE described elsewhere in this special issue; section 3, in turn, focuses on how higher education institutions can address, and eventually meet, these needs; the last section offers some concluding remarks.

2. The role and needs of support entities

As stated in the introduction, the role played by organisations aiding displaced persons varies depending on their size, resources, and target.

Large institutions such as Comisión Española de Ayuda al Refugiado (CEAR), Accem and Cruz Roja are devoted to providing comprehensive assistance for refugees and migrants (social, legal and health care); smaller entities, such as Asilim, are entirely dedicated to addressing linguistics needs.

In relation to language, all support entities working with migrants share a common purpose, i.e. helping those refugees and migrants for whom Spanish is not their mother tongue to acquire the language skills needed for their social inclusion and access to training so that they can get a job in the future.

For a better understanding of the role of support entities and their needs, let us make a previous reflection about three subjects linked to the process of teaching and learning the language of the host country and to the learners who usually represent our target audience.

Firstly, what does it mean to teach Spanish to migrants and refugees? There has always been a debate around this question in the sense of whether teaching Spanish to displaced people can be regarded as a specialization within the field of teaching Spanish as a foreign language. Our view is aligned with that of Villalba Martínez and Hernández García, for whom “the teaching of a second language is framed inside the general didactics of foreign languages and that is the framework from which the appropriate didactic adaptations have to be made” (2009: 61)³. When implementing a program for teaching Spanish as a second language, these authors suggest following the same guidelines as when teaching Spanish to non-immigrants and non-refugees (2009: 62). That is:

- Bringing students to the same level.
- Developing a teaching programme or syllabus of Spanish as a second language.

In this section, we find it interesting to point out a reflection by Miquel López (1995: 247) on the frequency with which displaced persons fail to attend class. This makes it advisable to elaborate a programme of communicative objectives in which it is as important to define the communicative goals that students must achieve (functions) and the notions (topics) that they are going to work on.

- Designing courses adapted to the characteristics and needs of the students. Sometimes this is not easy, as pointed out by Miquel López (1995: 247), since immigrants and refugees do not always know them and those needs are not static, but dynamic. The needs on arrival in our country are not the same as those they have when they have been with us for some time. On the other

hand, it is also important to point out that their needs cannot always be met on the spot or are the most appropriate (some students believe that the best way to learn a language is to follow a structural rather than a communicative approach). Yet how do we determine their communicative needs? According to the same author, the general needs of immigrants match the threshold level as defined in the *Council of Europe's Living Languages Project*, i.e. needs related to the ability to communicate in everyday life situations.

All the organisations cited in the introduction follow these guidelines. In the case of Asilim, when someone requests to join a class, a placement test is administered and the person is then assigned to the most suitable group. Nowadays, in its headquarter and in the Refugee Reception Centres where it works, Asilim covers the needs of students for levels A1, A2, and B1 (according to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). The rest of the entities follow a similar procedure. The next question is: what happens to the students who participate in the classes of Spanish as a second language offered by these organisations when they pass the B1 level? We must banish the idea that displaced people only need Spanish to cover their communicative needs: refugees and migrants need to make use of the communicative, integrating, and expressive functions of language.

Taking Asilim as an example, the association opens groups and, if necessary, other levels depending on demand, but as the number of people who require the lower levels is greater, sometimes those learners who need to move on to level B2 cannot do so in this non-profit organization, whose voluntary but specialized teachers must focus on training for the access (A1), platform (A2) and threshold (B1) levels. When the support entities cannot cover the higher levels, the intervention of Universities can be the solution to this real need.

The second important question to be addressed is: Who are our students? There is still a tendency to identify asylum seekers, refugees, or immigrants as persons with limitations; people who unfortunately often feel that “their socioeconomic status usually overshadows their characteristics as learners, and negative or deprivation considerations are often encountered” (Llorente Puerta 2018: 46)⁴. In the same way, although twenty-five years have already gone by, we recall the words of Lourdes Miquel, which are still valid today: “we tend to always assume a low level of training and yet we can find, above all among refugees but also among some immigrants (from the Maghreb, for example), some university students who work in construction here, or school graduates dedicated, in the best of cases, to street vending” (Miquel López 1995: 244)⁵.

