



Mobilya Sektöründeki Mikro-KOBİ'lerin Yeteneklerinin Dijital Uluslararasılaşma Öğrenme Merkezi Aracılığıyla Geliştirilmesi

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ÖZET

Avrupa mobilya sektöründeki mikro ve küçük ölçekli işletmeler (mikro-KOBİ'ler), sınırlı dijital beceriler, kısıtlı kaynaklar ve stratejik pazar anlayışının eksikliği gibi uluslararasılaşmanın önündeki önemli engellerle karşılaşmaya devam etmektedir. Bu zorluklara yanıt olarak, Erasmus+ Ana Eylem 2 tarafından desteklenen INT4FURN projesi, ECVET çerçevesiyle uyumlu modüler eğitim yoluyla uluslararası iş yetkinlikleri oluşturmak için tasarlanmış bir Dijital Uluslararasılaşma Öğrenme Merkezi geliştirmiştir. Bu makale, platformun pedagojik yaklaşımını, yapısal tasarımını ve tematik öğrenme modüllerini, çok dilli sözlükler, eğitici videolar ve öz değerlendirme araçları gibi temel özelliklerini inceleyerek eleştirel bir analiz sunmaktadır. Nitel bir vaka çalışması metodolojisine dayanan bulgular, platformun özellikle mikro KOBİ'lerin ihtiyaçlarına göre uyarlanmış, kullanıcı merkezli, mobil erişilebilir ve dijital olarak kapsayıcı bir öğrenme deneyimi sağladığını göstermektedir. Dijital okuryazarlık ve öğrenci katılımı gibi zorluklar devam etse de INT4FURN merkezi, mesleki eğitime anlamlı bir şekilde katkıda bulunan ve geleneksel imalat endüstrilerindeki dijital ve sürdürülebilir dönüşümün daha geniş hedeflerini destekleyen öлçeklenebilir, yenilikçi bir çözüm olarak ortaya çıkmaktadır.

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Enhancing Capabilities of Micro-SMEs in the Furniture Sector through a Digital Internationalisation Learning Hub

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ABSTRACT

Micro and small-sized enterprises (micro-SMEs) in Europe's furniture sector continue to face significant obstacles to internationalisation, including limited digital skills, constrained resources, and a lack of strategic market insight. In response to these challenges, the INT4FURN project, supported by Erasmus+ Key Action 2, has developed a Digital Internationalisation Learning Hub designed to build international business competencies through modular training aligned with the ECVET framework. This paper offers a critical analysis of the platform, examining its pedagogical approach, structural design, and core features, including thematic learning modules, multilingual glossaries, instructional videos, and self-assessment tools. Drawing on a qualitative case study methodology, the findings indicate that the platform provides a user-centred, mobile-accessible, and digitally inclusive learning experience, tailored specifically to the needs of micro-SMEs. While challenges such as digital literacy and learner engagement persist, the INT4FURN hub emerges as a scalable and innovative solution that makes meaningful contributions to vocational education and supports the broader goals of digital and sustainable transformation within traditional manufacturing industries.

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1. INTRODUCTION (*GİRİŞ*)

The furniture sector, a significant part of Europe's creative industries, reflects the continent's rich cultural and design heritage. Despite their strengths in craftsmanship and innovation, micro and small enterprises (micro-SMEs) often face considerable challenges when it comes to internationalisation. These difficulties are mainly due to limited resources, low levels of digital preparedness, and a lack of market intelligence. Such structural constraints are well-documented in the literature, which shows that micro-SMEs across various sectors frequently encounter barriers to entering foreign markets, including financial limitations, underdeveloped managerial capacity, and insufficient support structures [1][2].

Internationalisation is increasingly regarded not only as a growth strategy but as a vital requirement for long-term survival in today's globalised economy, particularly in traditional sectors such as furniture manufacturing [3]. However, research indicates that most micro-SMEs lack structured knowledge and key competencies in areas such as export logistics, market entry strategies, and cross-cultural communication. In many cases, these businesses adopt a reactive rather than a proactive approach to international markets, often lacking the strategic frameworks and skill sets necessary for sustainable global engagement [4].

To address these challenges, the European Union, through Erasmus+ Key Action 2 (KA220-VET), has launched several strategic partnerships aimed at enhancing the internationalisation capacity of vocational sectors. Within this context, the project stands out by providing a dedicated Digital Learning Hub that promotes the development of internationalisation skills through modular training aligned with the European Credit System for Vocational Education and Training (ECVET).

