

Newsletter n. 1

DEQF



Distance Education
Quality Framework



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Partners

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1. What is DEQF

The project focuses on distance learning, an approach widely used in the last years due to the global Covid-19 pandemic. Many teachers and trainers both in the Vet and IVET fields (technical and professional institutes, but not only) were caught unprepared to deal with the new emergency challenge, often using the same methods (mainly of transmissive type) used in face-to-face classes. At an Italian level, the Abruzzo Regional Education Authority submitted a qualitative survey to secondary school students of the Region. It was developed by a joint committee composed of the above-mentioned Regional Education Authority and the Regional Order of Psychologists to investigate the perception that students have of distance learning. The Distance Learning methodology is a valuable teaching and training tool that, beyond the emergency linked to the pandemic, can be exploited in many other contexts such as the following: • New emergencies • Inability of students to attend face-to-face lessons due to force majeure (i.e. long-distance commuter students could benefit from this methodology) • Secluded areas and mountain schools - Continuous training. It is not by chance that the European Commission recently published the new Digital Educational Plan 2021-2027 which sets out new goals for distance learning that must become more “effective, inclusive and engaging”. The project follows on from the goals set out in the new digital education plan, focusing on the centrality of the student in distance learning and the teacher seen as a guide of the processes, more precisely a facilitator and resource person. In order for the student to be able to feel like a protagonist, he will have to put many of his long-life learning skills (key competences) into play in an active learning context with particular reference to critical thinking that the project intends to develop in a quality framework on distance learning. The framework will be addressed to a target of teachers from professional schools and, in the testing phase, to students attending vocational schools (IVET) who need to develop critical thinking and digital critical thinking skills in order to be immediately ready to enter the labour market. The Framework will be developed mainly in a transversal way to the disciplines through active modes that shall take account of the following approaches: Problem based learning • Inquiry based learning • Problem solving • Creativity • Digital critical literacy. Another pillar of the project will be QA which will take place through the development of a framework that takes into account the EQAVET cycle.

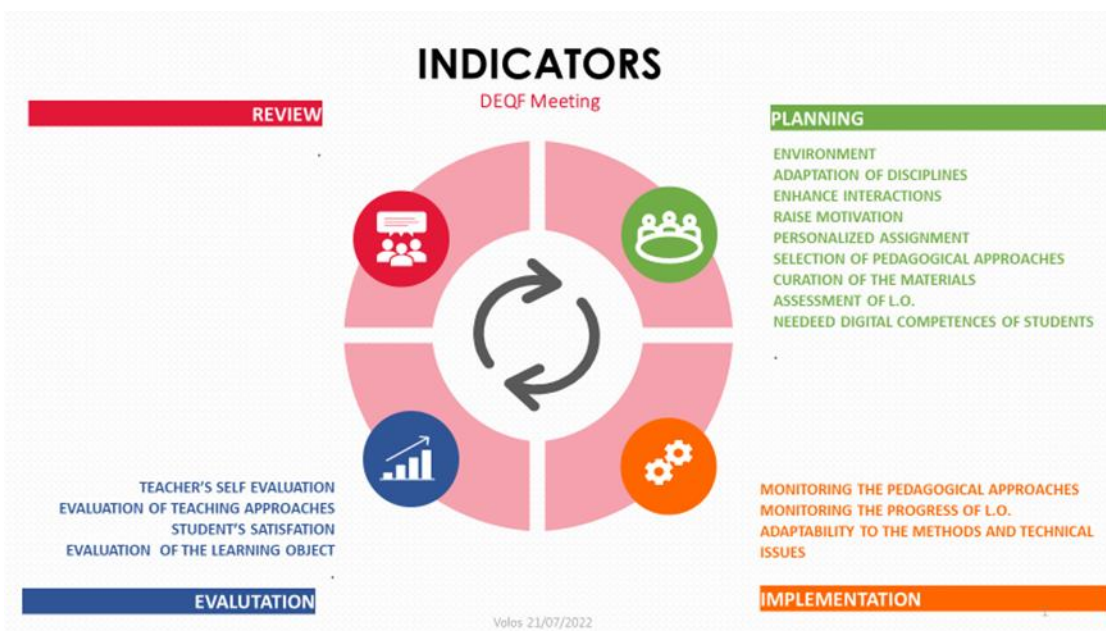
1.1 The survey

The partners submitted DEQF survey to almost 500 VET students attending VET schools in different Countries: Italy, Greece, Sweden, Austria. The questions have been developed thanks to the scientific supervision of the Italian Psychologist Association.

