blended learning quality

Quality in Blended Learning

Work package 02 of the project
Blended Learning Quality-Concepts Optimized for Adult Education

Quality Criteria Catalogue

Multilateral Grundtvig Project

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Summary of WP 02 Quality Criteria

1. Introduction

This document includes the result of the research work combined with the summary of the workshops at the Quality in Blended Learning Conference 2014.

There are five different classes of quality criteria based on learners' needs: Institution quality, the enrollment in a course, the course development (structure, description …), the Learning Environment and finally the assessment/self-validation.
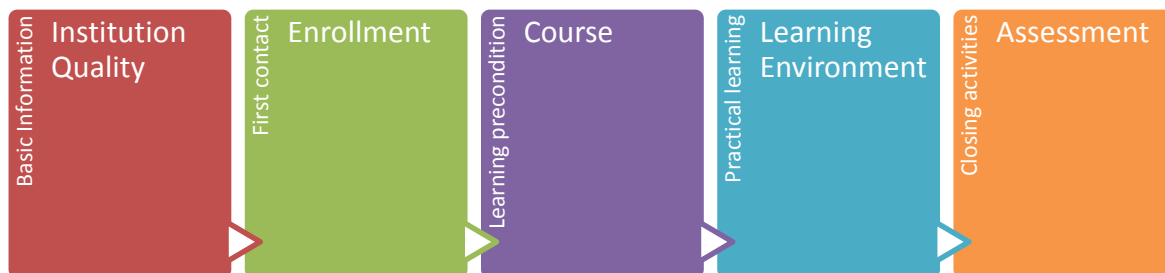

Figure 1: Five classes of main quality criteria

2. Quality Fields

It is important to acknowledge that quality of a learning process is not something that is delivered to a learner by a course provider but rather constitutes a process of co-production between the learner and the learning-environment. The organizational aspects are mainle researched and the currently used norms (like ISO) cover the quality fields of the course environment.

Furthermore, the learners needs should be an issue as well. This paper summarizes the main aspects of quality fields from the learner's view.

2.1. Quality of the Institution

The learner has to trust the institution and to feel sure that the teaching institution will undertake everything to satisfy the learner's needs. Here is a list of different aspects (mainly regulated by ISO or similar norms) which are important for the learner:

- Administration
  - Technical Administration
  - Program Administration
- Documentation
  (Documentation Control, Course, Materials, Reports …)
- Resources of the institution / Course provider
  - Technical
  - Human
  - Financial
- Teachers/Trainers
  - ICT Skills
  - Didactic Skills
- Instructional Design

2.2. Enrollment

The enrollment contains two different items that are crucial for learners: information about the course and the practical handling of the enrollment.

- Course information
    - Pre-Knowledge
    - ICT Skills
    - Structure of the course (timetable, estimated workload, assessment rules, …)
- Enrollment procedure
    - Registration
    Where to place - How to define?
    - Handling
    - Access to software, materials, …

2.3. Course

The course quality can be seen from the course organizers view as well as from the learner's. Jung and Latchem (2007) found that most institutions apply the same quality criteria for e-learning (and Blended Learning) as for the other modes of delivery[1]. These criteria will satisfy the learner's needs only partially.

The workshop results defined the quality criteria for the course itself as follows:

- **Documentation**
  Documentation Control, Course, Materials, Reports
- **Get to know the tutor(s)/teacher(s) and the other learners**
- **Well known course structure**

2.4. Learning Environment and Learning Phase

In Blended Learning Courses the learning environment describes the face to face phase as well as the distance learning phase. From the UNESCO comes an interesting definition for learning environment: Learning takes place in multiple settings and the learning environment can be structured or unstructured and the learning in different environments can complement each other.[2]

The study from Rohana Kamaruddin, Nor Rashidah Zainal, Zaidi Mohd Aminuddin, Kamaruzaman Jusoff about the "Quality of Learning Environment and Academic Performance from a Student's Perception"[3] determined that the learning environment affects the students' learning outcome. Therefore, the learning environment plays a crucial role in the learning process.