From Asilim's experience teaching displaced persons, we can infer that, although it is true that the level of education among immigrant learners varies and can sometimes be very heterogeneous, this does not differ greatly from what is found among Spanish adult students. The following data are revealing: from a sample of 60 people, all of them both asylum seekers and students of Asilim, 18% declared to have a university degree, 23% to have completed high school and only 8% declared not to have received formal education.

So, what is the situation for those with university or pre-university education who wish to have their studies validated, or complete or start them? This need can be best addressed by universities. As primary support entities have for a long time lamented, when their students want to pursue formal education, they find that, despite having a good command of communication skills in Spanish, they lack the knowledge of Spanish for Academic Purposes. They do not have the tools to make good use of oral and written texts for academic communication: papers, presentations, exams, and research articles, among others. As an example, let us share our experience with the course *Quiero Estudiar en España* (QEE), designed by Aselim and taught for four years (2010 – 2014). This training was aimed at non-Spanish speakers who were interested in studying in Spain (High School, Training for Employment, Vocational Training, undergraduate and graduate university studies) and also at all those interested in acquiring formal Spanish skills, necessary to meet their job expectations. With a minimum consolidated A2 level required for enrolment, the course was organized into three interdependent modules: a reading and writing module, an oral skills module, and a grammar and vocabulary module. Unfortunately, the scarcity of instructors (see below) brought about the interruption of the course after its fourth edition, despite its huge success.

Finally, we believe it is important to reflect on **who are the people who carry out the task of language teaching in the support organizations**. The document Santander Manifiesto (VV.AA. 2004) collects the principles that guide the teaching of Spanish to those who come to our country looking for a better future. One of its fundamental pillars is the professionalization of teachers who are dedicated to this kind of teaching. Not every native speaker can teach his own language. Yet this does not mean that the instruction should necessarily be in the hands of graduates in Spanish Studies, who, according to Miquel López (1995: 253) “...to teach immigrants, should ‘deacademize’ themselves”⁶.

According to Villalba Martínez and Hernández García (2009: 62), for the teaching of Spanish to migrants to be recognised and valued “the commitment of the Administrations is needed, but also that of publishers and the University; and, above all, it is necessary to approach this activity with humility, rigour, and social commitment”⁷.

There is one last issue which organisations working with displaced persons need to see addressed. If we defend the existence of professional teachers, the training offer must increase, keeping in mind that teaching immigrants and refugees is not a passing fad; there will always be people who come to our country for different, often dire, reasons, but always seeking a better future; and they have the right to quality instruction by professionals properly trained in teaching Spanish as a Second Language. As González Blasco (2007: 609) puts it: “the fact that undergraduate programmes include L2 subjects, that there are specialised postgraduate courses and a multitude of courses for teachers from different teaching contexts, shows that there is recognition –at least by the university, some institutions and the teaching community– of the specificity of the teaching of Spanish as a Second Language and the need for specific training”⁸.

Yet teachers who work with migrants and refugees must not only know how to teach language, culture, and prosody; they must also be prepared to at least understand the migratory grief which their students may be experiencing; they should also have a minimum amount of training, or at least information, of legal matters so that they can adapt their classes to the legal and bureaucratic needs of their learners in their daily lives. Such multidisciplinary training could be organized and offered by universities and their different colleges to people who collaborate or wish to collaborate with support entities.

The role of universities as second-stage elements in the integration of migrants and refugees is becoming increasingly meaningful insofar as they can complement the more direct and basic intervention of NGOs.

3. The role of higher education institutions

As said in the introductory section, higher education institutions, notably universities, have a potential key role in the integration of refugees and migrants. University degrees open the doors to the labour market and can therefore serve as valuable means to channel the efforts made by support groups to turn certain refugees and migrants into skilled labour.

The first step to be taken by these groups in order to access higher studies in the EU is obtaining recognition by national education authorities of the degrees of secondary education from their countries of origin. Once this is done, the main obstacle arises from registration fees. This is where universities can pick up the gauntlet by providing fee waivers for duly accredited refugees and migrants, something that has been demanded, among others, by the Spanish Network of Immigration and Refugee Aid (Marrero 2016).

