ITELab project – Independent Evaluation 2018

Introduction

This document constitutes the second deliverable of the independent evaluator: it reports on the evaluation of the ITELab project, as performed in November and December 2018 when the three-year project had been running for almost 24 months. The evaluator will report one more time: towards the very end of the project, in December 2019.

In line with the Description of Work for this deliverable (6.3.1 / 6.3.2 / 6.3.3), the report from the independent evaluator reviews project operations and final deliverables with the aim of deciding whether project quality assurance processes have been effectively designed and applied. The deliverable will particularly report on: the extent to which feedback from the wider group of stakeholders attending Capacity Development Workshops and the Pedagogical Board have impacted upon and influenced the course and MOOC development process; and whether the University-ICT industry Forum is boosting innovation with higher education institutions providing initial teacher education.

Just as last year, this report focuses on the performance of the ITELab project. An additional component this year is the particular attention to the viewpoints of stakeholders that are outside the inner circle of the partnership. This information has been collected through face-to-face interviews with one work package coordinator and five project stakeholders, i.e. students, associate partners and Pedagogical Board members. Furthermore – and just as last year in the first report - representatives of each of the eleven core partners have provided input to this evaluation by completing a partner survey.

The core section of this report contains the findings of the interviews and the partner survey. It is ordered around the key topics addressed in the survey. Some questions were formulated in such a way that their outcomes can be compared with the previous evaluation report. The findings from the interviews complement the survey outcomes and are reported under the respective topics. In a final section, the evaluator provides his own considerations on the project in general and the evaluation results in particular, and issues recommendations for the third and final year of the ITELab project.

A draft version of this report has been submitted to and discussed with the project co-ordinator and the work package (WP) leader on quality assurance. Their input has been taken on board in the final version.

Findings
A. Activities undertaken in 2018

Each partner reported on the range of actions they undertook in the framework of the ITELab project throughout 2018. These activities are generally in line with the initial project plans. If things did not go entirely as planned, then respondents often referred to unforeseen challenges

within their own organisation that required a temporary shift of attention away from the project. For instance, one partner mentioned that "we were aiming for more direct input and a higher level of engagement [in the project] but were facing some internal organisational changes as well as a market that was growing quickly and demanded higher attention."

Asked what went particularly well in 2018, partners referred to different elements. Some of these elements were mentioned regularly and by several partners, such as the project leadership, the engagement of student teachers, the collaboration between industry and university in developing modules and MOOC, and the contribution of the pilot modules / MOOC evaluation to advancing the quality of these deliverables. Several partners and interviewees moreover indicated that they had very much liked the June 2018 workshop in Brussels: the fact that module/MOOC users and developers were meeting face-to-face was considered mutually beneficial. One partner reported that "pilot students who participated got the chance to become acquainted with different realities, with colleagues coming from different parts of Europe and with different school systems' backgrounds".

Partners also reported several actions that had been taking more time than envisaged, such as the recruitment of institutions and students who could test the pilot schemes of modules and MOOC. The development of the modules also took longer than foreseen with all partners, university and industry, involved in the co-design process, and asked to comment and input to the development of content for both the MOOC and modules. As one partner mentioned, 'in hindsight it would have been better to ensure all the industry partners are actively involved in the first version, rather than to do that after the beta pilot." Others referred to the ITE Forum and the recruitment and active involvement of Associate Partners thereby emphasising that a lot of efforts have gone into trying to recruit external partners and involve them in the ITE Forum: "we have tried some different approaches. The needs of the stakeholders are very different. It is an area to rethink in 2019". The evaluator understood that the wide range of stakeholders (small and large scale industry, universities offering different subject disciplines and/or initial teacher education, and ministries of education some of whom have remit for schools but not for higher education) are pursuing different interests when considering to join the project. Moreover, it was clear from the interviews that both project management and individual partners have gone at lengths to reach out to potential associate partners and to get the ITE Forum up and running. During 2018, the project actively explored possible linkages with other EU-funded initiatives such as Scientix, Nextlab and the Future Classroom Lab.

