IT based Methodology for Promoting, Assessing and validating Competence oriented learning and Training

IMPACT Stocktaking results

The partnership undertook a thorough research of the activity fields in which IMPACT set out to make a contribution. It was carried out in three phases and combined different methods of data collection. The aim was to come to an understanding how educational professionals use web-based learning environments and Open Educational Resources (OER), as well as approaches and instruments for validation of learning outcomes in their practice. As IMPACT will create a holistic learning and validation environment and interfaces between existing web-based learning and validation instruments. This system shall be developed based on the feedback and the requirements from practice. In the following each research activity will be outlined and substantiated with a summary of the results.

Interviews

Each IMPACT partner carried out 5 interviews with experts working in the field of ECVET or validation. All participants agreed about the importance of validation of non-formal and informal learning (VINFL) at all levels of education and in all the sectors they represented.

A common finding of these interviews was that there is not much awareness about the validation procedure proposed by the European Commission (identification/documentation/assessment/certification).

It became clear that the development of an IT tool to validate transversal competences that could be applied and trusted EU-wide would be very important and helpful. Finally, all participants agreed about the need for customized and flexible tools to support validation. Interviwees in all countries agreed that validation systems integrated in VLE are very much wanted and anticipated, but the connection of virtual learning environments and validation is expected to be „easy to use". Virtual learning environments should be as intuitively usable as possible (e.g., using key words, recognition of associations, etc.) to require less support and provide a maximum of objectivity.

The possibility to connect such procedures to IT based learning systems is attractive, but needs to be based on sound description of learning outcomes and transparent criteria and procedures. Also, respective technical competences to establish and maintain these systems on organisational level are needed. There is agreement that instruments have to be contextualised– in other words: they have to be so flexible that they can cover different contexts, contents, serve different target groups etc.

In addition participants highlighted the key role played by mobile devices in supporting learning especially in Adult Education, as well as the use of self-produced videos as a tool to prove acquired competences. This realisation led to the conclusion that the IMPACT project and the dissemination of the IMPACT methodology would contribute to the above

outlined gaps of knowledge and needs for user-friendly online systems for both learning and validation.

Desk Research

In the desk research phase all partners researched the state of implementation of ECVET in their countries and documented 3 exemplary national ECVET projects. These projects were more closely analysed and ten projects were selected to be integrated into the validation system. There they can serve as database to inform new ECVET projects. Based on this analysis an ECVET ontology was developed, that classifies the elements of ECVET and can serve as tool to check the quality of ECVET projects. The ontology was published on the website www.open-ecvet.eu and addresses practitioners in the field of ECVET, who can find additional orientation in the arbitrary structure of the ECVET specifications.

In regard to the IMPACT objectives, the following general statements can be made:

- In all countries there is an increasing interest at national level regarding the theme of validation. (This is by the way also highlighted in the AE sector – in the latest EAEA country reports

- As matter of fact the reported ECVET projects highlight a purely sectoral approach; an overarching, centrally managed ECVET approach is not yet existing in any of the countries covered by the desk research.

- Although ECVET sets up a "specification" which should lead to comparable learning outcome descriptions, most of the projects often do not keep to these specifications and develop their own systems.

- However, the selected projects have kept to the basic regulations in the specifications, for instance they tried to derive competence levels from EQF descriptions, described them in knowledge and skills (the competence column is rarely operated (as level of autonomy and responsibility).

- ECVET points have been rarely assigned to the qualifications and CPD units and it seems that also the assignment to EQF / competence levels is quite an issue for most of the project consortia.

- IT tools have only been used in very exceptional cases, mostly the use is limited to asynchronous e-learning with no connection to validation. Singular validation instruments refer to self-assessment only.

Online survey

An online survey was set up and disseminated through partners networks across Europe. It was answered by 188 educational professionals from 19 European countries.

The survey was clustered into 5 question areas:

1. Utilisation of web-based learning tools and instruments

Here a fairly high amount of respondents (>50%) is familiar or very familiar with web-based learning and the concept of OER. There is a rather strong consciousness about the benefits of learning technologies for the educational practice among the respondents.

