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RESEARCH NETWORK

DIGITAL EDUCATION IN VET





BEYOND
ZOOM

Published in 2024 by the Comparative Research Network e.V. Berlin

The publication was edited in the frame of the Erasmus+ Partnership Beyond Zoom
2021-2-DE02-KA220-VET-000049017

Partnership:

Comparative Research Network e.V.
(Germany),

Ireforr (Italy),

Changemaker Education (Sweden),

Mullingar Employment Action Group
(Ireland),

Stowarzyszenie na Rzecz Spółdzielni
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Last update: 15th of November 2024



Open Educational Resources



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INTRODUCTION Introduction

How can we ensure that digital tools in hybrid classrooms not only enhance learning but also promote the well-being of every student?

Following RAES (2022), digital well-being refers to being healthy and balanced when using digital technologies. In education, digital well-being contains engagement and learning, meaning that teachers ensure that digital tools and environments effectively support student engagement and learning. Additionally, educators have the responsibility to create adaptable and inclusive learning spaces that meet diverse student needs and support digital well-being in hybrid learning situations. Integrating physical and digital environments to enhance the learning experience and providing technological solutions that facilitate connectivity and expertise exchange, regardless of location, are other important contributing factors.

The European Commission's Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) is a significant step towards establishing an effective education system that supports the well-being of both learners and educators. The Commission acknowledges that digital technologies have significantly changed how we learn, work, and communicate, bringing new opportunities and challenges. The plan underlines the necessity of creating 'well-designed digital education ecosystems that are effective and inclusive' to enhance the well-being of learners and improve their educational and employment prospects. Additionally, it underscores the importance of addressing the digital divide, which can worsen existing inequalities and ensuring that digital tools and environments are accessible and supportive for all learners, including those with disabilities and special educational needs. The plan also calls for developing digital skills and competencies that promote emotional well-being and resilience, enabling individuals to navigate both digital and physical worlds safely and ethically.

The Beyond Zoom (BEYZO) project is aligned with the European Union's Digital Education Action Plan. This alignment, particularly in its commitment to supporting digital well-being, reassures us of the project's credibility and relevance. The project recognises the rapidly changing demands on teaching professions, necessitating a broader and more sophisticated set of competencies, as highlighted by the Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu). The COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the urgency to enhance digital skills and competencies across all sectors, including vocational education and training (VET), to ensure an uninterrupted learning process. BEYZO aims to contribute to digital transformation by developing digital readiness, resilience, and capacity among VET educators, enabling them to deliver quality, inclusive training

opportunities in online and hybrid environments. This is achieved through several key objectives, such as increasing knowledge on best practices in online and hybrid VET delivery, supporting VET educators in adapting offline training to online and hybrid settings, and improving the skills and expertise of VET educators in facilitating inclusive quality learning processes.

MICRO CREDENTIALS

BEYZO addresses the need for national and pan-European accreditation for digital facilitation skills training and contributes to defining micro-credentials, thereby supporting policymakers in understanding the evolving educational landscape. By focusing on developing digital resources and designing pedagogical approaches that promote effective and engaging educational opportunities, BEYZO aligns with the EU's goal of fostering digital well-being. However, what truly makes this project stand out is its emphasis on inclusion and accessibility. It ensures that digital learning environments cater to learners with additional educational needs, such as disabilities, lower socio-economic backgrounds, and second language learners. This holistic approach not only enhances the digital competencies of educators but also ensures that the learning process is more relevant, interactive, and easy to use, thereby promoting digital well-being among both educators and learners.

The BEYZO project is focused on improving VET educators' digital skills by providing various resources and training opportunities. The project offers digital competencies and resources.

COMPETENCES **Digital Competencies**

- Skills for Conducting Training in Online and Hybrid Environments: The project concentrates on equipping VET educators with the necessary skills to effectively conduct training and educational activities in both online and hybrid settings.
- Enabling Inclusive Quality Learning Processes: Educators are trained to enable inclusive and high-quality learning processes in online and hybrid spaces, ensuring accessibility and inclusion for all learners.
- Core Digital Facilitation Competencies: The project develops a set of core digital facilitation competencies that VET educators can use to enhance their teaching methods in digital environments.

Resources

- **Training-the-Trainer Curriculum:** A comprehensive curriculum is developed to train VET educators in online and hybrid facilitation skills. This curriculum includes frameworks for adapting training programs to digital environments and exploring various e-learning tools.

- **Digital/E-Learning Resources:** The project creates a web-based set of resources that include video tutorials, online presentations, and downloadable guides. These resources are designed to support VET educators in developing digital competencies for delivering training in online and hybrid settings.

- **Position Paper on Core Competencies:** A position paper outlining pan-European core competencies benchmarks for the VET sector in online and hybrid learning environments is produced.

Overall, these resources and competencies aim to bridge the digital skills gap in the VET sector and support educators in delivering effective and inclusive training in digital formats. Beyond Zoom (BEYZO) positions itself as a proactive initiative to enhance digital well-being by equipping vocational education and training (VET) educators with the necessary digital competencies and resources to deliver inclusive, high-quality training in online and hybrid environments. The project emphasises the importance of digital readiness, resilience, and capacity-building to ensure that educators can effectively navigate and mitigate the challenges associated with digital transformation, thereby fostering a more equitable and accessible learning experience for all learners, including those from marginalised communities.

DISCUSSION

Discussion

The argument put forth by Beyond Zoom (BEYZO) regarding digital well-being emphasises the importance of improving digital competencies and establishing inclusive, adaptable learning environments. This is crucial for effectively delivering vocational education and training (VET) in both online and hybrid settings. The focus is not only on addressing the immediate educational needs arising from the COVID-19 pandemic but also on ensuring long-term resilience and inclusivity in digital education. Supporting this argument are several pieces of evidence.