B. Partnership cooperation

In last year's report, the survey respondents were all either very or rather satisfied with the number and type of partners in ITELab, as well as with the degree of activity and cooperation within the partnership. The same question was asked this year, and the result is very similar: all partners are reportedly satisfied: three are very satisfied and eight are rather satisfied with the activity and cooperation among the partnership in 2018.

Partners think the project management and the collaborative spirit among the partners are particularly strong elements within the cooperation. They reported that the project has a 'good

structure, professional project management, good participation in partners meetings and workshops' and that 'the communication among partners works well, it is an open and constructive environment." One respondent emphasised that "there is a great belief in the overall aims of the project given that there is need for action in this area of initial teacher education". Still another partner stated that there is a "willingness among all partners, especially some on the industry side to try and find common ground on issues and parts of the module development that were proving more complex than initially envisaged."

Asked where partners felt they could do more to add to and contribute to the project, the ITE Forum and the engagement of students is mentioned several times. The ITE forum is a focus for rethink in 2019, while the project has taken steps to involve students, e.g. through the Student Teacher Voice which was developed after the June workshop and was launched at the EMINENT conference in December 2018. Some partners indicated that they will assign more time to the project in 2019.

Associate partners (AP) indicated that they were happy to join the project because of the good network that comes with the project, because it addresses the core of what they are doing, or because they were involved successfully in previous EUN projects. These partners, however, mentioned that they did not understand well what their precise role in the project would/could be. One AP representing a teacher education institution had attended two online forum meetings but found it difficult to participate in this forum as there was little active sharing and networking; this AP felt it was "in the outer ring of the area and not yet part of the network". Another AP representing an authority included information on the project in its network meetings at home and maintained good relations with one of the full partners. This AP is confident that with more project results coming up, there will be more opportunities to display outputs and hence trigger more action from new institutions.

C. Project Management

Last year, project management was the item that was most consistently applauded by all partners. This has not changed at all in year two: nine out of ten partners indicated that they are very satisfied with the way the project has been managed by EUN in 2018, while one partner was rather satisfied. The project coordinator is very much appreciated for her immediate responses and ongoing availability, as well as for the way she leads the project and the project meetings in a firm but friendly manner. One partner stated that "the coordination of this project has been outstanding: the organisation is very strong, the communication takes place with both the group and the individual partners, and all activities are thoroughly documented".

While respondents are very elaborate in their comments on what they find particularly strong about the overall coordination of the project, there are hardly any suggestions for further improvement in terms of management: one partner would like some more information about the reporting requirements and the control of documentation at an earlier stage, while another partner suggested to EUN to add further resources to the social media/public communication aspects of the project.

D. Work Packages

Last year, partners thought highly of the way in which the individual WPs are coordinated: six partners were very satisfied with WP 2 on ICT monitoring in initial teacher education, while four partners were very satisfied with WP 3 on module development and two partners expressed a similar appreciation for the coordination of the MOOC.

The results this year do not differ much: again, all partners are satisfied with the progress that has been made on the WP 2, 3, 4 and 5 (pilot/evaluation of modules and MOOC), with (almost) half of the partners being very satisfied and the other partners being rather satisfied. One partner commented that "really most things are going well. The Monitoring Report and Case Studies are most valuable, the modules and MOOC are also developing well and there was very nice evaluation feedback on these from partners and student teachers". Other partners indicated that "the modules have progressed well from the pilot; recognition must be made of the extreme constraints on the delivery of this across all project partners – language, different terms, different assessment modules, different teacher training programmes" and that "ITE monitoring has been particularly successful". Moreover, the MOOC "has met the expectations especially regarding the resources, the sharing of experiences and the use of twitter."

One student interviewee was very positive about the MOOC because it offered new insights both theoretical and practical that can be – and have been – tried in a classroom setting. Students – and parents – reportedly loved the innovative approaches the student introduced in school. Moreover, sharing these experiences during a project webinar was very rewarding as it also boosted the confidence of the student. The student interviewees also emphasised that they were taken seriously by the project developers when providing feedback.