The relevance of such initiatives is underscored by research highlighting the need for accessible, context-specific, and scalable training solutions that are tailored to the practical realities of micro-enterprises [5]. Digital learning environments have gained increasing recognition as valuable tools for upskilling individuals in geographically dispersed and resource-constrained contexts. E-learning platforms, particularly those that incorporate mobile learning (m-learning), have proven their value in delivering flexible, personalised education to learners from diverse socio-economic and geographical backgrounds [6] [7]. These platforms are especially valuable in supporting ongoing professional development without disrupting day-to-day business

operations, an essential consideration for small business owners and employees operating under time and budget constraints.

The ECVET framework further enhances the structure of vocational learning by enabling credit transfer and recognition across national systems, thus supporting mobility and lifelong learning across borders. When embedded in well-designed digital training platforms, ECVET-aligned modules can significantly improve the quality, comparability, and recognition of vocational education outcomes [8].

Bringing together these elements, the project aims to bridge the knowledge and skills gap in micro-SME internationalisation through a user-friendly, multilingual, and mobile-accessible platform. This paper presents an academic review of the platform, analysing its content, pedagogical framework, digital tools, and its potential to impact the furniture sector. By addressing both educational quality and technological accessibility, it offers a replicable model that contributes to broader policy goals related to economic resilience, digital transformation, and sustainable growth within Europe's creative industries [6].

2. METHODOLOGY (*Yöntem*)

The Digital Internationalisation Learning Hub's design, usability, and pedagogical efficacy are assessed in this study using a qualitative case study methodology. When evaluating the multifaceted character of digital learning platforms designed for micro-enterprises, a case study technique was chosen because it is well-suited for in-depth, contextual examination of complex interventions within real-life settings. Five fundamental aspects of the platform are the subject of the analysis: (1) User Interface (UI); (2) Create a Navigational Design; (3) Accessibility of Digital Content; (4) Pedagogical Structure and Learning Objectives; (5) Multilingual materials, instructional videos, proficiency glossary and self-assessment tools. A summary of the main steps implemented is provided in Table 1.

Direct interaction with the platform's publicly available components (digitalhub.int4furn.eu), a reading of relevant project documentation, and an examination of interface behaviour across various devices and browsers were used to gather data. Established frameworks in online accessibility (Web Content Accessibility Guidelines - WCAG 2.1), instructional design, and usability served as the basis for key criteria [9][10].

Components that represent the user's initial experience and basic architecture were given priority in the review because full access to all training materials and interactive features required user registration. Field notes, screenshots, and comparative checklists based on worldwide e-learning platform evaluation standards were used to document observations.

Table 1 - Summary of Observations and Recommendations on the INT4FURN Learning Platform

Component	Observations	Recommendations
2.1. User Interface	Modern, clean interface with consistent design; modular content layout supports usability. Needs improved visual hierarchy and interactive feedback.	Add hover states, progress indicators, and clearer content hierarchy.
2.2. Navigation Structure	Intuitive and shallow navigation structure with valuable features like breadcrumbs and search. Some sub-pages lack internal linking or contextual guidance.	Enhance internal links and add contextual prompts on sub-pages.
2.3. Digital Accessibility	Partially meets WCAG 2.1 standards with basic keyboard access and text. Need transcripts for media, UI customisation options, and better format accessibility.	Provide transcripts, subtitle options, and UI customisation tools.
2.4. Learning Objectives	Modules are thematically organised but lack clear, measurable learning objectives. Improved instructional alignment is recommended.	Define specific, measurable objectives that align with the module's content.
2.5. Instructional Videos	Training videos with subtitles are included, but not publicly	Make sample videos publicly available with subtitles and descriptions.

	accessible. Metadata lacks detail on duration, pedagogy, and interactivity.	
2.6. Proficiency Glossary	Glossary supports multiple languages and defines key terms, but access is restricted to logged-in users.	Provide open access to selected glossary entries and usage examples.
2.7. Self-Assessment Tool	Featured; format and feedback mechanism not transparent.	Offer a demo version; describe the structure, scoring logic, and alignment to modules.

