Educational Quality and Micro-Courses

The learner centered perspective

Educational quality through the lens of the learner.



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Factors to consider for VET micro-courses.

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Educational quality and the students learning process

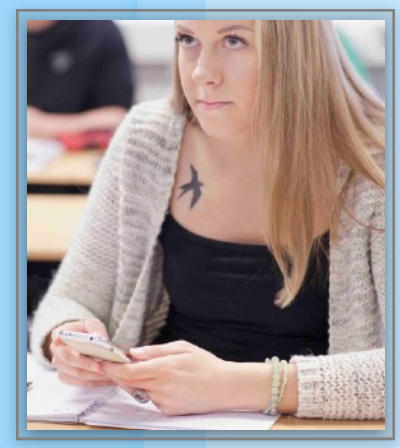
The quality of the student learning process refers to how well the learning progression is designed, supported, delivered and experienced, whereby students can successfully achieve the intended outcomes and develop meaningful knowledge, skills and competences. This includes stating clear learning goals and learning objectives; applying effective design of teaching and learning processes; active participation through engagement of learners; production of content that is relevant and meaningful; workloads that are appropriate; assessment processes that are fair, valid and recognized; provision of continuous feedback on students learning progression that help supports course improvements; support of learners through inclusive teaching practices; and reviewing the complete learning process by applying continuous improvement.

It is important to recognize that the quality of the students learning processes is not simply delivered by an e-learning provider. It is rather created through a process of collaboration, cooperation and co-production between the learners and their learning environment. This means that educational learning outcomes are not solely the result of an educational providers efforts, but depend on the learner's engagement and interaction. Due to this, education quality is closely linked to empowering and enabling learners. It must ultimately be implemented at the point of learning itself together with the perspective of the learners.

What makes e-learning becoming a success?

The growing importance placed on the issue of educational quality is clearly reflected in discussions, publications and lectures. There is, however, a significant uncertainty among decision-makers, managers, developers, trainers and learners:

- Instructors increasingly find themselves in new roles as tutors and facilitators of the learning process.
- For authors, instructional materials are no longer developed as a linear sequence of consecutive units in which each lesson depends strictly on the previous one. Instead, the focus is on creating decontextualized, modular based (micro course) learning units. Those are easier to reuse across different contexts, purposes and platforms.
- From the learner's perspective a key question are which characteristics define a high-quality e-learning environment. Which providers deliver the best performance at a reasonable cost in an increasingly competitive and rapidly evolving market?
- Software developers must actively engage in interdisciplinary collaboration and cooperation with teachers, instructors, learners and subject matter experts that provide specialized content.





- Learning management system providers are challenged by the ongoing transformation of technological delivery systems into more pedagogically driven platforms, requiring them to adopt towards an increasingly learner-centered training approach.

Five key sub-measures are identified, addressing the educational quality within the following domains:

- context,
- structure,
- process,
- outputs and
- impact.

Educational quality starts with the learner. It should be centered on real needs and meaningful learning experiences providing outcomes and results that matter.

This means that the term educational quality is applied differently across each of these domains. It is essential to consider the various perspectives on educational quality. This includes clarifying the different meanings and interpretations of what "educational quality" actually entails. There is no single remedy or universally applicable standard approach to designing, developing and assuring educational quality. Educational quality improvement must always consider diverse perspectives and the different meanings that quality can hold across various contexts, always keeping the perspectives of the learners in mind.

Policymakers have observed both in industry and private education sectors, a growing focus on the needs of individual competence development and application of personalized learning processes. Lifelong and life-wide learning can no longer be fully standardized. Instead, it must be shaped around providing individual learning pathways and personal training histories and learning episodes. This includes the ability to create, process and share knowledge, skills and competences by using modern information technology tools and services. These technologies should be applied to develop, deliver, evaluate and validate new, dedicated skills and competences. Those should be in line with personal preferences and specific usage contexts, e.g. in which for instance micro courses paired with Micro-Credentials (MCs) help providing.