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[1] Jung, I., & Latchem, C. (2007). Assuring quality in Asian open and distance learning. *Open Learning, 22*(3), 235-250.

[2] Unesco: Education, from: http://www.unesco.org/new/en/education/themes/strengthening-education-systems/quality-framework/core-resources/learning-environment/ [3/14/2014]

[3] International Journal of Business and Management, Vol 4, No 4 (2009), p171
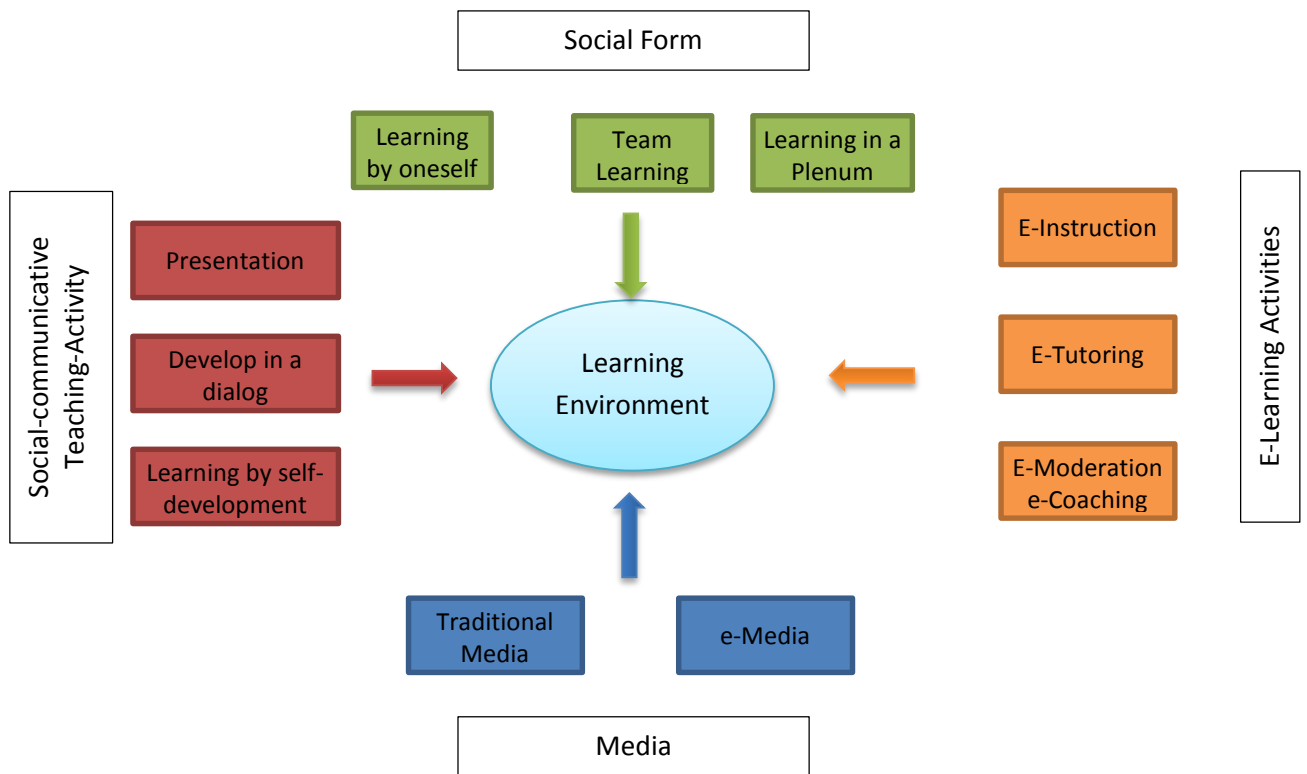
Figure 2: Source: Modules for the development of media-based learning environments[4]

- **Teaching Activities**
  Teaching can be done by presentations, develop content in a dialog or learning by self-development of the content. These activities are dedicated to face to face teaching. Basically the teacher's quality is important linked with the quality of the materials.