2.1. User Interface (*Kullanıcı Arayüzü*)

The platform presents a modern, clean, and visually consistent interface that aligns well with current digital design standards. Its use of a cohesive colour scheme, legible typography, and generous white space contributes to a comfortable and accessible user experience. Graphical elements such as icons and buttons are seamlessly integrated and intuitively designed, supporting ease of navigation and interaction. Content is organised into modular blocks, which aids cognitive processing and helps prevent information overload. Interactive features, including course modules and downloadable resources, are clearly identifiable and function smoothly across different devices. Nonetheless, some areas could be improved by introducing a more pronounced visual hierarchy and interactive cues, such as hover effects or progress indicators, to further enhance user engagement and feedback [11].

2.2. Navigation Structure (*Navигasyon Yapısı*)

The platform's navigation structure is primarily intuitive and designed with the user in mind. The main navigation menu provides direct access to core sections, including course content, partner institutions, and learning resources. The structure is hierarchical yet shallow, enabling users to locate information within just a few clicks. Features such as breadcrumbs, a persistent header menu, and search functionality contribute to a smooth and accessible navigation experience, particularly for first-time visitors. However, some sub-pages would benefit from improved internal linking and more explicit contextual guidance, which would reduce the need for users to backtrack. The logical organisation of content

structured around thematic areas and training modules supports both content discoverability and knowledge retention.

2.3. Digital Accessibility (*Dijital Erişebilirlik*)

In terms of digital accessibility, the platform demonstrates partial adherence to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG 2.1). The site offers basic keyboard navigability and displays acceptable contrast ratios between text and background. Additionally, the inclusion of alternative text for images and screen-reader-compatible HTML elements enhances accessibility for users with visual impairments. However, there are areas requiring improvement to ensure full inclusivity. For instance, dynamic elements such as video content and downloadable files should be provided in accessible formats (e.g., transcripts, subtitles, or PDFs that are compatible with screen readers). Moreover, the absence of customizable UI options, such as text resizing or colour contrast adjustments, may limit accessibility for users with specific needs [12].

2.4. Learning Objectives (*Öğrene Objeleri*)

The platform structures its curriculum into seven thematic modules that address essential dimensions of internationalisation from "Starting up an International Business" to "Sustainable Internationalisation" (digitalhub.int4furn.eu). However, the platform does not prominently display explicit learning objectives, such as measurable outcomes (e.g., "able to draft an export plan"). While the module titles suggest thematic breadth, an academic evaluation would recommend the inclusion of clearly defined objectives, articulated in terms of knowledge, skills, and application levels. This would support both instructional coherence and learner self-regulation [13].

2.5. Instructional Videos (*Tanıtıcı Videolar*)

According to site metadata, the platform includes "instructive and engaging training videos with subtitles" as a key component of Work Package 4 (digitalhub.int4furn.eu). However, these videos are not accessible through the publicly available sections of the platform. Information on their duration, instructional style (e.g., case-based, lecture-based), or degree of interactivity is likewise unavailable. To conduct a comprehensive review of their pedagogical value and accessibility, particularly regarding subtitle accuracy and inclusive design, it would be necessary to access sample videos, which appear to be restricted to registered users or the full version of the platform.

2.6. Proficiency Glossary (*Yeterlilik Sözlüğü*)

The platform promotes a "Proficiency Glossary" intended to clarify key terminology related to internationalisation and business (digitalhub.int4furn.eu). The multilingual nature of the platform is evident, with interface support available in languages including Turkish, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Estonian, Dutch, and English. However, access to the glossary itself requires user registration, preventing a complete evaluation of its structure, scope, and usability in the public-facing version of the site.

2.7. Self-Assessment Tool (*Öz Değerlendirme Aracı*)

A self-assessment tool is available within the platform to support learners in evaluating their readiness for internationalisation and to offer tailored tutoring recommendations (<http://digitalhub.int4furn.eu>). Access to this feature requires a user login. Once logged in, users are provided with quizzes, assessment scales, and personalised feedback reports.

This methodological framework enables a multidimensional evaluation of the platform's educational and technical qualities [14].

3. SYSTEM DESCRIPTION AND CONTENT (*SİSTEM AÇIKLAMASI VE İÇERİK*)

3.1. Platform Structure (*Platform Yapısı*)

The Digital Learning Hub functions as a comprehensive, open-access e-learning platform specifically designed to address the upskilling and digital transformation needs of micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (micro-SMEs) operating in the furniture manufacturing sector. With a multilingual interface and user-friendly design, the platform is built to accommodate a diverse user base across various European regions. Its structure integrates several key components designed to enhance accessibility, learner engagement, and practical relevance.

