e-Hoop - Unified e-Hoop Approach to Learning Differences

Deliverable information	
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The deliverable 2.4 belongs to WP2 which will provide the input for development of the sample training content and delivery tools in WP3 and WP4. More specifically, the current document is part of the activities to be carried out in the context of Task T2.1 – Analysis of current situation.

The foreseen activities & deliverables under task T2.1 are:

- D2.1 – 5 Country Reports on Obstacles to an ideal educational institution - Digital Reports.
- D2.3 - Report and on-line database of existing FLOSS tools supporting personalised learning.
- D2.4 - Definition of the top ten reasons for educators and top ten reasons for learners for using the platform.

The activities of WP2 start with the identification of the current state-of-play through the elaboration of the five country reports (D2.1), one for each country of the partnership. The analysis work for the elaboration of the country reports will lead to the identification of the most prominent FLOSS (Free/Libre Open Source Software) tools supporting personalised learning (D2.3) and the identification of motivational material for the promotion of e-Hoop to educators and learners through the design of a Training Unit targeting Educators and enhancing their ICT Competencies (D2.4) and it may be revised several times until the end of the project in order to take into account any development with respect to the most prominent tools, as well as any new trends with respect to the top ten reasons for using e-Hoop from the viewpoints of educators and learners.

The objectives of the current document are to define the reasons which will motivate educators and learners to use the e-hoop learning platform. Motivational material for convincing educators to upload their learning objects to the platform and for learners to use the platform will be obtained from the design and implementation of a Training Unit that will enhance educator competencies in using ICT tools as instruction materials. This outcome is closely linked, complementary even to the dissemination efforts for the project. Through the training we will also identify the 10 most compelling reasons for using the platform (10 reasons for educators and 10 reasons for learners).

2. Introduction

Asynchronous educational services may be used later than the time of their generation, and by overcoming geographical limitations, provide a student-centered standard, that allows students to learn at their own pace and investigate the material at any depth they wish. These past years a larger number of educational institutions as well as companies, implement asynchronous education services over the internet, while at the same time it has become an important research sector in many university departments of informatics and education, to an extent that the term e-learning has been established as a region with distinct features regarding the media used.

In distance education the student often feels *isolated* (Nkambou & Tchetagni, 2004, Lazonder et al., 2003, Pena-Shaff, & Nicholls, 2004) consequently the environment to be used is an important parameter for the success of a distance education program.

An important e-learning tool is the e-hoop platform which provides a high level of interaction that encourages cooperation and has an impact on the learning process.

Based on the basic functionalities that have been considered in D2.3, and were the selection of an learning environment, that will allow a large degree of personalisation, accessibility especially to disadvantaged groups and being able to offer advanced features of content management, the choice of the consortium was to go towards a open source CMS platform that will be enhanced using LMS add on features rather than towards a classical LMS platform.

This document presents the relevant study which was carried out at the elearning field, with emphasis to identify the reasons for using the platform for educators and learners.

3. Framework

Learning processes are continuously being affected by many circumstances such as social trends, technological changes and so on (Ertl, et al, 2010, García, 2005). One of the main representative changes has been produced by the application of ICT, which has been used in several areas in order to improve different activities, processes and policies. However ICT technology application has not had the transformational impact that can be observed in other application fields such as culture, society and economy (Mott and Wiley, 2009).

The main reasons for this lack of success can be due to: 1) Institutional resistance to change regarding the introduction of certain technologies in formal environments (Web 2.0 tools, Social Networks, eCommerce strategies and so on) (Mott and Wiley, 2009, Piscitelli, et al., 2010). 2) The insistence on the technology application when it is not required or seen as a solution. This application follows the hammer theory, outlined by Chadwick in 1998. He thinks that if you give a hammer to a five year old child, she assumed that it can be applied to many objects but they cannot (Chadwick, 2001). 3) The digital literacy necessity. The fact that lot of teachers and students are digital immigrants and the younger generations of pupils are digital natives [Bennett, et al., 2008) implies a confrontation and a gap that makes it difficult that they can take advantage of new technologies. 4) The lack of connection between the formal, non-formal and informal environments makes it difficult to improve learning processes and the centralization of the activity in only one context. 5) In addition to these factors a lot of technological applications and tools are defined without taking into account the final user, which means that its adoption and application can be difficult.

Despite all these factors there exist some popular tools such as the LMS, but also suffer from problems, such as the lack of openness, resistance to change, failure to take into account the user, lack of integration with informal context and so on. In fact, users are beginning to use them only in institutional contexts because they prefer other tools and technologies to learning activities [Mott and Wiley, 09]. Thus they should be adapted or they risk to be rejected. LMS must become what may be considered Personal Learning Environments (PLE) or must be opened to integrate the activity that is performed in those new environments.

According to Usrey (1999) the factors affecting the efficiency of asynchronous distance learning are: a) the student; b) the tutor; c) the contents; d) the environment (as a whole).

Based on the above and according to what is described in D1, E-Hoop is an online hub promoting the advances of technology for lifelong learning. It aims to provide a flexible tool that can be tailored to e learner's individual needs. Its unique adaptability allows users to insert their own learning material and use it according to their specific requirements.

One of the main aims of the e-hoop is to create a universal, dynamic and adaptable e-learning environment which educators can use, modify and expand, and learners with diverse needs easily use and benefit from it.

