

Chapter 10

Aligning E–Assessment With Learning Outcomes

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ABSTRACT

The chapter contributes to establishing a pedagogical framework for the implementation of e-assessment based on learning outcomes. The authors of this work have developed a model for the alignment of intended LOs with e-assessment derived from the concept of alignment defended by different authors. The chapter will describe the ALOA conceptual model for aligning learning outcomes and e-assessment, focusing on specific issues related with e-assessment. The chapter will briefly describe the implementation of the ALOA model in the context of the TALOE project (time to assess learning outcomes in e-learning).

INTRODUCTION

Since the last half of the 20th Century, the World has been experiencing rapid transformation in the field of Education, led by the changing Knowledge Society. Education and schooling have become a major concern for the society and it is a priority in national and transnational policies. Higher Education (HE) and Continuing Education (CE) have been most affected by this transformation, adapting to the demand for new skills of the labour market and at the same time corresponding to the needs of an increasing number of students. The global economy created opportunity and need for the mobility of students and workers, demanding better recognition of qualifications and increasing competitiveness in this field. The labour market demands more workers qualified and updated. All this, generates pressure towards a quality-based approach in all Education providers. One visible effect of this transformation is the shift from a content-based approach in Education to an approach centred on the student and what she/he has learned and achieved, the Learning Outcomes (LO). In Europe, Higher Education Institutions (HEI) and Continuing Education Institutions (CEI) are redefining programs in terms of Learning Outcomes, harmonizing them with national, international and sector level frameworks of qualifications that are

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-5225-5936-8.ch010

also based on Learning Outcomes. Several projects and initiatives are working towards the definition of LO, specific and transversal that can be used as a common reference. Learning Outcomes are also becoming fundamental for structuring the standards and guidelines of quality assessment of HE and CE institutions. In this context, the assessment of Learning Outcomes becomes a crucial process for the Educational System.

Another major revolution in our society has been the introduction of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT). The use of ICT applied to Education, e-learning, has been increasing and its use creates new opportunities for teaching, learning and assessment and has huge potential as an answer to some of the current challenges of Education. The change to the digital media has impact on the availability, reusability, accessibility and cost of learning resources, complemented by the communication and networking potential of the Internet that takes Education to a Global level. E-learning is promoting change and innovation in different aspects of Education including pedagogy, technology, organization, accessibility, and flexibility among others (Gráinne Conole & Oliver, 2006). It is a complex and multi-disciplinary area and, given its impact, it is important that e-learning research is informed by evidence.

Finally, assessment is a crucial process of Education and is seen by current trends as part of the learning process and not as a separate event. Assessment of student learning encourages involvement of student and provides feed-back to the student and the teacher (Crisp, 2012). It has an important role in validation and certification and is deeply related with quality issues.

The present chapter intends to contribute to establishing a pedagogical framework for the implementation of e-assessment based on learning outcomes. The authors of this work have developed model for the alignment of intended LOs (LOs) with e-assessment, derived from the concept of alignment defended by different authors (J. Biggs, 2007a; J. B. Biggs, 2003; Boud & Falchikov, 2006)

The chapter here proposed will describe the ALOA conceptual model (Aligning Learning Outcomes and Assessment) for aligning learning outcomes and e-assessment, addressing important questions related with e-learning and e-assessment.

AN OVERVIEW ON LEARNING OUTCOMES

The Learning Outcomes (LO) concept has its origin in pedagogy but in recent years it has been used in different contexts and assuming different roles. LOs are present in most European policies and strategies, like the Bologna Process (Adam, 2004; European Commission, 2009), the Copenhagen Process (CEDEFOP, 2010) and EQF (European Commission, 2008). LOs are shaping Higher Education and are being used as criteria in the accreditation processes of HEI and CEI, for the definition of programmes and assessment of students (ENQA, 2005). LOs are the focus of transnational studies like Tuning (González & Wagenaar, 2006) and AHELO (OECD & Publishing, 2011). LOs are a central tool for the recognition of prior learning (RPL) and the mobility of workers and students (European Commission, 2009). For the purpose of this work, the context of application of the term is the teaching and learning process and the working definition is: *Learning outcomes are statements of what a learner is expected to know, understand and/or be able to demonstrate after completion of learning.*

An interesting perspective about the usefulness of LOs is provided by Bloom et al. (Bloom, 1956). In their perspective, LOs are related with the change that occurs in learners after being submitted to an educational process. Authors suggest that this change can affect many students' behaviours. However, institutions and teachers have little time and resources to measure these changes. So LOs are an important

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