TALOE

TIME TO ASSESS LEARNING OUTCOMES IN E-LEARNING

Progress Report   Public Part

Project information

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Beneficiary organisation:	Universidade do Porto
Project coordinator:	Alfredo Soeiro
Project coordinator organisation:	Universidade do Porto
Project coordinator telephone number:	+351919738291
Project coordinator email address:	avsoeiro@fe.up.pt

Executive Summary

The world has been experiencing rapid transformation in Education area and on the actual scenario mobility, cooperation and development of quality relating to methods of assessment are crucial subjects that raise many questions. Effective assessment drives learning efficiency as the growth of e-learning technologies drives e-assessment. This growth reinforce the need to improve learning and support the idea that is important to define a strategy to ensure that our selection of assessment methods respond positively to the objectives and outcomes of our course programme allowing a clear evaluation of competencies, skills and knowledge.

Facing this scenario the TALOE project intends to promote the internal consistency of online courses by using an existing tool, the ALOA model (Aligning Learning Outcomes and Assessment), to highlight the connection between the intended learning outcomes and the assessment strategy used during a course. Because not every assessment method is valid the ALOA model provides tools for linking learning outcomes and assessment tasks. What the TALOE project intends to do is to apply those tools to the specific context of e-learning.

The main goal of TALOE is to develop a web-based platform to help teachers and trainers decide on the e-assessment strategies to use in their online courses. The main idea is that a teacher will describe the learning outcomes of their course or module and the TALOE platform will analyze them and provide an e-assessment strategy that is consistent with the intended learning.

To be able to develop the practical tool, the consortium will have to achieve the following specific goals:

- Research and select innovative e-assessment practices that take advantage of the use of technology;

- Develop a web-based tool that is easy to use by the stakeholders;

- To test the implementation of the tool with real case studies;

- To distribute and disseminate the TALOE tool among the communities of stakeholders.

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1. Project Objectives

The main goal of TALOE is to develop a web-based platform to help teachers and trainers decide on the e-assessment strategies to use in their online courses. The main idea is that a teacher will describe the learning outcomes of their course or module and the TALOE platform will analyse them and provide an e-assessment strategy that is consistent with the intended learning.

The objectives of TALOE are:

a. Research and select innovative e-assessment practices that take advantage of the use of technology;
b. Develop a web-based tool that is easy to use by the stakeholders;
c. To test the implementation of the tool with real case studies;
d. To distribute and disseminate the TALOE tool among the communities of stakeholders.

The project will provide a pedagogical framework for the use of e-assessment and for linking specific e-assessment tasks with the learning outcomes statements of the courses or modules. The method is based on recent research on assessment and it will extend the findings to different areas of application (e-learning).

It is intended that the TALOE tool will be freely available to different stakeholders. These include Higher and Continuing Education institutions as well as vocational training organizations. It is also available for stakeholders associated with processes of recognition and accreditation. The main target groups of TALOE project are teachers and trainers from all levels of education. The TALOE tool wants to help teachers and trainers to define e-assessment strategies for their courses or modules.

Other targets groups include:

✓ Researchers of Learning Outcomes and e-assessment
✓ Recognition and accreditation staff, to verify the validity of assessment methods for VNIL (Validation of Non-formal and Informal Learning) or to provide evidence for accreditation
✓ Programme developers, to define e-assessment strategies recommendations for new programmes
✓ Decision makers, to define valid e-assessment strategies for their institutions
✓ Networks and initiatives operating in the fields of learning outcomes (LO), assessment, vocational training, higher education, continuing education, recognition and accreditation

At this stage, TALOE Consortium is already working with a group of teachers and trainers that have actively contributed to the outcomes of the project. The Consortium has been investing on dissemination of projects activities and has reached stakeholders through online communication, participation in conferences and different types of publications.

2. Project Approach

TALOE project is developing and will distribute a web-based platform for e-assessment. The major goal is to help teachers and trainers of Europe decide on the e-assessment strategies they can use to match their courses or modules. The tasks of the TALOE project are aiming at developing and implementing a web-tool for teachers and training to facilitate the alignment of Learning Outcomes with e-assessment strategies. TALOE platform may be used by other stakeholders in the educational system, to verify the validity of assessment methods used in different learning contexts, in processes of recognition and accreditation. The project was structured around three main activities: research, development, and implementation/testing.