This document contains the conclusions from the answers from the interviews given by 32 tutors and 184 students. The answers to the relevant questions are presented per category, based on the classification made during the study of international bibliography.

4. Questions

Based on the above framework was trying to determine questions regarding both the educators as well as to students as follows.

Tutors

As regards to the tutors, raised some questions, like the following examples:

- What are the characteristics of an attractive up-to-date learning platform proper for person at the risk of exclusion?
- What special features does the increasing use of mobile devices require from of an up-to - date learning platform suitable for social and cultural inclusion?
- What should a learning platform be like to fulfil the prerequisites of curricular demands?
- Are you willing to upload your own learning objects to the platform to fulfil the prerequisites of your national curricular demands?
- What different aspects should be taken into consideration in the process of choosing the platform a learning platform for the special need users?
- What are the challenges for special needs users to develop their competences adequately by means of an up-to-date learning platform?
- What features should a learning platform have to enable an intensified communication between the schools and the homes of special needs learners?

Students

With regard to the students, raised questions, for instance, as follows:

- What are the characteristics of an attractive up-to-date learning platform?
- What special features does the increasing use of mobile devices offer to the use of educational platforms?
- How would you like to adapt your own educational experiences to benefit your special needs and the curricular needs of your school?
- What different aspects should be taken into consideration in the process of choosing a learning platform?

Because the detailed analysis is beyond the scope of this document, we will describe a few examples of the questions, analyzing them. For example to the question for teachers: "Which are in your view the most important characteristics of a fully inclusive e-Learning authoring tool?", the options given were as follows: Accessibility (conformance to the Web Content Accessibility Guidelines (WCAG) at least Level AA, Enhanced design tools, Multilingualism (UTF8 support), Integration with powerful tools (e.g. PowerPoint, Camtasia, Snagit and Flypaper Pro), Interoperability (e.g. support publication to HTML5, Tin Can API or SCORM), Easy to use (wizards, templates, themes, online training etc.), (multi-)object editing (edit, update, move single or multiple objects at a time), Intuitive interface (View, navigate and edit your course easily. Quickly locate, reorder, rename, copy, paste, delete and manage pages in your course, WYSIWIG editor), Built in media library, Collaboration, Social media support, Quiz/questionnaire creator, Certificate creator, Community

Also indicative to the question: "What special features does the increasing use of mobile devices require from of an up-to - date learning platform suitable also for social and cultural inclusion?"

the options given were as follows: Cross platform support (at least iOS and Android), Deliver a wide variety of learning content to your learners (HTML courses, videos, podcasts, flashcards, documents, quizzes and surveys), Limited dependency on Internet/GPRS (allows learners to access learning material even in offline mode), Customisable navigation (rename, hide, reorder, and color-code courses, favouriting blog posts, folders, and announcements with single clicks), Course communication tools for engaging students (e.g. discussion forum), Grading tool, Announcements functionality, DropBox integration, Push notifications (personalized notifications), Task manager, etc.

As for the learners, for example to the question: "What are the characteristics of an attractive up-to-date learning platform?" the options given were as follows: Assignment submission, Discussion forum, Files download, Grading, Instant messages, Online calendar, Online news and announcements, Online quiz, Wiki, Progress tracking.

The study concludes that an individualistic and holistic approach to learning is required, available to everybody for any learning inequalities to be removed. The reasons for using the e-Hoop platform are summarized below.

5. Conclusions

From the answers given, we can draw some conclusions regarding the reasons that the e-Hoop platform should be exploited:

Regarding the personalization of the teaching way by educators (top 10 reasons)

1. Enjoying all the benefits of pedagogical and technological innovation to offer a highly personalised learning experience.
2. Sharing your learning content easy, without sophisticated programming knowledge and by using a simple interface.
3. The e-Hoop platform offers proven scalability, reliability and interoperability thus facilitating the transfer and modification of your content across multiple platforms.
4. The e-Hoop platform as open source software is free to use, study, modify and distribute.
5. Now it is easier to incorporate multimedia elements into your e-learning content using the e-Hoop platform.
6. Customising the look and feel of the learning environment in way that is most suitable to you.
7. Creating learning communities that are easy to track and manage.
8. The e-Hoop platform can be customized to add desired features that are constantly renewed by the OSS community.
9. e-Hoop offers an abundance of tools for your learners to get the most out of the learning experience.
10. e-Hoop stocks a variety of learning materials and course templates. Many course templates to choose from!

Regarding the personalization of the learning way by learners (top 10 reasons)

1. Personalising the learning experience. Learning at their own pace, at their own time, at their own place!
2. Have immediate access to free and open Learning Materials incl. Open Educational Resources (OER).
3. Collaborate easily with their peers and educators exploiting the variety of collaborative tools of the e-Hoop platform.
4. The e-Hoop platform ensures easy access and usability for everyone due to its compliance with high accessibility standards.
5. The e-Hoop platform surpasses language and geographical barriers implementing a variety of language options.
6. Choosing what they want to learn from an extensive educational library.
7. Assess themselves, their learning progress, and receiving detailed scoring and feedback.
8. The e-Hoop platform ensures that their privacy and their personal information are protected.
9. Creating and showcasing their work in a course and other information while also creating their own personal portfolio.
10. Creating their own content and sharing it with educators and other learners.

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