

Learning outcomes in certification processes

Results of two Cedefop studies:

- QA in Certification in IVET
- Writing learning outcomes

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Overview

Cedefop study on ‘QA in certification’ – using learning outcomes in certification processes

Main findings

Cedefop study on ‘Writing learning outcomes’

Main findings

Some conclusions

Cedefop study: QA in Certification in IVET – use of LO

Learning outcomes-based standards

- A qualification is *'a formal outcome of an assessment and validation process which is obtained when a competent body determines that an individual has achieved learning outcomes to given standards'*.
- Qualification standards based on learning outcomes serve as a reference point for the certification process.
- Qualification standards*:
 - occupation standards: employment requirements
 - education standards: training specifications (learning process)
 - assessment standards: specify how evidence is collected for achievement of learning outcomes (assessment criteria and methods)

*'The dynamics of qualifications: defining and renewing occupational and educational standards' (Cedefop, 2009)

Cedefop study: QA in Certification in IVET – use of LO

Terms and concepts used differ

- Learning outcomes – competences (e.g. AT, DE-dual, DK, ES, NL)

Horizontal structure (domains of learning) differ – e.g.

- AT: professional competence, methodical competence, implementation competence, social competence and individual competence
- EE: vocational and professional knowledge and skills, autonomy and responsibility, learning competence, social competence, competence of self-definition, operational competence, digital competence and entrepreneurial competence
- ES: competence (*competencia*) and capacity (*capacidades*)
- HU: vocational competences (knowledge and skills) and other (personal, methodical, social/interpersonal) competences

Main findings – 1

Provision of learning outcomes-based descriptions as one key quality dimension of certification processes

In all countries studied a certain degree of outcomes orientation in qualifications standards – already existing or in development – can be observed (provided at macro level).

Grouping according to Cedefop study on LO in curricula (2012) also fits:

- ‘early developers’: Finland, Hungary, the Netherlands, Romania, Slovenia, England;
- ‘recent developers’: Austria, Denmark, Estonia, Germany, Portugal, Spain.

Assessment criteria based on learning outcomes specified at macro level in some cases (e.g. in Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Spain) or provided by awarding bodies (e.g. in England).

Main findings – 2 (case studies)

Use of LO in assessment for certification

- LO are usually used in the assessment process but to a different extent:
 - LO defined at national level are used as reference points in assessment without specifying assessment criteria (e.g. DK, NL, PT) – they can be defined at provider level;
 - assessment criteria are developed at national (e.g. ES) or regional (e.g. AT) level but not directly used in assessment (i.e. not included on assessment sheets).

Articulation of LO used in assessment

- LO related to practical parts of assessment often closely linked to work tasks;
- Assessment criteria are usually formulated using a higher degree of granularity and specificity and a higher level of detail compared to LO in occupation or education standards
- Defined at different levels of proficiency for determining grades (e.g. FI) or generic grade descriptors are provided (e.g. England).

Main findings – 3 (case studies)

Impact of use of LO in assessment

- Changing assessment methods: e.g. more practice-oriented assessment methods such as projects, case studies, simulations, skills demonstration in authentic or semi-authentic situations;
- Enhanced focus on ‘practical’ and transversal competences: LO descriptions seem to support awareness of these competences;
- Changing role of teachers and learners:
 - teachers act as coaches also for preparing assessment and cooperate with labour market stakeholders;
 - learners are actively involved and evaluate their own performance – learner centred approach (e.g. FI) - less likely in IVET schemes in which the examination process is totally separated from the process of training provision, when qualifications are awarded based on final assessment at the end of a training programme and in IVET schemes with standardised and centrally regulated examination systems;

Main findings – 4 (case studies)

Usefulness of LO

- Benefit: clarifying expectations and enhancing transparency –
But: common understanding and interpretation among all stakeholders involved in the assessment process is needed;
- Benefit: link between the world of education and the world of work -
But: LO descriptions need to sufficiently relate to the language of company representatives and support might be needed for contextualising LO in specific assessment situations;
- Benefit: LO facilitate individualised approaches and RPL –
But: only pointed out by representatives from IVET systems with a modular approach without final assessment.

Cedefop study: Writing learning outcomes (2014)

Aim

Analysing and comparing how LO are written – for qualifications standards (VET) and educational programmes (HE) - across ten countries.

Core research questions

- How is the writing of learning outcomes being oriented, for example through guidelines and handbooks?
- How are learning outcomes actually written – what characterizes the terminology used and how does it vary?
- Which are the main areas for improvement in the writing of learning outcomes?

Main findings - 1

- The definition of learning outcomes varies between institutions, education and training sectors and countries but also within countries.
- The approach to learning outcomes in VET seems to be more harmonized than in HE .
- The structuring of learning outcomes descriptions varies, both as regards
 - the horizontal description of domains of learning and
 - the vertical dimension, expressing the increasing complexity of learning.
- Focus is not always on learners' achievements: Many documents analysed include not only 'well written' learning outcomes but also a mix of learning objectives, teachers' intentions, phrases related to the learning process and vaguely formulated expectations (e.g. 'collecting experience', 'getting familiar with').

Main findings - 2

- No common format for describing learning outcomes exists reducing comparability. The number of pages used for presenting learning outcomes varies considerably (between 1 and 260 pages).
- The level of detail (granularity) varies dramatically, reducing transparency and comparability.
- Assessment criteria:
In many guidelines analysed it is indicated that learning outcomes descriptions should be used as a basis for assessment.
But not in all documents assessment criteria are presented and learning outcomes statements do not always refer to (observable) action or clearly express performance criteria. In many cases specific key words are used for expressing the level of mastery expected. However, such key words are also not applied consistently.

...some conclusions

- No perfect way of formulating and presenting learning outcomes; main issue: 'fit for purpose' in the context they are used.
- Appropriate balance: detailed enough to express requirements and expectations and comprehensible for those concerned – leaving sufficient room to interpret them in the specific context they are to be applied.
- Written documents alone are not sufficient: communication between stakeholders is vital (in particular when training is completely separated from assessment for certification).
- The writing and use of learning outcomes should follow the PDCA quality cycle – reflection/review/redesign should not be neglected.



Source: <https://mrsv.wordpress.com/2009/02/11/the-pedagogical-fallacy/>

Thank you!

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