Countries such as Canada, the US, Sweden, or France have taken more or less coordinated steps in providing refugees with access to higher education, whether by means of scholarships, bridging programs, or related initiatives, sometimes including not only tuition fees but also room & board waivers (see Loo, Streitwieser & Jeong 2018). These authors quote IIE's⁹ President, Allan Goodman, who makes the following thought-provoking statement: "the more than 20,000 higher education institutions worldwide should each offer to take in at least one displaced student and rescue one scholar. This would make a dent in preventing a global lost generation, while also saving, in some cases, entire national academies" (Goodman 2016, quoted in Loo, Streitwieser & Jeong 2018).

In Spain, the action taken by most universities in providing aid for refugees and migrants is limited to encouraging their students to join volunteering programs. Such is the case with the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, Universidad Rey Juan Carlos, or Universidad Autónoma de Madrid. The latter's Solidary and Cooperation Office adopts the following manifesto: "The main objective of the Office is to contribute to channelling the demand for the participation of the university community, and especially of its students, in activities and projects of cooperation and education for development, university volunteering and solidarity" (UAM 2021, original in Spanish, translated by authors).

While such measures are no doubt praiseworthy, they do not add much to what is being done by support entities. Much more useful to refugees and migrants is the policy undertaken by universities such as Universidad Complutense de Madrid (henceforth UCM), Universitat de Barcelona (henceforth UB), and Universidad Camilo José Cela (henceforth UCJC) (Laborde 2016). These are the only real existing commitments by higher education institutions in Spain to grasp the nettle of providing refugees with access to tertiary education.

The UCM refugees Office states as its two strategic goals: a) To contribute to guaranteeing the right to higher education of refugees from a diversity perspective and to recover and recognize their scientific potential; and b) To strengthen their potential for social integration. In particular, the UCM provides fee waivers for accredited refugees and asylum seekers. According to the UCM refugees Office (personal communication), 75 applications had been accepted up to now 2017/2018, and about half of those did finally enrol in an official degree, whether at graduate or postgraduate level. The enrolment in Bachelor's degrees is revised and renewed every year. The tuition fee waiver does not necessarily cover 100% of fees. Applicants must offer proof of their financial status, based on which the university decides the percentage that is applied.

Those displaced persons who want to benefit from this fee-waiver, are first requested to become acquainted with the Spanish university system, in particular the Comunidad de Madrid's system, as well as with the degrees offered by the UCM and the prerequisites for admission. Although the prerequisites include proof of previous studies and/or degrees, official recognition of these by the Spanish education authorities is not always a *sine qua non*. The UCM contemplates the possibility of accepting original transcripts and/or certificates of studies provided that these are accompanied by a sworn translation and, in the case of certificates of degrees enabling access to postgraduate studies, an official certification that such is the case. It must be taken into account that, as migrants and refugees come from countries outside the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), equivalences between education systems are not always easy to establish.

Refugees are also requested to prove a B2 level of Spanish prior to admission. If this level is not achieved or applicants cannot prove it, the UCM facilitates access to the Complutense Center for the Study of Spanish, where individuals can take free Spanish courses and/or a placement test. Especially important is the motivation letter that applicants are requested to write, where they should explain their motivations for enrolling in studies at the UCM. The amount of the socioeconomic aid granted is decided by the Commission of evaluation, "based on the annual budget allocated and the File of each applicant" (UCM 2021).

The UCM initiative has been selected as a good practice in the inclusion of refugees in the university and is part of the Welcome Refugees map of the European University Association/Higher Education Policy Unit (UCM 2017), an effort to "to showcase and document the commitment of higher education institutions and organisations in supporting refugees" (EUA 2021).

UB channels its aid to refugees through the Fundació Solidaritat UB, which has "the aim of applying the policy of university cooperation to development, and thus promote human rights and the social action of the University, within the framework of its actions of responsibility towards society" (UB 2021, translated by authors). The prerequisites for displaced people to access studies at the UB are very similar to the ones described for the UCM, above. In terms of the actual action taken, in the school year 2016-2017, the UB waived the tuition fees of 100 refugees, providing free room and board for 33 of those (<http://www.solidaritat.ub.edu/refugees/>). The UB initiative shares with the UCM its appointment as a good practice in the inclusion of refugees in the university and is also part of the Welcome Refugees map of the European University Association/Higher Education Policy Unit (UB 2017).