Thematic Learning Modules. The platform is organised into seven key modules: Starting up an International Business, Accessing International Markets, International Logistics and the International Value Chain, Managing Market Analytics and Information, Understanding the Customer, Marketing to Global Customers, and Sustainable Internationalisation. Collectively, these modules cover a wide range of topics central to the internationalisation of the furniture sector, including digital innovation, sustainable production practices, digital marketing, innovative manufacturing

technologies, and human capital development. The modular and sequential structure allows learners to engage with the content at their own pace, supporting personalised and goal-oriented learning pathways.

E-Learning-Adapted Content. All educational materials are adapted explicitly for e-learning environments, incorporating infographics, instructional videos, and clear, structured text. Importantly, all textual content within the modules, as well as subtitles for video materials, is available in the seven partnership languages: Turkish, Spanish, Portuguese, Greek, Estonian, Dutch, and English. This ensures both linguistic inclusivity and accessibility for a broad range of learners.

Proficiency Glossary. To support comprehension and promote a shared understanding of key concepts, the platform features a multilingual glossary that facilitates a deeper understanding of the content. Available in the seven partnership languages, the dictionary defines essential technical terms related to internationalisation in the furniture industry, helping users navigate specialised content across language barriers.

Self-Assessment Tools. Each module includes a self-assessment feature designed to encourage reflective learning. Learners can evaluate their prior knowledge and track their progress upon completion of the module, reinforcing learning outcomes and enabling personalised feedback.

Mobile Compatibility. Acknowledging the importance of flexible learning, the platform is fully optimised for mobile access across iOS and Android devices. This ensures that learners can engage with the content at their convenience, even in remote or resource-limited settings.

User-Centred and Accessible Design. The platform architecture is grounded in user-centred design principles, with an emphasis on intuitive navigation and adherence to digital accessibility standards, such as the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG). This approach accommodates users with different levels of digital proficiency and supports inclusive learning experiences.

Supportive Learning Ecosystem. Beyond its core learning materials, the platform fosters a broader educational environment through features such as discussion forums, progress tracking dashboards, and access to supplementary resources. These tools encourage peer interaction and ongoing knowledge exchange, contributing to the development of a collaborative community of practice among users.

3.2. Learning Modules (*Öğrenme Modülleri*)

The INT4FURN Digital Learning Hub offers a comprehensive set of learning modules aligned with the European Credit System for Vocational Education

and Training (ECVET), designed to equip learners, particularly those in the furniture and wood processing sectors, with the skills necessary for effective internationalisation. By adhering to ECVET principles, the modules support the transfer and recognition of learning outcomes across national boundaries, enhancing mobility and the relevance of vocational training within a European context.

The platform currently features the following seven modules:

Starting up an International Business: This module introduces the foundational principles of launching a business in an international context. Learners explore the legal, financial, and strategic requirements of cross-border operations, with emphasis on preparing a business for global markets. Topics include international business planning, legal forms, partnerships, and risk assessment.

Accessing International Markets: Focused on market entry strategies and internationalisation pathways, this module guides learners through export readiness, market selection, and the regulatory and cultural considerations of target countries. Case studies demonstrate successful market entry approaches, and learners are encouraged to evaluate and compare multiple strategies to inform their own decision-making.

International Logistics and International Value Chain: This module provides insight into global supply chain structures and logistics operations critical for international trade. Topics include transportation modes, warehousing, customs procedures, and digital tools for logistics management. Learners gain a practical understanding of how efficient logistics systems contribute to international competitiveness.

Managing market analytics and information: Equipping learners with the tools to collect, interpret, and apply market data, this module emphasises the importance of informed decision-making. Topics include competitor analysis, market trend forecasting, and digital platforms for information sourcing. Learners are introduced to techniques for managing information flows and turning data into strategic insights.

Understanding Customers: This module delves into customer behaviour in international contexts, including cultural dimensions, preferences, and communication styles. Learners explore segmentation techniques, customer profiling, and buyer personas to gain a deeper understanding of diverse international audiences. Real-world examples illustrate how understanding customer needs leads to successful engagement.

Marketing to Global Customers: Building on the previous module, this section focuses on global marketing strategies, branding, and promotional channels suitable for international customers.

