

Final Report

Quality for E-Learning in Africa

**International Hands-on Training Workshop for Decision
Makers, Educational Practitioners and Students**

**Organised by the UNESCO,
the European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning,
and the University of Duisburg-Essen**

at the

**United Nations Congress Centre,
Addis Ababa,
May 24th, 2006**

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In May 2006, the UNESCO Division for Higher Education, Paris (Stamenka Uvalic-Trumbic), the European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning (Dr. Ulf-Daniel Ehlers), supported by the European Commission, and the University of Duisburg Essen organised a one-day workshop with the title "Quality for E-Learning in Africa" which took place co-located to the first international conference in ICT enhanced learning, the E-Learning Africa, in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

The workshop was attended by over 60 participants from over 20 countries, mainly from Africa. It comprised 5 plenary sessions, 8 focus group sessions, over seven hours of presentations and experts' input from over 17 experts from Africa, Europe and North America, and followed a concept of active participation and involvement of all participants through discussions and exchange of experiences. The workshop was a breakthrough for the field of quality development and assurance in e-learning because for the first time experts from all over Africa were brought together, in order to discuss quality themes specifically for the field of technology enhanced learning.

It was followed by a three-week discussion phase which took place as an international virtual discussion led by the European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning which resulted in an exchange of over 100 messages in the discussion forum between African and European experts.

All in all the workshop and the virtual discussion clearly showed that:

- there is a **need for enhanced development of quality** in education in general and e-learning in particular in Africa. This need comprises the stimulation of a debate in the professional educational communities, the development of concepts and strategies for quality development, quality assurance and mutual recognition of the quality of educational programs and systems between African countries, as well as the development of internationally recognised quality marks specifically for the field of technology enhanced learning.
- the developments, discussions and the coordination of the debate on quality in education and e-learning should be supported and led **by Africans and should be a discussion for Africa** and Africans. This does not mean to exclude international stakeholders, networks on quality, already existing frameworks, strategies and tools and experts from the international quality community. Yet, it emphasises the need to establish a self-confident professional debate on quality amongst the African stakeholders, networks, organisations and countries.
- a **consensus process between African countries** is necessary in order to develop quality concepts which are recognised throughout Africa. This can only be done through finding consensus of how quality can be recognised and what could be minimal standards and agreed-on procedures. Such a consensus should be lead and organised by stakeholders which are already established in the field of education and e-learning like the Association of African Universities, the African Virtual University and others, and supported by international organisations to guarantee a compatibility with international developments. Other international initiatives, like the European Commission, the European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning and alike should be contributing actors to this process.

1. INTRODUCTION

The use of ICT in the field of education gains more and more importance for both enhancing educational capacities and contributing to well being and prosperity of citizens. Quality provision becomes a key element to assure a high level of educational opportunities and protect as well as support students. This was the main reason to organise a training workshop on “Quality for E-Learning in Africa”. It was a joint initiative of the **European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning** which is supported by the European Commission, the **UNESCO**, Division for Higher Education and the **University of Duisburg-Essen** in Germany. The workshop focused on quality in the field of e-learning in higher education and its specific conditions. Both theoretical backgrounds of quality development of e-learning, and practical application of successful tools in the field were addressed. The workshop was provided by African experts in cooperation with European and international experts and comprised three plenary and eight panel sessions, each led in co-moderation of African and European or international experts.

As a follow up a virtual discussion phase was organised which has been animated by the Working Group for Global Learning of the European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning. The event hosted

over 65 participants from 27 countries in total, amongst the over 15 Africa countries. It was organised as an interactive training session on quality assurance and quality development in which participants entered into an interactive dialogue with the experts, sharing their experiences and discussing their specific needs.

“Quality for E-Learning in Africa” was chosen to be one out of 13 pre-conference workshops to the *International eLearning Africa Conference* May 24-26, 2006 (<http://www.elearning-africa.com/>) The conference provided an ideal host for the workshop. It was attended by 832 participants from 80 countries, making it the largest event on educational technologies and development ever to have taken place on the African continent. It provided a massive capacity-building event for all stakeholders and educational and training professionals. Over 70% of the participants came from African countries – a figure that shows the vital interest in eLearning on the continent and made eLearning Africa a real African conference.