UCJC has taken a meritocratic approach in the admission of refugees by selecting 10 individuals with a high GPA from secondary education –starting from 7.9 out of 10– and a good command of languages, including Spanish. The aid to refugees –called *Proyecto Integra*– includes tuition fee waivers, as well as free room and board for those in need. UCJC makes it clear that, in the selection of applicants, their religion, nationality, political ideology or ethnic group were not taken into account. (UCJC 2016).

In much of the work done by higher education institutions to aid refugees, collaboration with support entities is essential. Whereas the actual admission to tertiary degrees is something that only the universities can do, these rely on support entities for the fulfilment of the prerequisites mentioned above, notably the acquisition of the necessary proficiency level of Spanish, as well as assessment in the paperwork involved in the adaptation of their diplomas and certificates from their countries of origin to the Spanish system, not to mention the invaluable psychological support throughout the whole process.

The efforts just described to grant access to higher education are usually accompanied by an additional effort to prepare both staff and students to be receptive to the specific needs of refugees. To this end, higher education institutions have developed social volunteering programs that help to create the right environment for the integration of these groups in the higher education community. Some institutions train staff in the acquisition of good practices in the assistance to refugees pursuing studies in those institutions (see, for instance, the case of UB and their participation in the inHERE project for staff training [UB 2018]).

The other main way in which higher education institutions can help refugees and migrants is through research projects targeting this issue. The European Union has funded several such projects in the last few years, among them MOONLITE, the project within whose framework the research presented in this special issue is taking place. Other chapters in this volume deal with several aspects of this project, including the initial meetings held with support entities and the results of the data mining from the needs analysis carried out with their collaboration. A clear example of the synergy resulting from the joint effort of the researchers in this project and support entities as well as displaced people themselves is the work done in the planning and development of the MOOCS which are described in Chapter 5. An important stage in the MOONLITE project has been the official recognition by the UNED of these MOOCS as part of their institutional life-long training program. Refugees completing these courses will therefore receive ECTS credits, which should not only open a gate for their integration in the Spanish

educational system but also facilitate their mobility across EU states.

Because we wanted to create MOOCS addressing the real needs of displaced people, we made it a priority to empower these groups by involving them in the process. To that end, a brainstorming session was carried out, where delegates from many support entities as well as refugees decided on those topics which they considered most relevant for integration in Spanish society and which therefore should represent the backbone of the Spanish LMOOCS addressed to refugees and migrants. In order to ensure the effectiveness of the brainstorming session (see Hillson 2007, about the risks of brainstorming), a Design Thinking approach was adopted. In this kind of brainstorming, participants are monitored and given a topic about which to come up with ideas (see Sprangers 2016, about brainstorming in Design Thinking). The topic in our brainstorming session was “what I urgently need to be able to do”. All participants contributed by writing their ideas on post-its, calling them out, and then posting them on a whiteboard. After this, conceptual clouds were created with the ideas expressed on the post-its, eventually determining the Spanish LMOOC contents.

Another important step in Design Thinking is prototyping, which “offers designers the opportunity to bring their ideas to life, test the practicability of the current design, and to potentially investigate how a sample of users think and feel about a product” (Dam and Siang 2017). We, therefore, avoided long theoretical discussions about the suitability of the contents, deciding on a relatively fast and efficient way to bring the LMOOCS to life. To that end, researchers and support entities worked together in the actual development of the lessons, including the shooting of the video lessons that are central to this type of courses. Now that these prototypes have been implemented, it will be important to do a follow-up of their effectiveness to identify their strengths and weaknesses and thus reinforce the former and address the latter. This will allow us to move from the prototype stage to final products, with the added value that the improvements made will have been informed by real practice. This will bring about a symbiosis by which we, as researchers, will be able to develop more efficient learning tools which are then bound to have a positive impact on the lives of refugees and migrants.

4. Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the ways in which support entities and higher education institutions can collaborate in order to help refugees become integrated into the host society, notably Spanish society. While

support entities play a crucial role at the early stages by providing refugees with aid addressing some of their most basic needs, these early interventions often serve as a springboard for the later access of refugees to higher education. For instance, their help with paperwork and with the acquisition of language skills can be the first steps in a race for integration where the relay is then passed on to the hands of higher education institutions.

Another way in which support entities and higher education institutions can collaborate is through the implication of the former in projects carried out by the latter, as is the case with the MOONLITE project mentioned in this chapter and discussed more in detail in other chapters in this volume. A positive by-product of this kind of collaboration is that refugees themselves can end up having a say in the whole process. This empowerment results, in the context of MOONLITE, in symbiosis by which the work of the researchers is better informed, thus resulting in more efficient learning tools from which refugees and migrants can in turn benefit.

Of the three points in the CRUE manifesto alluded to in the introduction, the third one –i.e. promote voluntary actions among students– is clearly the most satisfactorily addressed to date. The first point –i.e. facilitate access for refugee students who are university students in their country of origin– is starting to be tackled by higher education institutions, yet, as seen above, still on a very small scale. The examples set by the UCM, the UB, and the UCJC should be an inspiration for other institutions to follow. Lastly, the second point of the CRUE manifesto –i.e. facilitate the collaboration with Spanish universities of refugees who are professors in their home country– has not yet been addressed and no efforts have been so far identified to revert this situation.

We see, therefore, that there still is much to be done in the quest for providing the means for the integration of refugees into Spanish society. While there are abundant volunteering efforts, mostly revolving around the work done by support entities, the aid coming from institutional agents is far from sufficient. This should not be put down to a lack of compromise from such institutions but rather to the difficulties involved in setting the bureaucratic machinery in motion. And this is precisely where research groups have an important role to play. Because research projects can be run quite autonomously by these groups, once funding has been obtained, they can provide additional help from the institutional end which to a certain extent palliates the slow response coming from the administration. An example is that of the MOOCS created in the context of the MOONLITE project, which have obtained official recognition by the UNED. In this way, before actually obtain-

ing access to tertiary degrees, refugees can reap benefits from their efforts to learn the language by receiving an official certification for the MOOCS completed. This may be a first step in their integration into the university educational system and ultimately into Spanish society.

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Notas

- ¹ “La ley establecerá los términos en los que los ciudadanos de otros países y los apátridas podrán gozar del derecho de Asilo en España”.
- ² “En esta fase se incidirá en las actividades de orientación cultural y formativa, haciendo especial hincapié en la enseñanza del idioma y en la formación pre laboral y laboral, de forma que los destinatarios puedan contar con las habilidades necesarias para acceder a la 2ª fase del itinerario en un corto plazo de tiempo”.
- ³ “La enseñanza de L2 se encuadra dentro de la didáctica general de idiomas y ese es el marco desde el que se tienen que realizar las adaptaciones didácticas oportunas”.
- ⁴ “Por lo general, se antepone su situación socioeconómica a sus características como aprendices y resulta frecuente encontrar consideraciones negativas o en términos de carencia”.
- ⁵ “Solemos presuponer siempre un bajo nivel de formación y, sin embargo, podemos encontrar, sobre todo entre los refugiados, pero también entre algunos inmigrantes (del Magreb, por ejemplo), algunos universitarios que aquí trabajan en la construcción o graduados escolares dedicados, en el mejor de los casos, a la venta ambulante”.
- ⁶ “...para dar clase a inmigrantes, deberían desacademizarse”.
- ⁷ “Se necesita el compromiso de las administraciones pero también, de las editoriales y de la universidad y, sobre todo, se necesita acercarse a esta actividad con humildad, rigor y compromiso social”.
- ⁸ “El hecho de que los programas de grado cuenten con asignaturas de L2, que existan posgrados especializados y multitud de cursos para los profesores en activo de diferentes contextos de enseñanza, pone de manifiesto que se reconoce, al menos desde la comunidad universitaria, algunas instituciones y el colectivo de profesores, la especificidad de la enseñanza de EL2 y la necesidad de una formación específica”.
- ⁹ Institute of International Education.

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