- **Distance Learning (e-Learning)**
  Communication and the established comunication stucture must be considered as an important quality criteria (connected as well with the Social Form and Contact)

- **Media**

- **Social Form and Contact**
  In this part the interactions between Students ⇔ Students are important as well the interaction between students ⇔ and teachers (that does not include the tutorial support). Since face to face instruction is usually eliminated in online classes, instructors may lack sufficient information on how well learners actually perform in the distance learning phase. Thus, ensuring academic honesty and integrity in online courses is another challenge for instructors[5].
  There are two important situations of interactions:
  o   Interaction Students/Students

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[4] Eulers 2005, p 231
[5] Mentioned by Linda F. Cornelious, Ph.D., Department of Instructional Systems, Leadership, and Workforce Development, Mississippi State University, 2005
(Link: http://www.westga.edu/~distance/ojdla/spring81/yang81.htm, [12/03/2014])

o Interaction Students/Teachers

Besides the Learning Environment some other issues connected with the learner are to be considered.

- **Motivation**

- **Workload**
  An important issue during a Blended Learning course is the workload of a student. Here the learner does not want to be supprised – the estimation of the necessary work load during the entire course must be described in the enrollment documentation.

- **Communication**
  Communication is – especially in the distance learning phase – one of the sophisticated items in the criteria list. The communication needs are connected with the different learner types[6]. It's necessary to develop typical communication structures to satisfy all the different learner types.

- **Technology**
  Consequently, how to appropriately use technology to serve an instructional purpose tends to be a challenge for the online education instructors as well as for the learners.
  Learners must be able to finance the technology as well as to use it. Especially for the distance phase technology problems (like the internet connection) may decrease the learner's success intensively and is considered as extremely frustrating (mentioned by Muirhead in 2000)[7].

- **Equipment** and **software**

- **Platform** for the **distance learning phase**

2.5. Assessment

2.5.1. Planning and Definition
Assessments must be planned and defined before the course; the information about the assessments should be shared with the learner before the enrollment of the course (necessary pre-information). It could be useful to define a Learning agreement where times, tools, goals and duties (of learners and the learner's employer[8] – if existing - are well explained from the beginning

2.5.2. Assessment execution
The assessment should be the closing element of a Blended Learning Course, followed by the evaluation of the course (by the learner).

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[6] For the definition of the learner's styles, there are several different models available. One is the Kolb LSI (Learning style Inventory).

[7] Muirhead, W. D. (2000). Online education in school [Electronic version]. *The International Journal of Educational Management, 14* (7), 315-324.

[8] Not all learners are employed – there are freelancers or other people running their own business that are attending Blended learning courses.

Figure 3: Typical Course

The expectations of the learners are

- **Assessment** and **testing definitions**
  Must be done before the course starts
- **Learning outcomes**
  definitions of the expected learning outcomes
- **Evaluation** and Feedback
  The course evaluation by learners should be enhanced by a self-validation of the learner.
  That description is useful for the course provider as it may help to define better the target
  group of the course. The self-validation of the learner always should ask the questions "Was
  it worth for me? What did it bring for my further development?".
- **Assesments**
  According to the type of learning objectives, the course provider can use different methods
  to evaluate learning.
  Here a definition is necessary, how these assessments[9] can be useful for the learner and how
  they can be quality criteria for the learner.

3. Summary

The paper lists the quality criteria for a Blended Learning course from the learner's viewpoint. The list
covers the typical issues mentioned in literature and was enhanced by the workshops at the Blended
learning conference 2014 /Wiener Neustadt).

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[9] Possible assessments could be: Prerequisite tests, Pre-assessment tests (or entry tests), diagnostic tests, post-
assessment test and certification tests.

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