“I believe that Africa doesn’t have to repeat mechanically the same mistakes committed in Europe, focusing on the distribution of pre-digested (quality) contents, ignoring the link with organizational learning and knowledge management, treating the learners like mere consumers of (quality) learning objects tested with (quality) multiple choice questions. Perhaps Africa can bypass this stage, creating directly the African Institute for eLearning, making the Quality activities an integral part of its services, or an affiliate body providing services to governments and institutions”

A participant of the virtual discussion

2. WORKSHOP METHODOLOGY AND PROGRAM

The workshop day was moderated by Ulf-Daniel Ehlers (EFQUEL/ University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany, see page 9) and Tove Lyngra (UNESCO, Paris), and was organised in 5 sessions, session one, four and five as a plenary, and session two and three being break up

“A quality education and thus quality e-learning is an urgent need in order to improve living conditions in Africa”
A workshop participant

sessions where the participants split into focus groups with different topics. In special reporting phases they had the opportunity to

exchange about the outcomes of the focus groups sessions at the end of each focus group discussion. The UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education were used as an overarching framework, providing a quality concept to which all workshop topics could be related throughout the workshop. The participants were asked to consider the relevance of the Guidelines to the specific conditions e-learning.

2.1 WORKSHOP METHODOLOGY

The workshop methodology followed the principle of involving participants into active dialogues. In this method the participants are viewed as expert for their own specific *quality challenge* and are asked to contribute actively it to the group discussions. Each session was co-moderated by one moderator from the African region in cooperation with one moderator from a different region of the world. In the beginning of the workshop a profile of needs was generated in the beginning of the workshop day. This was used by the experts throughout the day in their focus group sessions to address the specific needs of the participants while promoting their topics.

The workshop method gained through mainly three factors enormous potential which resulted in excellent results: *First*, the participants were from very different contexts and countries throughout Africa, so that they could give very fruitful impulses to each others situations by taking on views from different angles. *Secondly*, the experts and moderators provided excellently prepared statements and concepts to the sessions which could be facilitated by the participants for their own contexts. *Thirdly*, the workshop was prominently supported UNESCO and thus raised huge interests in the community of African educators, and through EFQUEL which allowed the possibility to contribute with bringing in a European network of experts and viewpoints.

Session 1: Quality in e-education: A Key Issue or add-on? Welcome, Introduction, Needs & Expectations
Session 2: International Quality Models, Strategies and Methods - Introduction (20 Min.) - 4 Focus Groups (70 Min.) → Sign up! - Reporting & Discussion (30 Min.)
Session 3: Tools for Tomorrow's Quality Development in E-Learning - Introduction: UNESCO HEODLKB (30 Min.) - 4 Focus Groups (70 Min.) → Sign up! - Reporting (20 Min.)
Session 4: Showcase and Networking
Session 5: Conclusions & Next Steps Conclusions, Virtual Discussion & Closing Remarks

Fig. 1: Workshop Structure

2.2 WORKSHOP PROGRAM

The workshop day was divided into five different sessions of different length and was held in the United Nations Congress Centre in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. It amounted to a total of seven hours of input and presentation and five hours, 20 min. of active discussion and group work. The participants were very active and took stake in lively discussions which covered a broad range of topics. Challenges, needs, dilemmas and recommendations were expressed. The sessions comprised many topics in the field of quality development and e-learning and were framed by statements from prominent UNESCO representatives.

Session 1 (Plenary): Quality in e-education: A key issue or add on?