1. Digital Competence Framework for Educators (DigCompEdu)

The DigCompEdu framework underscores the need for a broader and more sophisticated set of competencies due to the rapidly changing demands on teaching professions. The urgency to enhance digital skills and competencies across all sectors, including VET, has been highlighted by the COVID-19 pandemic to ensure an uninterrupted learning process.

2. European Commission's Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027)

The European Commission stresses the significance of establishing effective and inclusive digital education ecosystems to enhance the well-being of learners and improve their educational and employment prospects. It prioritises bridging the digital gap and ensuring that digital tools and environments are accessible and supportive for all learners, especially those with disabilities and special educational needs.

3. Impact of COVID-19 on VET Sector

The sudden shift to remote and online training due to COVID-19 has revealed significant gaps in digital education readiness. A public consultation for the Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) showed that almost 60% of respondents had not used distance and online learning before the crisis, highlighting the need for more relevant, interactive, and easy-to-use online learning resources.

4. Inclusive and Accessible Learning Environments

BEYZO strongly highlights inclusion and accessibility, ensuring that digital learning environments cater to learners with additional educational needs, such as disabilities, lower socio-economic backgrounds, and second language learners. This holistic approach seeks to enhance the digital competencies of educators and make the learning process more relevant, interactive, and user-friendly, promoting digital well-being among both educators and learners.

COUNTER ARGUMENTS

One potential opposing view is that digital tools and environments can be distracting for students, leading to decreased focus and engagement in hybrid classrooms. Critics argue that the presence of digital devices can tempt students to engage in non-educational activities, such as social media or gaming, which can detract from their learning experience.

While it is true that digital tools can be distracting, this issue can be mitigated through effective digital well-being strategies. According to RAES (2022), digital well-being involves creating adaptable and inclusive learning spaces that meet diverse student needs and ensure that digital tools effectively support student engagement and learning. By integrating physical and digital environments thoughtfully and providing technological solutions that facilitate connectivity and expertise exchange, educators can enhance the learning experience and minimise distractions.

Another opposing view is that the digital divide can exacerbate existing inequalities, particularly for students from lower socio-economic backgrounds or those with disabilities. Critics argue that not all students have equal access to digital tools and high-speed internet, which can hinder their ability to participate fully in hybrid learning environments.

The European Commission's Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) underlines the importance of addressing the digital divide to ensure that digital tools and environments are accessible and supportive for all learners. The plan calls for developing digital skills and competencies that promote emotional well-being and resilience, enabling individuals to navigate both digital and physical worlds safely and ethically. Additionally, initiatives like the Beyond Zoom (BEYZO) project focus on inclusion and accessibility, ensuring that digital learning environments cater to learners with additional educational needs, such as disabilities and lower socio-economic backgrounds. This holistic approach helps bridge the digital divide and promotes digital well-being among all learners.

A further opposing view is that many educators may not be adequately prepared to use digital tools and effectively facilitate hybrid learning environments. Critics argue that the rapid shift to digital education, accelerated by the COVID-19 pandemic, has left many teachers struggling to adapt to new technologies and teaching methods.

The BEYZO project addresses this concern by focusing on developing digital readiness, resilience, and capacity among vocational education and training (VET) educators. The project aims to enhance the skills and expertise of VET educators in facilitating inclusive quality learning processes in online and hybrid settings. By increasing knowledge of best practices in online and hybrid VET delivery and supporting educators in adapting offline training to digital formats, BEYZO ensures that teachers are well-equipped to navigate the challenges of digital transformation. This proactive approach not only enhances the digital competencies of educators but also provides a more effective and engaging learning experience for students.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion

In conclusion, the importance of digital well-being in hybrid classrooms cannot be overstated. The integration of digital tools and environments to support student engagement and learning, as well as the creation of adaptable and inclusive learning spaces, are essential for fostering a balanced and healthy educational experience. The European Commission's Digital Education Action Plan (2021-2027) emphasises the necessity of creating effective and inclusive digital education ecosystems to enhance the well-being of learners and educators. This plan highlights the need to address the digital divide and ensure that digital tools are accessible and supportive for all learners, including those with disabilities and special educational needs.

The Beyond Zoom (BEYZO) project aligns with this vision by focusing on developing digital readiness, resilience, and capacity among vocational education and training (VET) educators. By increasing knowledge of best practices in online and hybrid VET delivery and supporting educators in adapting offline training to these settings, BEYZO contributes to the digital transformation of education. The project also understands the importance of inclusion and accessibility, ensuring that digital learning environments cater to learners with additional educational needs, such as disabilities, lower socio-economic backgrounds, and second language learners. The broader implications of this position are significant. By fostering digital well-being, we can create more equitable and accessible learning experiences that benefit all students, regardless of their backgrounds. This approach not only enhances the digital competencies of educators but also ensures that the learning process is more relevant, interactive, and easy to use. As the COVID-19 pandemic has shown, the urgency of enhancing digital skills and competencies across all sectors is paramount to ensuring an uninterrupted learning process.

Therefore, it is crucial for policymakers, educators, and stakeholders to prioritise digital well-being in their efforts to improve education systems. By supporting initiatives like the BEYZO project and adhering to the guidelines set forth by the European Commission, we can work towards a future where digital education is both practical and inclusive. We encourage readers to explore the topic of digital well-being further and consider how they can contribute to creating a more balanced and supportive digital learning environment for all students.

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EMPOWERING VET EDUCATORS FOR DIGITAL
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Beyond Zoom Position Papers

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