During the first year of the project, TALOE focused on research about e-assessment and development of the web-tool. Concerning research, TALOE is focused on a theoretical model for the alignment of assessment and Learning Outcomes, the ALOA model. However, TALOE has pushed the model forward to incorporate a component of e-assessment. The project used multiple case-studies analysis to collect e-assessment practices that could be used as examples of implementation of assessment methods online. In terms of development of the web-tool, TALOE used the ALOA model to define the structure of the online tool in terms of functionality and of interface. The web-tool has been developed collaboratively, involving a team of developers and the author of the ALOA model.

The second year will be focused on the implementation with pilots and reaching stakeholders, inviting them to participate. It is believed that the tool that will be produced is useful for teachers and trainers of all levels if education.

The research and development components have had the collaboration and inputs of several partners of the consortium. There has been a great effort in dissemination of the results obtained until now, as it can be seen by the number of publications and participations in conferences and other events. The Consortium expects that the continuation of an adequate dissemination strategy will promote its use by a community of users, even after the project is finished. The members of TALOE have already produced papers and other materials that will be available for researchers long after the end of the project. The website of the project and social network activities will operate mostly online. The involvement of all partners was achieved with a communication strategy among the Consortium members. The regular virtual meetings and the online collaboration platform (Moodle learning management system) were important to achieve this goal. The activities of TALOE project are distributed in seven work packages that are intrinsically related with the tasks arising from the project goals.

3.   Project Outcomes & Results

In the first year of project, TALOE has been focusing on the first two objectives related with the web-tool that represents the major outcome:

- Research and select innovative e-assessment practices that take advantage of the use of technology;
- Develop a web-based tool that is easy to use by stakeholders.

Besides these two content oriented deliverables activities other tasks were performed in terms of project management, of quality control of the project, of dissemination of project and of some initial exploitation actions.

Research and selection based outcomes

TALOE has produced two deliverables, WP3.01 and WP3.02, concerning the first research objective.

WP3.01 "E-Assessment practices" consisted in the collection of 18 cases of assessment of online courses from different institutions around Europe, mostly from the project partners. These case studies were analyzed by the partnership in terms of classification under two perspectives: these were classified in terms of learning outcomes definition and in terms of the assessment modes used to verify these learning outcomes. The case studies classifications were also revised by the partnership during a second round. The goals of this work were to obtain examples of case studies that can be used as a showcase of current practice and also as testing material during the second year of the project. Since these case studies are available to the partnership these can be scrutinized during the tuning of the web-tool. WP3.02 "ALOA model with integration of E-Assessment practices" was developed on a second stage of the research component where the consortium developed an extension of the ALOA model to include the e-assessment practices described in the case-studies. This outcome generated the list of e-assessment methods to be considered in the web-tool. The relationship of these methods with the different types of learning outcomes was defined based on the revised Bloom Taxonomy and on the alignment theory of Anderson et al.

Development based outcomes

WP4.01 "Web-based e-assessment platform" addresses the second main objective of the project. The partnership has produced a first version of the web-tool that is ready to test the first functionalities of the intended platform. Due to the complexity of the ALOA model it was decided to simplify the tool procedures during a first phase of testing it. The first phase addresses only the simplest forms of knowledge. It is intended that partnership tests the

web-tool until the next project meeting in February 2015. The development and consequent testing will be done in phases of complexity of the definition of the procedures relating learning outcomes and assessment methods. This is an extra effort to achieve consistency of the web-tool performance and simplicity of procedures by the potential users. The second deliverable WP4.02 "User guides of the e-assessment platform" is already developed for the partners that will test the web-tool until next phase of development is initiated.

Project management outcomes and results

The management of the project has taken into account the project planned tasks and the administrative and financial activities and responsibilities. Two face to face meetings were held. The first was dedicated to the project presentation and discussion, approval of work packages plans, debate about future tasks and financial and administrative establishment of guidelines. The second meeting was dedicated to the analysis and classification methods of the case studies and preparation of the specifications for the development of the web-tool until the end of 2014. Eight virtual audio meetings within and interval of about one month were held to keep contact between partners about arising issues and reporting of actions undertaken. It was produced an intermediate report from partners at the end of the first semester to measure progress and make an internal report to the project officer.

Quality control of the project outcomes

According to the Quality Plan approved in the first project meeting partners have produced an internal evaluation report every six months. A compilation and analysis of these quality reports was performed by the work package leader. A quality report was also produced by an external evaluator every six months taking into account the progress of the project and the quality of deliverables. These two types of quality evaluation were disseminated among the partners and taken into account in terms of project management and implementation. It is expected that these reports will result in the improvement of the project implementation and achievements.

