

A TOOLKIT TO EVALUATE THE IMPACT OF AN EDUCATIONAL ACTION TO SENIORS' QUALITY OF LIFE

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Abstract. *When an institution needs to evaluate the teaching-learning process then it can be done evaluating the knowledge and skills acquired by the learners or by the self-evaluating the trainers from the students perspective. The qualifications in this context is the main measure to get the metric for evaluation. On the other hand, when there is not a need to acquire a specific knowledge or expertise but when the learners wants to continue learning because he/she enjoys it, wants to keep learning and being active or any other personal motivation, then evaluation becomes a big challenge. This is the case of seniors' education (citizens over 65 or retired). Which metrics should be used when evaluating institution? how we can know if those institutions are doing the work correctly ? how can the institution increase the quality and effectiveness ? From this need the project QEdSen (supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission) produced an evaluation toolkit*

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The Quality of Life

The work of Rapley (2003) provides extensive analysis of the Quality of Life (QoL) concept. He firstly recognizes the complexity of the term and highlights the difficulty of reaching a general consensus on the definition. QoL is a complex state that can be observed at group, community or individual levels. At an individual level, Rapley notes that QoL can be conceived as “an aspect of individual subjectivity, a psychological quantum expressing the satisfaction of particular people with their individual lives”. Definitions of QoL based on health or disease are plentiful, but they are too varied and too specific. As the QoL concept is subjective, certain cultural components further complicate its definition, since cultural, social and environmental contexts and local values come into play. Given the difficulties in finding a precise definition, we must start with the most accepted theories, such as those offered by the WHO (WHOQOL 1997), Cummings (Cummins, 1997) and Schalock (2004).

The WHOQOL justifies the dimension and facets chosen to evaluate the QoL based on some of people's individual aspects. These aspects are explained in the Manual of WHOQOL (WHOQOL, 1998); some of the facets are detailed in

Table 1, together with other theories from Cummins (1997b) and Schalock (2004).

Each of previous research establishes facets and dimensions to define and evaluate the QoL, but some of them cannot be affected because of education while other are very important, firstly because they are more related to social and psychological situation of the elderly, secondly, because they can be impacted from an educational action. From previous works of Escuder-Mollon (2013) and analysis and research (QEduSen, 2012) following QoL dimensions has been extracted:

1. Physical Health.

Psychological Health.

Social.

a. Feeling integrated in society, with more communicative and social skills.

b. Getting a better knowledge of the environment.

Increase participation

c. Participation in the own educational institution.

d. Participation in communities, families, friends.

e. Participation in the society in general.

That participation can be done: creating, sharing or being an active part of a group.

Increase perceived control (internal and external, primary and secondary).

f. Improving the skills and competences to discuss, negotiate, and communicate but also to accept and adapt.

g. Acquire skills to analyse and know more about oneself and how we are related with the environment (links with other people)

Personal grow: optimism, motivation, energy to do things

Personal fulfilment: Leisure, spend time on oneself, useful time

Transversal: The indicator does not fit any of the previous QoL dimensions directly, but it makes possible to increase the quality of the institution effectiveness to impact the QoL of the senior learners, therefore, that indicators can affect all the QoL dimensions.

Any of those 7 dimensions (as one is transversal, it is not a true dimension), can be affected thanks to education, by any of following dimensions (Escuder-Mollon, 2013):

1. Institution: that are the premises and the physical institution.

Management and organisation, that includes;

a. The general aims of the institution (objectives and strategic aims), internal processes of the institution, management decision and internal regulations.

b. How the work inside the institution is performed, no matter if it is regulated or it done because of costumes.

Educational models: ways of providing the learning contents and activities. It includes the formal, non formal and informal models, but educational models is more about:

- c. How education is provided by the institution (not how a specific course is offered).
- d. The design framework that later directs how it is going to be implemented (pedagogies, courses, content, evaluation).

Pedagogy: application of different techniques and educational methods to courses and activities.

Courses: any kind of learning processes where it is involved a teacher and has a teaching plan related even if that plan has nor formally stabilised (content, competences to reach, pedagogy, timing, objectives, evaluation), example:

- e. ICT or language courses.
- f. Economy, sociology, courses.
- g. Cooking, arts, courses, chorus or theatre (in case they had attached a teaching plan).

Activities: any kind of learning process where it is not involved any teacher and has not a teaching plan attached, example:

- h. A web-site, conference or any dissemination activity.
- i. Research or projects related activities.
- j. Trips that learners can organise, lunch or dinners, festivity, fairs.
- k. Extra academic activities: as chorus or theatre (in case it is organised as a leisure activity).

Staff and trainers: That includes the operational level of the personnel: coordinators, teachers, tutors, facilitators, administrative staff, etc.

- l. Competences and skills.
- m. Functions and responsibilities.

The evaluation toolkit

An evaluation toolkit was produced in the QEdusen project, "Evaluation toolkit on seniors education to improve their quality of life" is supported by the Lifelong Learning Programme of the European Commission with reference 518227-LLP-1-2011-1-ES-GRUNDTVIG-GMP from October 2011 to September 2013.