Learners are introduced to digital marketing, content localisation, and multi-channel campaign planning. The module also addresses ethical marketing and cultural sensitivity in communication.

Sustainable Internationalisation: Addressing the growing demand for sustainability in global business, this module highlights the environmental and social dimensions of international operations. Learners explore corporate social responsibility (CSR), eco-certifications, principles of the circular economy, and sustainability reporting. Practical tools help businesses align their international strategies with global sustainability goals.

4. EXPECTED IMPACT AND DISCUSSION (BEKLENEN ETKİ VE TARTIŞMA)

The Digital Learning Hub is anticipated to bring significant benefits to micro-SMEs in the furniture sector, particularly across Europe. These benefits are expected to contribute across several strategic areas, closely aligned with broader industry objectives related to modernisation and internationalisation, as outlined below.

Capacity Building: The platform offers targeted and sector-specific training modules that focus on international trade, logistics, digitalisation, and cross-cultural marketing. These learning opportunities address a significant skills gap in micro-SMEs, equipping entrepreneurs and employees with competencies that are critical for entering and succeeding in global markets.

Accessibility and Equity: The platform's free access and multilingual support ensure that learning is inclusive and not limited by language, geography, or financial capacity. This is particularly crucial in empowering underrepresented groups within the sector, including women, youth, and migrants.

Self-directed Learning: Learners benefit from a personalised learning experience supported by self-assessment tools that help identify their strengths, knowledge gaps, and track progress over time. This fosters autonomy and increases engagement by allowing learners to tailor their educational journey according to individual needs.

Digital Transformation Readiness: By familiarising users with online learning environments and digital tools, it contributes to the broader digital transformation of the furniture sector, which has traditionally lagged in adopting digital solutions [6].

Sustainability Integration: In line with the European Green Deal and increasing consumer demand for sustainable practices, it incorporates modules on green logistics, eco-friendly packaging, and responsible sourcing strategies. These elements foster an understanding of sustainability as a competitive advantage rather than a regulatory burden.

However, despite these expected benefits, several challenges must be acknowledged. Digital literacy remains a barrier for some target users, particularly in rural regions or among older demographics. Moreover, sustaining learner motivation in self-paced environments can be difficult without structured incentives or community interaction. Finally, long-term usage and impact depend on ongoing content updates, institutional support from industry associations, and empirical monitoring of learning outcomes and business performance improvements. Future follow-up studies should aim to capture both quantitative metrics (e.g., user engagement, completion rates, business performance indicators) and qualitative insights (e.g., user satisfaction, perceived relevance, behavioural changes). These studies will be instrumental in refining the platform and ensuring its scalability and adaptability across multinational and cultural contexts. In conclusion, the platform represents a forward-looking initiative with high transformative potential for micro-SMEs in the furniture industry. Its success, however, will ultimately hinge on sustained stakeholder engagement, user-centred design evolution, and evidence-based impact evaluation.

5. CONCLUSION (SONUÇ)

The Digital Learning Hub emerges as a timely and strategic intervention aimed at addressing the internationalisation challenges faced by micro-SMEs in the European furniture sector. By combining modular, ECVET-aligned content with a user-friendly, multilingual, and mobile-accessible platform, it offers a scalable solution to close skills gaps in areas such as export readiness, market intelligence, and sustainable business practices. The platform's integration of multimedia resources, self-assessment tools, and inclusive design principles demonstrates a commitment to both pedagogical quality and learner accessibility. While the initiative shows strong potential in fostering digital transformation and capacity building, its long-term success will depend on continuous stakeholder engagement, iterative improvements based on user feedback, and robust mechanisms for evaluating its impact. The approach might be expanded to include allied industries (such as light manufacturing, crafts, and textiles) and better integrated with national qualification frameworks to facilitate the official acknowledgement of learning results.

Future studies should examine both quantitative indicators (such as user engagement, module completion rates, and participant export growth) and qualitative feedback (such as perceived value, learning impact, and behavioural change) to evaluate

practical efficacy. These observations will be crucial for enhancing the platform and informing digital training plans across various vocational fields. To summarise, it is a viable, inclusive, and scalable strategy for enhancing the international expansion capabilities of micro-SMEs. It has a great chance to make a significant contribution to the digital and economic transformation of Europe's manufacturing and creative sectors with continued stakeholder collaboration and evidence-based improvement.

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