Project dissemination outcomes

According to the project proposal and with the dissemination plan later approved several actions were undertaken that tried to disseminate TALOE among stakeholders. These tasks had several perspectives and levels that comprised a website, presentations in conferences, publications, leaflets, newsletters, social networks, workshop and webinars. A dissemination graph registering the dissemination activities has been maintained in the dedicated Moodle platform by the work package leader.

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Website – It was produced right at the beginning of the project (http://taloe.up.pt). It has a description of the project, the partnership composition and contacts, news related with the topics of the project, description of the work packages, presentation of project results and a list of resources that constitute support for the project development and implementation. It has also the links to the social networks where the project is present. It has a dedicated email address for contacts and the possibility of choosing, by a stakeholder, a permanent subscription of updated project news.

Presentations and publication in conferences – There have been several presentations by partners in conferences with related topics or potential interested stakeholders. There were reviewed paper presentations in EDULEARN 2014 (http://iated.org/edulearn/announcement), WCCEE2014 (http://iacee2014.stanford.edu/) and 15th AEA Annual Conference (http://www.aea-europe.net/index.php/about-the-conference-tallinn). Presentations (poster, paper or other) were done in EDEN 2014 (http://www.eden-online.org/2014_zagreb.html) EIF/LINQ 2014 (http://www.learning-innovations.eu/2014/conference), EUCEN Autumn Seminar (http://autumn2014seminar.eucen.eu/) and Media and Learning 2014 (http://www.media-and-learning.eu/the-conference). Most of these publications make part of the proceedings of the events.

Workshop – The project workshop was held during the EDEN 2014 (http://www.eden-online.org/2014_zagreb.html). There were eighteen participants. It was an opportunity to discuss the selection criteria for the assessments practices with other educators and e-learning experts. The workshop results were considered in the project implementation.

Leaflets – There were two editions with two thousand being printed for each one. The contents of the first leaflet were a summary of the project and other relevant information about TALOE. The second leaflet contained the developments of the project and related events in terms of dissemination. These four thousand leaflets were distributed by partners in accordance with requests. According to the needs of the partners these were distributed within organizations, in events and in conferences where partners participated.

Newsletter **–** The project produced one newsletter with related news, significant past and future events, webinars interesting projects and e-assessment conferences. In the distribution of the newsletter there was a strategic decision of combining direct mailing of the newsletter with website content and with social media coverage.

Social networks – The project has a presence in Facebook and in LinkedIn. In Facebook there is a dedicated TALOE page (https://www.facebook.com/taloeproject) and in LinkedIn a TALOE Group (https://www.linkedin.com/groups/TALOE-Time-Assess-Learning-Outcomes-8136873?home=&gid=8136873&trk=anet_ug_hm&goback=.gmp_8136873). Both presences were created by the work package leader that is in charge of managing these two presences.

Webinar – A webinar was produced to disseminate in the national event and in Europe the relevant issues about the assessment of learning outcomes. The seminar was recorded and is available for viewing "Ask your Learning Outcomes what you should be Assessing" (webinars (https://connect.srce.hr/p1b57dxz1rd/; http://www.srce.unizg.hr/en/webinars-and-video-conferences/presentation-ask-your-learning-outcomes-what-you-should-be-assessing/).

Some exploitation actions – Due to the dissemination actions some exploitation activities have taken place in terms of engaging stakeholders and other organizations. In terms of stakeholders the partnership has been contacted by the University of Athabasca (Canada), by the Medical Navy Center BUMED (USA), by ATIT (Belgium) and by Ioncudos (USA). In one of the cases a case study provided by one of these organizations was included in the set analysed in work package 3. All these contacts had in mind cooperation and possible interest in using the results and tools of the project. The exploitation plan has included in the planned activities the correspondent follow-up of these contacts to explore possible cooperation and joint developments. One of the exploitation tasks was the application done with the Wise Accelerator program of the Qatar Foundation (http://www.wise-qatar.org/wise-accelerator). The application was not successful but several recommendations were obtained that may be useful for the future of the project.

4.   Partnerships

Education and learning are a contextualized process and the fact that there is the contribution of teachers from different countries and backgrounds adds value to the project. TALOE project has benefited from being developed collaboratively among nine European partners. One of the most important contributions of the project is the collection and analysis of the different e-assessment practices. TALOE has collected case studies from educational institutions across Europe and Canada that were studied and classified as part of the work package 3 of the project. The TALOE web-tool intends to be used by a vast community of teachers and trainers. It is important that it reflects the views of a diverse community. This could only be achieved with the collaboration of partners from different countries and cultural contexts.