You can find more information about this project in <http://www.edusenior.eu> and about the LifeLong Learning Programme of the European Commission at <http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme>.

This evaluation toolkit is aimed to evaluate an educational institution that is teaching to senior learners (over 65 or retired) which main motivation to keep learning is completely personal (not job related). In this context, the education

which will be evaluated is done on the point of view of the impact of the Quality of Life (QoL) of the learners.

This evaluation toolkit does not measure the QoL of the senior learners. For that purpose, there are already a lot of other tools and questionnaires.

This toolkit tries to evaluate an education institution. That is a very ambitious objective which is in fact difficult to get, and we recognise the limitations; there are a lot of different kinds of educational institutions whose objectives can be very dissimilar, also the target of each institution can be different (elderly with good health, elderly immigrants, or at risk, etc.), social context of the institutions and their limitations makes also a big difference. Because of this, an exhaustive, strict and objective evaluation would be impossible, but being aware of this limitation, we design this toolkit as a powerful tool not centred on evaluation for getting an award where getting a high rank is the most important objective, but to be applied in an institution together with the guide (the other product of the project) and as a very practical tool to get advice about how to improve.

This toolkit can be applied:

- To know the institution weaknesses and obtain information about how to increase the impact of your educational action on your senior learners quality of life.
- Use it for internal or external accreditation.

This evaluation toolkit is designed to be targeted the educational intervention of an institution that encompasses (Figure 1):

- Human resources: managers, technicians, staff, teachers.
- The results and impact: subjective perception of the senior learners when attending to lectures and activities.
- Processes, methodologies and workflows of the institution.
- Materials, activities, courses and pedagogies applied.

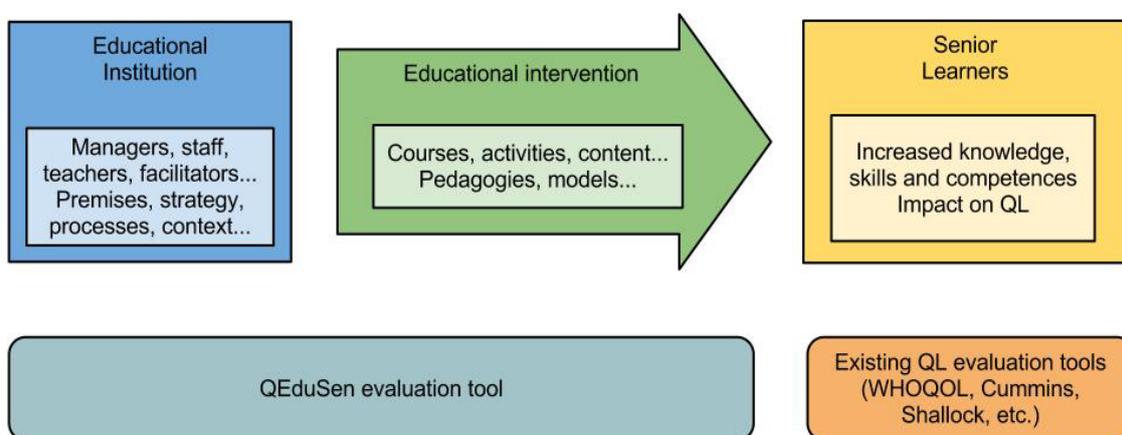


Figure 1. The toolkit aims to evaluate the educational institution and its processes. Not the QL itself

This evaluation toolkit is not aimed to:

- Evaluate the quality of life of senior learners.

Evaluation can be made in both directions, so an indicator can be double checked from the institution perspective (a) or the learners point of view (b) in Figure 2.