Asked for improvement suggestions, partners mentioned – again – the ITE Forum and the number of students and institutions to be recruited for involvement in modules and MOOC. One partner mentioned that "lots is being done, with the help of many partners reaching out to their networks, but it is a slow and time-consuming job." Another partner indicated that "the content is sometimes more directed to teachers or future teachers with more experience in schools, making it difficult for students with little experience in practice to perform certain tasks". One student interviewee mentioned that when designing MOOC and modules, it is important to take into account that not all schools have the same policies and opportunities in terms of infrastructure. One partner indicated that "MOOC and modules feel like separate projects; more should be done to align the content". The evaluator understood from the interviews that a greater alignment was envisaged initially but proved impractical due to the challenge of aligning the different university teaching semesters. There is alignment in the themes covered by module A and the MOOC. One of the students would like to see more emphasis in the MOOC and the modules on the collaborative spirit and the exchanges among student teachers. This student moreover informed the evaluator that this suggestion had been taken on board for the updated version of MOOC/modules. It is partly in response to these and similar suggestions that the Student Hub area will be expanded in the main pilot to

accommodate more possibilities for student interactions, and also that the Student Voice Facebook page has been developed.

With regard to the evaluation of the pilot modules and MOOC, the evaluator read the draft evaluation report and spoke to a representative of the evaluation team. Both sources revealed that the evaluation was set up rigorously and that considerable feedback had been received from students, particularly with regard to the MOOC. A strong element of this MOOC was the flexible structure for students who can join when they want; it is very accessible, and the collaborative element is important. Feedback on the modules revealed that the contents are very interesting. One of the suggestions that came up from the evaluation – to develop a student and teacher hub in addition to issuing a module handbook – has been realised in the meantime.

E. Outcomes and deliverables

The project has produced several deliverables in the course of the second year, such as the modules, the MOOC, the ITE Monitoring Report and the Case Studies. Partners are invariably positive about the quality of these outputs and the way these deliverables were produced and reviewed. Suggestions for improvement include "more academic visibility of the work, perhaps through a project publication or a special issue in a carefully targeted academic journal" and "more work on the impact and sustainability of the project." The evaluator understood from the discussions that increasing academic visibility is being considered as part of the project impact / sustainability discussions to be taken forward in 2019. For instance, a symposium proposal has been developed for the upcoming ECER conference in September 2019, which brings together many of the academics involved in the project. Furthermore, a "more structured iterative process for producing and reviewing would enrich the outputs by allowing opportunities to adapt according to needs and set objectives".

Looking at the boxes they ticked in the closed survey questions, partners were rather satisfied with the way the Pedagogical Board and the ITE Forum are functioning. However, not all partners felt sufficiently informed to answer these questions. One partner suggested to get "more information about the role of the Pedagogical Board. Perhaps they could have a more active role."

The interviews with two Pedagogical Board (PB) members revealed that they have been providing feedback on several draft deliverables / pilot modules and MOOC and that their input was taken on board. Until now, however, these PB members have been contacted and operating individually, not as a team. They indicated that the recent appointment of new and additional members to the PB could be a good opportunity to schedule a range of online meetings with set agendas to discuss further drafts/pilots and issue feedback and recommendations as a team.

F. Ambitions for year 3

Last year, WP leaders indicated that the targets of the project are quite challenging in terms of content (the envisaged deliverables), timing (by the end of 2019, covering three calendar

rather than academic years) and number of users. Reaching these targets would require considerable efforts in terms of dissemination and awareness raising among a very specific target group: student teachers in their transition from school to work. Other ambitions concerned the range of Associate Partners and the establishment of a sustainable higher education – industry forum that would continue to exist beyond the lifetime of the project.

These challenges are still playing an important role in the considerations and plans of the different partners for year 3: recruiting more students and institutions, working on the sustainability, exploitation and impact of the project, involving more students in testing and evaluating the modules and MOOC, growing the number of associate partners, disseminating information on the concrete outputs of the project, etc.

Asked about positive indications that the partnership will deliver the project, partners mention the "great sense of overall commitment and buy-in to the goals", "the methodological project management", "the professionalism of the partnership", and the fact that "modules and MOOC are already at a very good stage". Moreover, "feedback from student teachers indicate that the project is delivering outputs of value".