- Opening remarks & welcome address by Awad Elhassan, Director of the UNESCO Office Addis Ababa, Ethiopia and Joseph Ngu, Director a.i. of the IICBA, UNESCO

- Introduction to the topic of quality assurance & Identification of participants learning needs, contexts and specific work situations by Ulf Ehlers, EFQUEL, Germany
- Setting the Scene: UNESCO/OECD Guidelines on Quality Provision in Cross-Border Higher Education by Tove Lyngra, Division for Higher Education, UNESCO, Paris

Session 2: International Quality Models, Strategies and Methods

- See fig. 2 for details

Session 3: Tools for Tomorrow's Quality Development in E-Learning

- See fig. 2 for details

Session 2: Focus Groups			
UNESCO/ OECD Guidelines (Tove Lyngra)	Open Educational Ressources (Derek Keats)	Quality From a Learners' Perspective (Ulf Ehlers, Gerald Roos)	Quality Marks and Certification (Kathryn Barker, Placid Njoku)
Session 3: Focus Groups			
UNESCO HEODLKB (Neil Butcher)	UNESCO HEODLKB (Bridgette Monge Tiaka)	European Quality Observatory (Ulf Ehlers, Tesfaye Teshome)	OER Repositories (Speranza Ndege, Leonard Oloo Mware)

Fig. 2: Focus Group Topics

Session 4 (Plenary): Showcase and Networking

This session provided presentations on projects and initiatives in the Africa region. A short presentation of each project was followed by an interactive session which focussed on a dialogue between presenters and participants.

Session 5 (Plenary): Conclusions & Next Steps

- Conclusions and next steps (Tove Lyngra, UNESCO, France, Ulf Ehlers, EFQUEL, Germany)
- Closing Remarks, Joseph Ngu, Director a.i., UNESCO, IICBA

3. WORKSHOP OUTCOMES

The workshop has proven to be a successful contribution to the debate and capacity building process in the field of quality for e-learning in Africa. It provided a broad range of outcomes of which in the following only a few substantial can be captured in this report.

All in all the workshop supported the awareness raising process for the topic and helped giving a relevance and room to the field of quality within the frame of the conference. It

“Quality development should be done by Africa for Africa”
Participant of the virtual discussion forum

promoted the work of the UNESCO and of the European Commission (through EFQUEL) in the field of quality in the African region and

allowed for new contacts and networks amongst the participants – a possibility which was emphasised as very valuable by the participants.

In the following three main discussion strands will be summarised:

- a) **Needs and challenges** for quality development for e-learning in Africa,
- b) Main outcomes of the **focus group discussions**, and
- c) Main message of the **virtual discussions** following the workshop.

3.1 QUALITY FOR E-LEARNING IN AFRICA: NEEDS AND CHALLENGES

Amongst the challenges, participants highlighted, that **poor connectivity** and high cost of **infrastructure** are seen as general quality issues which are (still) an issue for the African regions, and should not be forgotten in the discussions about quality in e-learning. The **motivation** of students in online courses to continue and complete their coursework and high drop out rates were formulated to be a further challenge for e-learning and strongly connected to the quality of the e-learning provision. Also the quality and availability of **learning materials** for e-learning was addressed. For the updating and quality assurance of **Open Educational Resources (OER)** it was suggested to use peer review concepts as a possible solution, an example/ model for this could be WIKIPEDIA. The challenge then lies in the organisation of an African contributing community which takes over responsibility for the peer reviews.

Apart from conceptual challenges in the field of quality in e-learning there is a need to develop a culture, a debate on quality and a community of professionals which bring the topic of quality to the foreground of education, research and policy.

As a possible concept to monitor and assure the quality of e-learning it was suggested to explore the development of a **minimum standard** for e-learning. One basic challenge in the field of e-learning quality for Africa which was emphasised by the participants is the transfer of educational **face-to-face modes to e-learning** modes in delivering a high quality education. This issue can be seen as underlying many other mentioned aspects because it touches on the process of changing an educational culture. The participants saw an urgent need to enter into a process of openly **sharing experiences** and resources for quality development in e-learning. This issue was directly linked with the aspect of creating a pan-African network for quality assurance and also for the creating and exchange of OERs. A need for OER repositories which are directly usable for the African context was articulated and it was asked if this could not also be supported and/ or recognised by governments to facilitate the use and assure a certain quality of the materials.