Within this perspective a learning process is not something simply delivered by an e-learning provider. It is rather created through a process of co-production between the learner and the learning environment. This means that the learning outcomes and the learning processes are not produced solely by the provider. It is rather shaped by the learner's active participation and interaction within the learning context. Due to this the outcome and the results of an educational processes cannot be shaped solely by the provider institution's internal procedures. Learning is a process that require that the learners must actively take part in and partly carry out themselves and partly in partnership with the other students. Educational quality must therefore be designed, defined and implemented at the point where the learning actually occurs: at the level of the learner and their co-learners.

The orientation towards learner-focused educational quality development must identify which quality aspects, dimensions and criteria matter most to learners. The e-learning provider must recognise that the various learners will have varying needs, preferences and expectations of quality in e-learning. Due to this e-learning materials must be designed to reflect the various needs.

Thus, a learner centred educational quality concept must go beyond a narrow focus on instructional methods or technological interface design. Instead, subjective quality requirements should be understood in a more comprehensive way.

They should indeed be organized across seven key domains of educational quality preferences:

Educational quality is shaped by learner needs, engagement and the success they obtain.

Learner support and tutoring

Tutor support is essential for learners, but there are significant differences in what individual learners need and how they benefit from that support.

- Communication and interaction between the tutor and the learner are especially important when they are bi-directional, as learners do not only seek feedback from tutors. They want opportunities for providing feedback to them in order to both show and demonstrate their learning progression. Continuous feedback is a key element to help securing students learning progression.
- Effective moderation of learning processes emphasizes the importance of tutors actively guiding and facilitating learning by using clear and effective communication.
- Learners will differ with respect to their preferences for tutorial styles. Some will favour a learner centred approach that focuses on their personal learning process, while others prefer more content-focused interaction and communication with tutors.





- Individualized learner support is a form of tutoring that focuses on the learner's unique situation, providing guidance beyond the course content and offering additional information tailored to each learner's interests.
- Personal development centeredness versus development of goal orientation, refers to a distinction in tutoring approaches. The first style focuses mainly on achieving course objectives. The other one adopts a more learner centred approach that supports the personal development of learners' educational and social skills.

Collaboration and cooperation during the course

The educational quality expectations learners have regarding the communication and collaboration environment with fellow learners, experts or tutors within the learning groups, should address:

- Social collaboration, including cooperative activities within the online courses, must place particular emphasis on meaningful social interaction. This includes online discussions and chats, group work and face-to-face communication during in-person sessions.
- Cooperation and collaboration activities in online courses should place particular emphasis on integrating discussion-based learning environments and frameworks. This is done by engaging with areas or towards challenging or controversial topics. The focus should not be merely on social interaction, but on active construction of knowledge, skills and competences through structured argumentation and critical dialogue.





Thus, collaboration and cooperation refer to how students work together to learn, solve problems and carry out additional complete tasks. These skills are essential in most academic and professional settings. This includes sharing ideas, application of team work where each student take responsibility and development of the communication skills. Groups of students will often solve challenges faster by combining their strengths during the problem solving and decision processes. Examples of collaboration in a course include group projects or presentations, peer review of assignments, study groups or team discussions, joint development and research related tasks with cooperative lab work and hands-on work-based learning activities.

When the educational quality is high and collaboration is effective, students benefit more because the learning processes become more engaging and active, the understanding improves through discussion and group work, students will gain both academic knowledge and practical soft skills, while the motivation and confidence increase.

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Use of technology

When technical requirements are met, they tend to have little impact on perceived quality because they are simply expected. However, when these standards are not achieved, learners' perceptions of quality decline significantly:

- The learning platform should adapt to user settings and allows the learners to resume exactly where they left off in their previous session.
- The selected learning platforms must provide various types of synchronous communication possibilities that are designed for instant or nearly instant real time communication. This will better support students learning progression by declaring at an early-stage misconceptions and misunderstandings.
- Content should be provided in multiple formats, allowing users to download and save course materials on their personal devices. In this way it may be used without Internet access.



Transparent information

Learners' perceptions of the value of quality are influenced by how they assess the cost and effort required for an e-learning course in relation to the benefits they receive. For a course to be judged as high quality, the time, effort and any financial costs invested by learners must be perceived as proportionate to the outcomes and benefits gained:

- The financial costs and fees for courses are the most important one in the assessment of the cost-values.
- The individual needs refer to the expectation that online learning should be flexible in terms of time, while offering personalized course structures, content and support.
- The effort required to stay motivated and focused on the course within an individualized learning environment.
- Learners expect practical benefits from a course that directly support their everyday working lives.
- The learner is drawn to the course not only for its subject matter, but out of an interest in online learning and using the internet.