Overall, partners are confident that the project will have a long-term impact. One crucial element for this impact is the knowledge alliance between industry and universities, which takes time to build. Contrary to other projects funded through the Knowledge Alliance strand, the ITELab project has many different stakeholders and interests, while it is very complex to meet all these needs and targets concerning initial teacher education.

While the quantitative targets are high and may indeed be difficult to reach fully, the partners are convinced that the learning they draw from the project outputs will find its way in relevant (policy) recommendations at different levels. As one respondent mentioned: "I feel confident that the partnership will make an impact. Whether we can hit our targets across all the areas is still a major challenge given the dynamics in this market. The project will certainly lead to very interesting recommendations for the policy makers".

Considerations

The following considerations by the independent evaluator are based on the survey results and interviews as described in the previous section.

First and foremost, the overall survey results are positive. Partners appreciate the partnership, the management, the work on the different WP and the outcomes/deliverables. Looking at the closed questions where partners could tick an option ranging from very satisfactory to not satisfactory at all, all questions are answered somewhere in between very satisfactory and rather satisfactory. This means that partners are satisfied with all aspects of the project. Although the differences in appreciation between the questions are small, they do reflect the effective level of progress and appreciation. It therefore comes as no surprise that project

management gets by far the highest score and that the work on the ITE Forum and the Pedagogical Board are at the lower end of the average scores.

Comments to the open questions confirm the above results. On the positive side, this feedback emphasises the collaborative spirit of the partnership, the strong, organised, documented and approachable management, the fact that modules and MOOC are on track, and that the partnership is likely to issue relevant recommendations on ICT in initial teacher education by the end of the project. In terms of development issues, the relations with industry and with associate partners require attention, and the project needs to roll out a sustainability and dissemination strategy if it wants to reach the quantitative targets. A further positive development in 2018 is the attention to and inclusion of student teachers as fully-fledged project stakeholders.

The interview with the evaluation team learns that students are overall satisfied with the modules and MOOC, that the evaluation data from the MOOC are quite extensive, and that the recommendations and points for improvement from the pilot evaluation are taken up in the next version of the deliverables. Based on the evaluation report and the interview, the independent evaluator considers that the protocols for running an evaluation with student teachers have been consistently applied by all universities that were involved in the pilot.

The student interviews learn that they appreciate the MOOC and the modules and confirm the findings from the evaluation report. Students moreover feel that their concerns and feedback on modules and MOOC are taken seriously. In general they appreciate the bigger role for students in the project and will take up their position in the Pedagogical Board.

The interviews with Pedagogical Board members learn that the individual members are well cast and keen to cooperate. Their involvement until now was limited to individual input on project deliverables but they look forward to a more structural involvement as a group in 2019. Interviewees were aware of the PB tasks – assuring quality, reaching out to the wider stakeholders, and issuing recommendations – but so far, they have mainly been dealing with quality assurance issues. They appreciate the extension of the Board and the inclusion therein of students. Based on these interviews, the independent evaluator considers that until now, the feedback and recommendations from the experts in the Pedagogical Board have impacted upon and influenced the course module and MOOC development process.

The interviews with and surveys completed by Associate Partners learn that they are interested in the project but have been involved only to a limited extent until now. This, however, is broadly in line with the original intentions and structure of the project. Although they have promoted the project in their own networks, AP representatives are unclear on what the project could bring to them: so far, they are passive spectators rather than active contributors or members of a network. Key ITELab representatives have indicated to the evaluator that in 2019 a more active involvement of AP's will be explored in relation to the ITE Forum, module aspects and the sustainability planning of the project.

In last year's report, the evaluator remarked that "the project seems potentially vulnerable in terms of action planning: notwithstanding the successful implementation so far, the project has little room for manoeuvre in delivering the outcomes envisaged for year 2 and 3. Any delay – notably with regard to producing the modules and the MOOC - is likely to cause a snow-ball effect. Moreover, the tasks ahead will require coordination at different levels (overall partnership, Work Packages, individual partners) and on an even broader range of outputs: developing and testing modules and MOOC, establishing a viable associate partnership structure, quality assurance, dissemination, evaluation, and creating a sustainable education – industry forum." The evaluation this year shows that the partnership has been very much aware of these challenges and, throughout 2018, has gone at lengths to avoid delays, produce good quality outputs, and build sustainable structures. This in turn resulted in relevant outputs produced by a committed partnership and coordinated by an effective and much appreciated management.