The issue of **quality marks** was mentioned as well – defined as a system that brings credibility to an e-learning provider from a consumer perspective. In particular two issues were raised: the need for a **recognised quality mark** for the African region and the existing **uncertainty** in the field of quality marks in general. A way should be found to promote transparency in the field of quality marks.

3.2 QUALITY IN FOCUS

- **Quality Marks and Certification:** It was emphasized that the definition of a Quality Mark (QM) for e-learning demands for the definition of e-learning. A QM should bring credibility to e-learning providers in Africa. It should be Africa-specific but compatible with international requirements. It was emphasized that QMs are usually given by a consortium of institutions and that the community of a consortium gives credibility because of the high consensus amongst the actors – they need a consensus process. A QM should make sure that e-learning meets the needs of the consumers. In the UNESCO/ OECD Guidelines a need for great awareness of QMs can be seen. Such a QM must be accepted by the national quality assurance agencies. It should be encouraged that governments establish national QMs in African countries.
- **Quality in E-Learning from a Learners Perspective:** The concept of learner oriented quality development was discussed. Learner orientation was viewed as a necessity rather

than an option for quality development in e-learning – for all areas of learning, education and e-learning. Learners quality concepts were seen as the reference point for negotiation processes between the stakeholders in a quality development process. In this connection it was suggested to develop participative negotiation models for education in order to be able to implement learner orientation into every quality development process. Participation and negotiation of the learning processes and learning situations should take place in order to involve the learners from the start in creating the conditions for a good learning. It was stressed that there is a need for an organisation culture of learner orientation – it can not be achieved in an isolated approach or activity of a single teacher in an organisation.

- **FORE! – Open and Free Educational Resources:** Two focus groups discussed concepts and repositories of open educational resources (OER). It was mentioned that these resources are *open* and *free* (FORE – Free and Open educational RESources) but have to be adopted to each specific situation of teaching and learning, and to the respective organisational context in which they are used. The creation of OERs and the use were discussed and examples demonstrated. It was suggested that there should be as few barriers as possible for the creation of OERs – it should be able to create and store them within 5 minutes. Within the topic of OERs networks also play an important role for the assurance of quality and for recognition. Peer review approaches within contributors networks can be used for quality assurance. One issue which was discussed was how to animate African stakeholders to participate in creating and sharing OERs for African educational contexts – from Africa for Africa. Further questions were covered: Which skills do we have in African Universities? How can we raise the level of activity of African contributors to OER repositories? How to update and assure quality/ validity of resources? How to evaluate articles and resources? It was stated that there should be repositories, supervised by governments in order to ensure the trust of the materials stored there, and that a network of African institutions for materials is needed.
- **The European Quality Observatory:** It was discussed that the problem with finding a suitable quality approach for a specific educational purpose – e. g. for improving the learner support in an E-Learning-Environment – is often not that there are too few approaches to choose from but rather that it is difficult to match the divers range of available approaches with the own specific needs. What is needed in this situation is a quality concept for quality approaches in order to a) to analyse and compare different quality approaches, b) to access information on the usage of quality approaches, c) to evaluate different implementation/ usage strategies, and d) to have information on key factors for failure or success. The European Quality observatory (<http://www.eqo.info>) was presented as a decision support tool which helps in this situation, and provides a database which allows to search for quality strategies, compare them and assess their suitability for certain educational contexts. The European Quality Observatory is the result of a European Commission funded project, led by the Institute for Information Systems for Production and Operations Management of the University of Duisburg-Essen (<http://wip.wi-inf.uni-essen.de>).
- **Higher Education Open and Distance Learning Knowledge Base:** The session focussed on presenting the decision support tool (DST) which is built in connection to the Knowledge Base (www.africaodl.org). The DST is as a tool for making and running self-administered questionnaires that makes it possible to link questions and answers to relevant information resources available in knowledge bases. It aims at collecting reliable data and best practices in Higher Education Open and Distance Learning. The project partners, under the coordination of UNESCO HQ (Paris) and Field offices in Harare and Bangkok, developed three regional Knowledge Bases, collecting and indexing relevant

information taking into account regional needs. The feedback of the participants was in general that the tool was seen as useful and necessary. As the critical success factor for such an approach was the design of the questionnaires pointed out. The discussion about the DST stimulated a debate about the key factors for quality development: Contextualisation possibility for own specific purpose, the importance of local best practices, the lack of documented best practice, the need for a clear description of the target audience for the DST, the necessity to include feedback from students.