Investments, expectations and impact

Learners' perceptions of the value of quality are influenced by how well they will assess the cost and effort required for an e-learning course in relation to the benefits they receive. For a course to be judged as high quality, the time, effort and any financial costs invested by learners must be perceived as proportionate to the outcomes and benefits gained:



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Thus, learners' perceptions of e-learning quality are indeed strongly shaped by how they evaluate the value of a course,.



This is particularly done through a comparison of the costs and efforts they invest, against the benefits they gain in return. In this sense, quality is not judged only by the content or design of the course, but also by whether learners feel the experience is worth it. When learners commit to an online course, they invest multiple resources such as time, mental energy, attention, motivation and often financial payment too. Therefore, learners are more likely to consider an e-learning course as high quality when the demands placed on them such as the workload, deadlines, technical requirements and learning intensity, are considered as reasonable and justified by meaningful outcomes. If a course requires extensive effort but provides limited learning improvement, unclear progress, or minimal practical relevance, learners will perceive it as low quality, even if it appears professionally designed.

How to structure an e-Learning course?

Organize e-learning with clear goals, logical flow and learner-focused design.

This focuses on understanding learners' requirements regarding how to organize and structure an e-learning course. Learners' educational quality preferences clearly indicate that face-to-face sessions, if possible as part of a blended learning model, are highly valued. These areas of educational quality indeed highlight the functions and benefits these in-person components provide from the learners' perspective:

- Personal support during the learning process is essential, highlighting the importance of individualized course support structures delivered through in-person or facilitated training sessions.
- An introductory session, delivered as an in-person hands-on workshop, that familiarizes participants with the key technical and content aspects of the course.
- An important function of a course is the ability to conduct exams and tests that formally assess and document learners' knowledge, skills and competences. The course must be designed such that the students train on what they will be tested in during an exam.

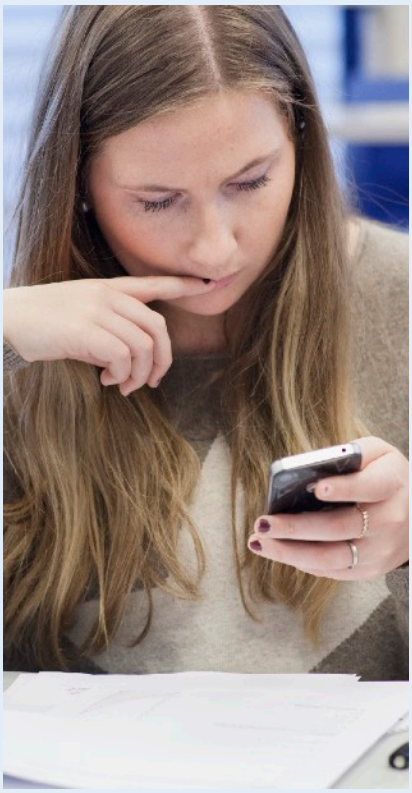
A typical e-learning course works best when divided into modules, where each are focused on one major theme or skill area. What is the key element that the learner should learn here ? This is the key question to answer in each module:

- Course introduction
- Module 1: Foundations
- Module 2: Core concepts
- Module 3: Application
- Module 4: Practice / case studies
- Final assessment
- Wrap-up + next steps



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Teaching and instructional methods



Educational quality encompasses elements such as content, learning objectives, teaching methods and learning materials. Experienced e-learners are often highly specific about their expectations for the instructional design and structure of an e-learning course. They like to address:

- The availability of learning materials and the importance of access to background resources on course topics.
- Multimedia-enriched materials are essential, since effective learning resources should incorporate a variety of media formats rather than relying on a single type of content.
- Provide goal-oriented course material which involves organizing content in a way that clearly aligns with the predefined learning objectives.
- Support of the learning progression process refers to criteria indicating that a course should help learners develop learning literacy and strengthen their lifelong and life-wide learning competences.