The survey aimed at the investigation of the students' perception of DL, especially during the pandemic period. The questions of the survey were conceived according to a multiple-choice model: (never, occasionally, sometimes, often)

At first, the project staff wanted to investigate the composition of the sample, in general students aged between 16 and 17 years old (56% males, 44% females). Almost 85% of the sample stated to have a good internet connection at home; in addition, almost 90% of them had their own PCs or tablets. The two indicators seem to represent a good start for quality distance learning!

The first section of the questionnaire dealt with learning and teaching practice, focusing on the different activities developed by the teachers in DL. The survey addressed to learners' sample gave a great opportunity to reflect upon the urgency to develop a DL quality framework. We started the reflection deeply analysing the critical points pictured by the students, developing some indicators referred to the EQAVET cycle. Quality assurance is based on 4 phases: planning, implementation, evaluation and review. EU strongly recommends the use of QA in education. For each phase and based on the answers given by the students, we developed some indicators to improve the critical points highlighted by the learners.



From the teachers' side, they should plan learning outcomes according to the needs of the students taking into consideration specific aspects, such as the adaptation of the discipline contents, the curation of the resources, and the selection of pedagogical approaches.

Furthermore, the teachers should plan appropriate strategies or tools to enhance interaction and raise motivation, Finally, they should plan how they are going to assess learning outcomes in terms of test categories and appropriate time.

During the implementation phase, the teachers will have the role of facilitator and supervisor. It is necessary, during this stage, to monitor the relevance of the pedagogical approaches, and the progress of learning outcomes. Finally, it is crucial to check if the adjustment to the methods was successful. At this point, the teachers might have also to deal with the solution of technical issues.

From the evaluation phase, the teacher will be able to collect the elements to review the cycle from the very beginning (planning phase). It is the time for the teachers to evaluate the success of their learning and teaching action. This can be done through a complex process dealing with the teachers' self-evaluation, evaluation of the learning outcomes, evaluation of the teaching approaches, and students' satisfaction.

2. The framework

This framework is based on the indicators developed after the survey. It will guide how to design an online learning/teaching course (from the needs analysis to the definition of learning objectives, sequencing, choice of learning strategies and delivery formats). It mainly addresses trainers and instructional designers who aim to create learning projects that match learners' needs by choosing different methods and delivery formats. The teacher takes on the role of a purposeful learning designer rather than (just) a curriculum implementer. The teacher is a designer translating learner needs, curriculum frameworks, teaching strategies and resources into a coherent plan for learning. The design framework is based on the following key quality approaches:

1. Learning is enhanced when teachers think purposefully about curricular planning. The design framework helps this process without offering a rigid process or prescriptive recipe.
2. The design framework helps focus curriculum and teaching on developing and deepening student understanding and learning transfer.

3. Understanding is revealed when students autonomously make sense of and transfer their learning through authentic performance. Six facets of understanding—the capacity to explain, interpret, apply, shift perspective, empathise, and self-assess—can serve as indicators of understanding.

4. Effective curriculum/course plan is planned backwards from long-term, desired results through a three-stage design process (Desired Results, Evidence, and Learning Plan).

5. Teachers are coaches of understanding, not mere delivering content knowledge, skill, or activity. They focus on ensuring that learning happens, not just teaching (and assuming that what was taught was learned); they always aim and check for successful meaning-making.

2.1 The toolbox

Technology can assist instructional designers and teachers in meeting the needs of learners in traditional classrooms and virtual course environments. During the COVID-19 pandemic, many teachers and instructional designers began looking for resources they could use for hybrid and online course delivery. Many found that the cost of some technology tools was well outside of their financial means to assist them in meeting student learning outcomes. However, some digital tools provide free access for educators and are beneficial to students. Here we present to you several tools that are in use in developing and teaching online courses. The guidelines cover the most usual criteria for choice of a digital tool

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Functionality • accessible from anywhere • must offer mobile options • easy use for the trainer 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • easy use for the learner • low cost or free of charge, pricing model • provides customization options • enhances learning
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supports (a)synchronous learning • fulfils GDPR or other security requirements • aligns with school policies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • options for learning analytics • no coding skills required • scalability (for how many learners/trainers can you use this tool?) • availability of tutorials how to use the tool

	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• should offer a gamification component
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