3.3 QUALITY FOR E-LEARNING IN AFRICA: A VIRTUAL DISCUSSION

Following the face-to-face workshop a three week phase of virtual discussion took place. It was structured into three main questions which each was discussed in one week: a) What are your concepts (in use) or ideas for the quality assurance of e-learning? b) What do you suggest to amend in order to apply the UNESCO/ OECD Guidelines to e-learning? and c)

How do you see the quality development and assurance for e-learning in Africa in the future? The discussion was moderated by the European Foundation for Quality in E-learning and proved

“Quality and e-learning both address issues of transforming educational organisations. If this is not taken into account the potential of these concepts is not realised.”

A participant of the virtual discussion

to be very successful. Over 100 messages were sent in the three week phase to the mailing list. The main results of the discussion can be summarised in the following points:

- Quality development and assurance is a comprehensive process and needs to be considered differently at several levels: individual - organisational - national. Quality aims at improving learning experiences, the learners has a key role in the definition and assurance of quality. Quality and e-learning both address issues of transforming educational organisations. If this is not taken into account the potential of these concepts is not realised.
- In Africa, many countries are grappling with the relatively recent introduction of internal and external quality assurance practices in higher education. Many African institutions are still at the outset of introducing quality assurance, and also at the outset of introducing e-learning – both are big changes which take time to adapt to.
- In Africa should be a greater awareness for the importance of quality *development* as an internal process, and not so much about quality *assurance* – which usually comes from the outside and involves standards. Quality development is a comprehensive process and has to take all relevant stakeholders and factors into account, it is about creating a quality culture. African organisations need to build their own organisational quality cultures.
- Africa should not followed the same steps Europe has taken in the same order but should try to learn from the experience made – this can be done through mutual African-European experience sharing and cooperation.
- The building of a comprehensive quality network and mutual recognition of quality standards and procedures can only be achieved through consensus processes. Such a consensus should be lead and organised by stakeholders which are already established in the field of education and e-learning like the Association of African Universities, the African virtual University and others, and supported by international organisations to guarantee a compatibility with international developments. Other international initiatives, like the European Commission, the European Foundation for Quality in E-Learning and alike should be contributing actors to this process.

4. FINAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The international workshop led Quality can be identified as an urgent need for e-learning in Africa. This need comprises the stimulation of a debate in the professional teaching and educational communities, the development of concepts and strategies for quality development, quality assurance and mutual recognition of the quality of educational programs and systems between African countries. The development and introduction of an African – but internationally recognised – quality marks should be started in order to raise awareness, strengthen providers credibility and clients benefit. It is important for Africa to take implement this approach by Africans for Africans. This it emphasises the need to establish a self-confident professional debate on quality amongst the African stakeholders, networks, organisations and countries.

A consensus process between African countries should be initiated and supported. This is necessary in order to develop quality concepts which are recognised throughout Africa. This can only be done through finding consensus of how quality can be recognised and what could be minimal standards and agreed on procedures. Such a consensus should be lead and organised by stakeholders which are already established in the field of education and e-learning like the Association of African Universities, the African virtual University and others, and supported by international organisations to guarantee a compatibility with international developments.

In the workshop discussions it became clear that concepts like the UNESCO/ OECD guidelines are a valuable tool to bring forth the quality development on basis of sound and clear values and agreed norms. The Guidelines were considered inherently relevant for e-learning due to their generic nature. Especially the guidelines' central principles for quality assurance of a) competent national authority and b) international cooperation were held to be valid. The participants emphasized that quality assurance of *e-learning* should not be held separate from quality assurance of other educational modes and that national quality assurance systems for higher education should encompass e-learning as well as other modes of learning/teaching.

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