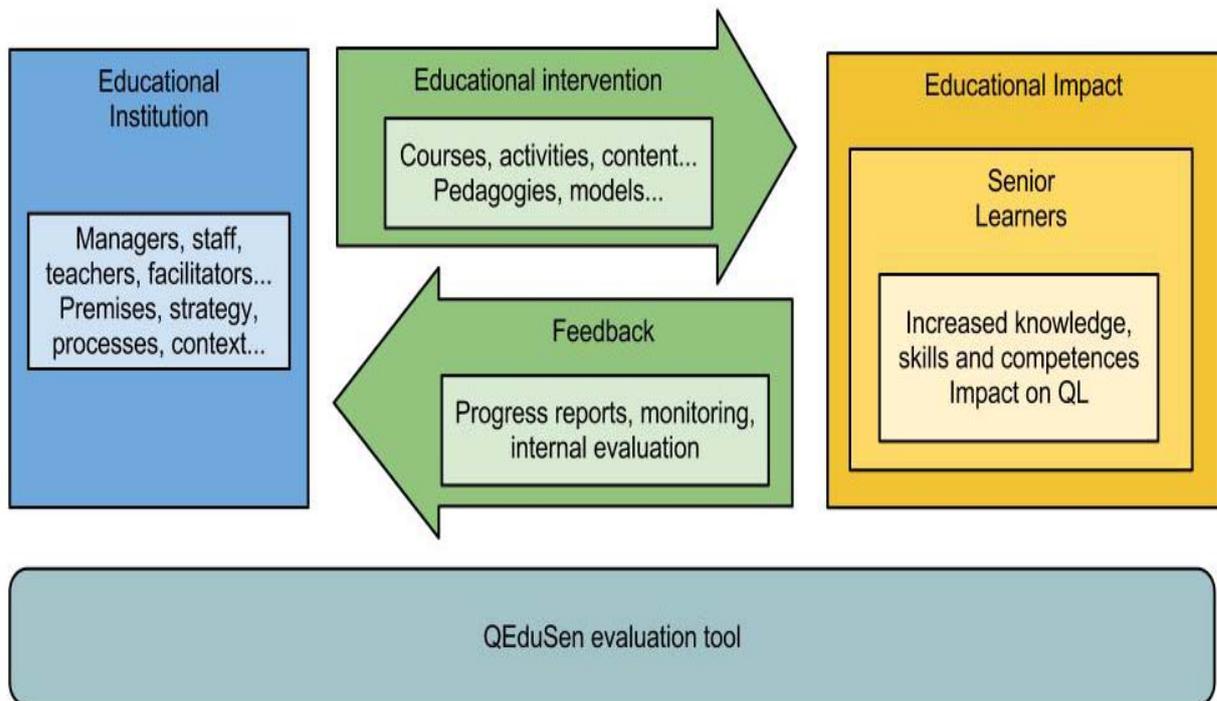


Figure 2. The action (a) and the feedback (b) can be evaluated

The target

This evaluation toolkit can be used in two ways:

- As a check-list for self-evaluation: if you are a manager, technician or teacher, and you are worried if you are doing the appropriate things to increase the QoL of your learners, or even, if you feel curiosity about what you could do, then you can take a look to the recommendations.
- As external evaluation. In this case, a person outside the institution, with experience on seniors' education, should apply the evaluation methodology to provide at the end a mark and recommendations.

The indicators

As numbered before, there are 7 educational dimensions and 7 QoL dimensions, on which all indicators have been distributed. Each indicator has the following structure.

- Id: a correlative number that makes easy later to make reference.
- Title: one single sentence descriptive.

- Educational dimension: One or several of the previous dimensions that institution has control and power to act.
- QoL dimension. One or several of the previous dimension on which the senior learner QoL can be impacted.
- Justification: description of the indicator, why this must be considered, what is the relation of the education with QoL. In which way are the indicator, QoL, and institution dimension related. How the QoL is increased thanks to that educational action.
- Proof of evidence: how the evaluator can check that the indicator is fulfilled.
- Recommendations: this is a first advice in case the institution fails to fulfil the indicator.

There have been produced 38 indicators that belong to each of the previous Educational dimensions and that affect one or more of the QoL dimensions. Following a list of the indicators.

1. Better accessibility for better learning.
2. Meeting points in the building.
3. Evaluation of Senior Education Programmes.
4. Promotion of social activities.
5. Evaluation of the senior's requirements.
6. Participation of learners in management.
7. Non-formal learning provider.
8. Formal learning accreditation.
9. Learn social attitudes informally.
10. Formal learning provider.
11. Formal learning groups.
12. Reciprocity, peering and participation.
13. Intergenerational learning.
14. Constructive pedagogy.
15. Learn by research.
16. Participatory pedagogy.
17. Learn to learn.
18. ICT for communicative skills.
19. Increase the efficiency of seniors through physical exercise.
20. Art activities.
21. Teaching languages to senior learners.
22. Problem-based learning.
23. Coping with stress and relaxation.
24. Occasional meetings for social contacts.
25. Common holiday trips.
26. Emotions through sound.
27. Increasing satisfaction through participation in walking sightseeing tours.
28. Artistic performances.

29. Volunteering as a form of Seniors social productivity.
30. Memory and Alzheimer disease (AD) and related disorders.
31. Impact of ICT courses on the social life of seniors.
32. Sharing hits and tips.
33. Gerontology teachers training.
34. Intercultural awareness, diversity and multiculturalism.
35. Intercultural awareness, diversity and multiculturalism.
36. Enhance the communication skills of the teachers in class.
37. Professional burnout and stress management.
38. Developing skills in motivation and optimistic view of the world.

Conclusion

The application of previous to any educational intervention to seniors provided a rank of effectiveness and achievement. That makes possible to score an institution, for internal or external accreditation. But this is not the main aim of this toolkit and the indicators. Each indicator has detailed information about why it is important (justification), how it can be evaluated (proof of evidence) and a recommendation. The recommendation is very useful as it provides information about the corrective actions that can be taken to improve the effectiveness of the education that provide an educational institution.

Those recommendations should be taken into account with the guide, that has been produced also in the QEduSen project. The guide provides a basic theoretical background and practical experiences for each of the educational dimensions.

Acknowledgments

You can find more information about this project in <http://www.edusenor.eu> and about the LifeLong Learning Programme of the European Commission at <http://ec.europa.eu/education/lifelong-learning-programme>.



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