Highest benefits of web aided learning is seen in:

1. Flexibility regarding the learning place and time (170 of 188),
2. Enrichment of learning resources/media (166),
3. Possibility for self-organised learning (159),
4. Better availability of contents (158),
5. Reutilisation f learning contents (154)

However, only 50% often use specific learning technologies (LMS) and only 30% e-Portfolios to collect and document evidences on learners' competence and establish pro-files that can be linked to validation. Major obstacles to the implementation of learning technologies are shortages in resources (time money, access and support).

2. Utilisation of OER

When it comes to the utilisation of digital learning materials, most respondents (still) use texts, photos and videos. Being asked about the obstacles that prevent them from using web-based learning contents and learning materials, more than 40% mention license problems. This is of course one of the major arguments for the promotion of OER as learn-ing materials, contents and instruments. Hence the overwhelming part of the respondents (80%) highlights the benefits of OER.

3. Areas of implementation

The majority of respondents consider web-based learning as very useful for all target groups. There is prevalence for blended learning solutions and most respondents use web-based learning as addition to traditional forms of learning. Knowledge is the main compe-tence dimension which is supported by web-based learning, followed by skills and atti-tudes, however Responsibility and Autonomy (as third EQF-pillar) still score relatively high values.

4. Validation of learning outcomes and connection to web-based learning

The respondents first rated the relevance of validation for their own practice as relatively low. Despite this low relevance for the own educational practice (42%) the respondents rated the singular validation elements (identification, documentation, assessment of learning outcomes and also the connection to the learning process as (highly) relevant (mostly around 80%) and another 10-15% fairly relevant. In other words: those who con-sider the sub-steps as NOT relevant are below 5% and around 5% don't know.

This rather contradictive result leads to the suspicion that the (official) concept of valida-tion is not fully understood by the respondents. The majority of respondents is convinced that they understood the idea – but on the other hand they are not aware of the elements; how else could they consider the central validation elements as very important ("relevant" = 80%) but the concept as a whole just "half relevant (40%)".

Among the respondents there is a nearly equal distribution of formative and summative assessment purposes and also a prevalence of mixed assessment settings regarding self-, peer and external assessments

Documentation of learning outcomes is generally considered less important than assessment and identification and certification. Only 41% of the respondents offer documentation services.

When it comes to certification institutional certificates (60%) and certificates of attendance (37%) are most common, 25% also use external certification, 16% mention ECTS credits. ECVET credits are not very common (4%) and informal certification and documentation is not at all established (badges).

5. Development of a web-based instrument to connect learning, instruction, assessment and validation.

In the last questionnaire section the IMPACT group asked about most useful instruments to be integrated in an open learning space and offered tools for five purposes:

1. Planning

2. Assessment

3. Documenting (and certification)

4. Learning Management Systems and

5. E-portfolio

In general, 40% of the respondents found all proposed instruments useful for a holistic "open learning space" (a competence management and validation tool. Another 33 to 38% rated all offers as "useful". This means that at least ¾ of the respondents would integrate all five functionalities in an open learning space.

The respondents were asked for a specification of the services that such a system would offer, namely the features/interfaces that it should have. The options for these features were "Must have", "nice to have", "not needed" and "don't know". Again, most respondents opted with around 90% for at least "nice to have" which means that all proposed features are considered useful. Approximately 5-8% did not have an opinion while between 2 and 5% considered certain options as "not needed", highest scores (highest rejection; 5%) here in relation to an interface which describes levels of attitudes.

The interfaces for the description of competence levels for knowledge and skills and the documentation of learning outcomes achieved the highest scores as "must haves", while all other features scored around 50%, which is still a very high rate.

75% of the respondents found all envisaged services useful/very useful. This is a clear voting for a versatile system that interconnects planning of competence oriented learning (planning and validation tools like LEVEL5-reference systems) with delivery (LMS like moodle), assessments (again combination of competence level based reference systems and assessment deliveries via LMS, documentation (e.g. via e-Portfolios), management of own competence (again e-Portfolio) and certification (LEVEL5/ECVET systems), connection to EUROPASS.

Next steps

Having analysed the outcomes of the research phase and after the implementation of technical adjustments to the validation system, IMPACT will now move forward to develop a training scheme to enable educational professionals to integrate VINFL connected to learning technology into their working practices. Further all partner institutions will develop pilot approaches how to achieve this. This will be subject of a future newsletter.

If you would like to stay updated on the activities within the IMPACT project, please sign up for our newsletter by sending a mail to **level5@bupnet.eu** or visit our website **www. impact.my-vita.eu.**

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