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- Feedback on the students learning progression process is strengthened by integrating tests and examinations directly into course materials, possibly at the end of each module (micro-course). This is allowing learners to regularly assess and monitor their learning progressions.
- Individualized tasks should be carefully designed to align with each learner's specific needs, learning goals and goal orientation.

Learners` expectations for educational quality preferences.

It is possible to identity at least four educational quality specific target groups with their learners' preferences, resulting in four educational quality preference profiles. These four quality preference profiles differ significantly in their needs for communication, tutor support, collaborative group activities and social interaction within an online course:

Students that are self-directed and oriented towards the content, with the following characteristics.

They

- implement personalized learning scenarios that are designing and putting into practice learning experiences that are tailored to individual learners' needs, abilities, interests and learning pace,
- use self-directed learning to take responsibility for their own learning process,
- link the course materials with the applied didactical methods,
- are present during the courses and highlight the importance of the interaction and collaborative communication processes.

Students that are result oriented and work independently, while being goal oriented

They

- study independently and are goal oriented by applying goals in learning at their workplace, including how they drive their efforts and how success is defined,
- integrate work-based learning by embedding real workplace experiences into the learning process,
- apply an instrumental purpose orientation by focusing on practical goals and outcomes,
- apply learn and media literacy to learn effectively and critically, by using media and digital information,
- are present in courses and highlight the importance of the interaction during the communication processes.

Students that are pragmatic and apply a needs orientation

They

- use individualized offers by applying learning opportunities that are tailored to specific needs, preferences and the abilities of each individual person,
- prefer to receive factual tutor support consisting of clear, accurate and content focused help from a tutor,
- priorities non-financial costs by referring to time, efforts and personalized challenges they experience, instead of addressing money related expenses
- personalize their learning experiences by allowing the learner to shape how, when and what to learn based up on their needs, interests, abilities and goals,
- apply the didactical requirements by putting into practice the essential learning principles that help ensuring that the instructions are effective and meaningful.

Students who start with needs, stay practical and finish with real-world skills.

Learners` expectations for educational quality preferences.

Students that are interaction oriented

They

- learn by highlighting the importance of discussions and communication during the communication processes,
- prefer learner-oriented tutor support,
- apply media and technology vanguard,
- like to get information and advises in their learning process constituting of guidance, support and feedback that help them to better understand what and how to learn and how to improve,
- apply virtual online groups of learners who work and collaborate through digital platforms in order to support each other's learning processes,
- like to receive and apply rich didactic concepts during their learning processes.

Thus, education quality development in e-learning must be centred on learners' needs and contexts. Rather than relying on general criteria or uniform guidelines, educational providers should provide personalized learning services and learning paths. Those should support individuals based on their unique preferences and learning profiles.

Thus, students that are interaction oriented learn best by actively engaging with other people and not just listening or reading. Their learning improves through talking, sharing ideas, asking questions and working together.

They usually enjoys working with classmates and talks a lot during learning activities. They learns faster after discussion and likes activities like role-play, presentations, debates etc.

Thus, learners today often hold increasingly clear and demanding expectations regarding what they considers and constitutes as high-quality education. Their preferences are shaped by personal goals, prior learning experiences, social and economic pressures and the rapidly changing demands at modern workplaces.

In general, learners expect educational quality to be reflected not only in educational content, but also in how learning is delivered, supported, assessed and connected to real-life outcomes. One major expectation is that learning should be relevant and meaningful, with course content aligned to practical skills and competences, employability, and current industry trends. Learners will often prefer programs that provide opportunities to apply knowledge and skills through projects, internships, simulations or problem-based tasks rather than relying solely on theoretical instruction. This reflects a shift from passive learning toward active engagement, where learners want to learn by doing and see clear value in what they study.

Learners tend to associate educational quality with instructors who are knowledgeable, supportive, well-prepared and able to explain concepts clearly using diverse teaching methods. They value teachers who encourage participation, provide timely feedback, and create a respectful and inclusive learning environment. In addition, learners increasingly prefer interactive and learner-centered approaches, such as discussions, collaborative learning, digital tools, and personalized learning pathways.

Pragmatic learners with a needs-first mindset: focused, relevant and outcome-driven.