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Measuring of Quality in the Context of e-Learning

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Abstract

For the purpose of clarity and consistency, the term e-learning is used throughout the paper to refer to technology-enhanced learning. This paper describes selected aspects of the implementation model, which aims at the improvement and complex assurance of quality and cost efficiency in the context of e-learning. Within the described project, a complex quality assurance method, based on a model for quality assessment of e-learning – ELQ, has been proposed and verified. A modified Kirkpatrick Evaluating Four Level Model has been used for evaluation of quality of blended learning. After implementation of described models, experimental data has been collected and analyzed. These will drive the direction for future improvements.

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1. Introduction

The quality of education is a widely used phrase at present. The quality can be seen differently in conjunction with the knowledge, information and educational technologies. These can be considered as catalyst for change in education, where the goal of our efforts is reforming and modernizing education for our knowledge-based society. One part of the effort is devoted to the special issues of quality of e-learning, which is seen as a potential tool for changes in education. Not only a number of studies (e.g. (Agariya & Singh, 2012; Al-Mushasha & Nassuora, 2012; Bremer, 2012; Ceobanu & Asandului, 2009; Clements & Pawlowski, 2012; Dobre, 2012; Gamalel-Din, 2010;

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Cheung & Vogel, 2013; Iqbal & Ahmad, 2010; M. Z. Iqbal, Maharvi, Malik, & Khan, 2011; Islam, 2013; Jayakumar, Manimaran, & GopiAnand, 2013; Jung, 2012; Lai & Sanusi, 2013; Liu, Huang, & Lin, 2012; Marshall, 2012; Masoumi & Lindström, 2012; Meier, Seufert, & Euler, 2012; Ossiannilsson & Landgren, 2012; Ramakrisnan, Yahya, Hasrol, & Aziz, 2012; Saatz & Kienle, 2013; Tamrakar & Mehta, 2011; Teodora, Mioara, & Magdalena, 2013; Voogt, Knezek, Cox, Knezek, & Brummelhuis, 2013; Zhang & Cheng, 2012) have been published, but various interest groups and commercial institutions dealing with these issues rose recently, one of them being the European Foundation for Quality in eLearning (EFQUEL). Its declared aim is to share experiences on the use of e-learning, to enhance individual, organizational, local and regional development, digital skills and promote social cohesion and personal development. (more at <http://efquel.org>)

Education is one of the two basic functions of the University. A big pressure to rationalize public educational institutions exists currently in Slovakia, while as a survival factor was defined in the quality of them. Quality criterion for science and research is widely accepted and has a quantifiable expression; the situation is more complicated for the quality of education. For a comprehensive assessment of the quality of an educational institution, it is necessary to formalize also this aspect of its activities. The quality of educational activity from the perspective of future is crucial to the creation of a suitable environment providing the necessary educational services to students in terms of content, availability, speed, flexibility, timeliness and the like, so that not only process, but also outcomes reflect the quality standards. Lack of generally accepted quantifiers of quality, as well as strong state pressure on results of science, create a space for the innovation in education and specifically the development and subsequent broad implementation of such a education model, which substantially contribute to enhancing the quality of the institution. The measurement (quantification) of the quality of education is the key element in improving the quality of education.

The article describes a way of ensuring the quality of blended teaching as a partial result of the project "Rationalization of education at Trnava University in Trnava". The issue of quality in e-learning is discussed in the second part, the basic framework of the project and the methods and technologies are described in detail further. Partial results obtained during the two years of the project are discussed at the end.

2. Quality of e-learning

E-learning as a term refers to a variety of different forms of technology-supported learning, usually characterized as the application of knowledge, information and educational technology to link people to each other and / or with educational resources, for the purpose of education (formal or informal) (Ehlers & Hilera, 2012). Quality in e-learning is understood in two contexts: "quality through e-learning", which refers to the quality of education in general by means of the use of e-learning tools; the quality of e-learning itself that is the subject of improving the quality of e-learning as such, is the second one. (Teodora et al., 2013)

Auvinen and Peltonen (cited in Dobre, 2012). indicate that the quality of education can be defined from three perspectives: technological, economic and pedagogical. The quality standards were associated with particular outcomes in the past. This meant that quality was evaluated on the base of courses quality and pre-defined learning outcomes. This approach changed in recent years. According to Bremer (Bremer, 2012), process-oriented approaches began to prevail. This means that not only the output, but also the quality of the entire process is subject to evaluation.

Thair et al. (Thair, Garnett, & King, 2006) defined the quality in the context of higher education as a following combination of organization activities:

- Improving core activities (teaching, research and institution services)
- Alignment of activities, budget and resources with the strategic plan
- Demonstration of leadership and innovation in all activities
- Exploration of the needs of students, other customers, stakeholders and the market
- Investing in human resource development
- Use of data, information and knowledge for decision making
- Improving outcomes

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