In sum, the evaluator considers that the project is adhering closely to the plans it has set out in the application form and the contract with the European Commission. Throughout 2018, the partnership has progressed on each domain / work package along the lines of its work programme. When implementation did not advance as smoothly as expected, the partnership has put in additional efforts to keep the project on track. The partnership in general and the project coordinator and work package leaders in particular should be commended for their pro-active and problem-solving attitude. Furthermore, the independent evaluator confirms that in 2018 the project operations and deliverables have been designed and applied in full alignment with the quality assurance provisions of the project. This is particularly the case for the evaluation of the pilot scheme of both MOOC and modules, as the protocols for running an evaluation with student teachers have been consistently applied by all universities that were involved in the pilot. Moreover, the project has taken into account the feedback and recommendations from the experts in the Pedagogical Board to advance the modules and MOOC development process. Finally, the evaluator recognises both the struggle and the efforts of the partnership to develop a University-ICT industry Forum that is effectively boosting innovation with higher education institutions providing initial teacher education.

Recommendations

Based on the results of the survey and the interviews, the evaluator considers that the ITELab project is doing very well and therefore encourages the partnership to continue the project with the same degree of expertise, enthusiasm and commitment.

Both survey and interviews also inquired about potential areas for improvement. In view of an (even more) effective project delivery in 2019 leading to a sustainable endeavour beyond the expiry date of ITELAb, the independent evaluator issues following suggestions:
- to address an even broader range of stakeholders, reaching out not only to industry, teacher education institutions, student teachers, teacher educators and authorities, but also to schools, school managers, mentors and senior colleagues;

- to pursue the efforts that have already been undertaken to develop the ITE Forum in a more inclusive and interactive platform;
- to continue to adapt the final Exploitation and Sustainability plan to reach the long term project outcomes, quantitative and qualitative indicators;
- to put even more efforts into encouraging universities to recognise the modules and MOOC as part of their courses;
- to make more systematic use of the expertise of the Pedagogical Board as a group to further the project objectives regarding quality assurance, stakeholder engagement and policy recommendations;
- to ensure that the feedback loop in the project is closed: the project is taking on board recommendations from (external) stakeholders but does not yet report back to these stakeholders what has been adjusted following their suggestions.

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23.01.2019

Appendix – evaluation methodology

Following the project's Description of Work, in line with the evaluator's initial offer to European Schoolnet and based upon the evaluation undertaken during the first year of project activity in 2017, the independent evaluator has focused in his assessment of the second year of ITELab project activities on the 2018 project operations, the ITELab deliverables, the involvement of stakeholders in the project, and the role of the ITE Forum.

The evaluation consisted of three parts: (i) information gathering; (ii) data and information analysis; (iii) reporting on findings from data collection and analysis, personal considerations on these findings, and recommendations for effective project implementation in year 3.

Information on the ITELab project activities have been gathered in different ways:
- Background information on the project's most recent developments by attending an online project meeting and ITE Forum meeting.
- Reviewing project deliverables such as the ICT in ITE monitoring report, a recent version of modules and MOOC, the evaluation report on module/MOOC testing, and the initial exploitation and sustainability plan.
- Survey designed by the evaluator and completed by all eleven ITELab partners;
- Survey designed by the evaluator and completed by three associate partners;
- Interviews with stakeholders involved in the 2018 activities of ITELab:
    - Jennifer Tiede, Würzburg University (coordinator WP5)
    - Two experts members of the Pedagogical Board
    - Two associate partners from Finland and Norway
    - Three student teachers from Ireland and Portugal
- Project immersion through attending several project-related activities at EMINENT: ITELab site visit and project meeting, conference plenary session on innovative teacher training initiatives (featuring ITELab), workshops on ITELab and on the ITE Forum.

The independent evaluation report has been produced in two times:
- a draft version containing findings, considerations and recommendations was made available to EUN/ISIS by mid-January 2019 for review and discussion;
- the input obtained from the review by and the discussion with EUN/ISIS has been taken on board in this final version.