

The 21th Conference of the Junior Researchers of EARLI 2016: Education in a dynamic world: Facing the future, At University of Helsinki, Helsinki, Finland

2. Consensus Among Stakeholders About Indicators and Success Factors for Quality of Online and Blended Learning in Adult Education – Preliminary results of a Delphi study

In HE frameworks, with similar quality dimensions, for quality assurance and/or improvement (QA&I) of Online and Blended Learning (OBL) were developed. However, these differ by scope, structures of the framework, type of institution to which they are intended, and the way in which they are meant to be applied. Literature suggests that these frameworks are often conceptualized from the providers' perspective (e.g. institutions, government) omitting the learners' perspective. Also these frameworks were not specifically designed to support the quality dialog between stakeholders which is needed according to several scholars to align management, faculty and students goals. Nor were these frames designed to mainstream quality of OBL into traditional quality assurance frameworks used by educational institutions. A quality framework for OBL in Adult Education (AE) that meets these requirements was constructed.

This research aims to contribute to scientific knowledge by validating this framework. However educational quality can be reviewed from different levels: the meso level – institutional level and the micro level – course/module but also from the macro level – national or global dimension. A theme in current school evaluation research, macro level, is how to integrate internal and external evaluation and accountability and improvement. In addition to alignment of the meso with the micro level, the macro and meso level should be aligned too; however it appears that quality indicators, benchmarks and critical success factors on OBL have not been taken seriously into consideration, nor incorporated in ordinary national or international quality assurance systems.

In a validated state the framework could be used to mainstream quality of OBL into traditional institutional quality assurance frames, and support the contextualization of quality systems for OBL in AE. It can, in addition, help align approaches at the intersection of different levels i.e. macro (external quality assurance) with meso level (institutional QA&I) and meso level with micro level (program and course level). Educational institutions in Flanders (Belgium) are compelled to examine and systematically monitor quality of their provision. However a common quality framework for Online and Blended Learning (OBL) is lacking for this context.

Inglis (2005) stresses the importance to take the structure and the purpose of the quality framework for which it is to be used into account during an evidence-based validation processes. Therefore the Delphi technique is opted as method. This is a survey technique that facilitates group communication aimed to reach consensus between experts. These were selected from several key stakeholders: external accreditation (inspectorate), professionals working at policy level or program level in institutions and students. Respondents are asked to indicate on a Likert scale (1-7) to what extent indicators add to quality of OBL to meet learners expectations, demands

and rights. For the design a priori criteria for: inclusion of participants, consensus, when items are to be dropped and stop the Delphi were defined.

After the second Delphi round (group) stability of responses was reached for 66 indicators. Respondents agreed that 44 indicators to meet students' needs and expectancies are critical. Students faced difficulties to answer indicators related to 'Credibility', therefore their answers were not included for this factor. This paper focuses primarily on indicators agreed upon at the group level.

Keywords: e-learning, quality, online learning, quality enhancement, success factors