The consortium has been involved in dissemination activities at national and international. Therefore the respective activities and deliverables have reached a vast community of stakeholders. This is relevant to achieve the goal of the project of having a web-tool available to stakeholders that are teaching and managing teaching. Partners are active in education and e-learning and have formal and informal contact networks that can be involved in the different stages of the project. This motivated the increase of the number of case studies that is now larger than initially expected.

Partnerships have taken place already as explained in the previous point. One of the direct outcomes was a table available at the Media and Learning Conference 2014 (http://www.media-and-learning.eu/the-conference) to present the project. These partnerships added to those planned in the exploitation plan will bring the visibility of the project to a large community of possible users. This community of users will have an important role in the second year of project. The project has been presented in many events, with different formats and different audiences. Informal conversations have resulted in verbal agreements to cooperate in the testing and tuning of the web-tool during the second year of the project.

A particular partnership is already planned for the year of 2015 organized by one of the partners that aims at engaging other experts in the production of webinars about learning outcomes and assessment from the University of Edinburgh, University of Roma Tre and Dublin City University. This initiative will be a good partnership to present and share results

5. Plans for the Future

The second year of the project plans to focus on the two remaining objectives of TALOE:

- To test the implementation of the tool with the set of collected case studies and with other case studies from other courses;
- To distribute, to disseminate and to explore the TALOE web-tool among the communities of stakeholders.

During the first part of the year deliverables it is intended to review the existing deliverables as a function of the evolution of the testing of the web-tool. Following the testing of the web-tool by the partnership the plan is to adapt the web-tool to the decisions. It is relevant to consider the increase of the accuracy of the tool, the interface with users, the cultural diversity, the language issues and the scope of users. After that adaptation and improvement the web-tool will be tested on a wider scale using the networking and the partnerships established. Some organizations and experts will be directly contacted and invited to cooperate in this testing. The final phase, envisaged for the last quarter of the year, will be dedicated to reach a larger audience in terms of dissemination and of exploitation of results.

Some activities are related with dissemination and exploitation like:

- Collection of related news to be published on the project and partners' websites and in social networks
- Contacting directly stakeholders that are related decision makers, accreditation organizations, qualification bodies and quality assurance agencies
- Elaborating three newsletters and leaflets that will be distributed via the partners' lists and via the engaged organizations
- Publication of papers in conferences and in journals with the results arising from the project implementation
- Organisation of a conference with an intended European audience aiming at presenting the web-tool.

6. Contribution to EU policies

The project can have several types of contribution to the EU policies listed as priorities in the funded programs. For instance it can bring a significant addition to the training of teachers. The fact that there is a web-tool available to teachers that can enhance the evaluation of students may improve the performance of teachers and of trainers. These can learn more about writing learning outcomes and about proper assessment. This may be a valuable development to Lifelong Learning in Higher Education. It will also be a supporting mechanism to improve excellence in teaching and training when providing proper assessment methods for the initial education and for continuing education.

The fact that there are new jobs being created constantly, with different profiles and requirements for new competences, creates a need to validate and to verify the new correspondent skills. This new type of skills needs other types of assessment that require an alignment between training and learning outcomes and the evaluation methods.

Concerning recognition of qualifications and competences the project tool can provide an adequate procedure to evaluate the capacities of each learner using the proper assessment method. Knowledge, skills and attitudes are the types of competences of the European Qualification Framework. Since the learning outcomes of the case studies are in one of these categories the web-tool may help building confidence in the evaluations and, therefore, may facilitate recognition.

In terms of the transparency in Higher Education a proper set of assessment methods for the different types of competences will help the expression of competences across the countries. It will be clear for all stakeholders in Higher Education which type of assessments are acceptable for the various levels and different nature of the learning outcomes.

The project web-tool may remove barriers for mobility of learners and of professionals since all learning outcomes can have a common benchmarking framework. In fact it will be easier for accreditation and qualification bodies and professional organizations to accept competences acquired in other countries if the recommendations to find proper assessment methods are common to all those involved. This will contribute directly also to employability since informal and non-formal learning can be recognized and validated.

Finally, the web-tool may contribute significantly to the quality assurance of courses offered since the verification of the competences or learning outcomes acquired is done using the same strategy. This is particularly relevant for e-learning and for distance education where the quality assurance across countries and educational systems has been an obstacle for the development of these environments.