

Finland: Evaluation with Open Badges (oppimismerkki)

Type of provider

Omnia, Joint Authority of Education in the Espoo Region is a multisector education provider, which specialises in providing lifelong learning and vocational training/ Omnia Education also offers liberal adult education, upper secondary education for adults and youth workshops in its region. (www.omnia.fi/internationalomnia).

Objectives

Digital learning badge, which measures and makes visible different skills and competences: language skills, professional skills, digital skills; it can also be used to measure soft skills.

Assessment approaches

Self-assessment or e.g. employers as assessors (Finnish Red Cross project); potential for peer assessment.

Target Group

1. Vocational teachers
2. Students
3. Refugees (self-assessment, or employers assessing skills)

Potential transferability/ scalability

Good. Open technology (Mozilla); any organisation can issue badges. Easy to use in different contexts and to measures various skills. Easy to share online. However, employers may lack information about digital badges. The more complex the skill, the more difficult it is to easily measure it accurately.

Summaries or Basic elements of analysis

Digital badge, which measures a specific skill. The person with the skill owns the badge that they have earned and decides in which context and with whom to share it. The Red Cross project was not sufficiently successful in making employers recognise the benefits of digital badges (recognition leads to valuation). Organisations must be prepared to inform employers about the badges they issue. Greater support is necessary.

Introduction in keywords

- Evaluation with Open Badges (oppimismerkki)
- Finland
- digital badge, which measures a specific skill
- can measure language skills, professional skills, digital skills, soft skills...
- use depends on the project and activities surrounding the badge
- works in formal and non-formal contexts

5 areas descriptive text

Organisation and Description of the tool(s) (which skills are assessed)

Omnia, the Joint Authority of Education in the Espoo Region, is a multisector education provider, which specialises in providing lifelong learning and vocational training. Omnia Education also offers liberal adult education, upper secondary education for adults and youth workshops in its region.

Omnia Education works together with the Häme University of Applied Sciences (HAMK) and the Oulu University of Applied Sciences (OAMK, the coordinator for the project) in using open badges for teachers. Omnia also cooperated with the Finnish Red Cross and the consulting company Accenture in using open badges to map refugees' skills.

Open badges use Mozilla's open technology, and offer a way to make skills and competences visible, and share them easily online. They can be used to measure any specific skill. In Finland, they have been used to measure refugees' language, professional and work life skills, as well as their on-the-job learning. Open badges are widely used in upskilling vocational teachers, enhancing their digital and pedagogical skills. Students can also use them.

Although open badges can be used to assess almost any skill, the more complex the skill, the more difficult it can be to measure it accurately with a form. Esko Lius, key expert in digital learning at Omnia, says: "If you think about the refugees coming to Finland, how they (...) adjust their skillset in a new context, in a new country, it's very difficult to ask with closed questions. You need some kind of interview, open questions, somebody who can estimate and review, and on that basis (...) can estimate (...) the competence, and it means that the more open the application form is, the more time-consuming it is to process."

Implementation (how the tool is used, how the assessors are trained, how often it is used)

Open badges are earned by fulfilling the criteria for a specific badge. The person with the skill creates a digital portfolio and then decides in which context they want to share the badges that they have earned. Badges may be earned using self-assessment, or employers may function as assessors. There is also potential for peer assessment, according to which those who have already earned certain badges could assess their peers, perhaps earning themselves another badge.

However, credibility must be maintained.

Open badges are easy to share online. As Lius points out, refugees often move from one city or country to another. “[We thought about how] we could help them map what kind of skills and job competences they’ve got already. And how they could sort of carry that information with them. In many cases, when they move around, papers (...) should be translated. Or they (...) get lost. Etc. So we thought (...) let’s use a digital version [of] this.”

More than 14,000 badges have been done by vocational teachers, for their digital and pedagogical skills. The next step is making open badges more available and known generally in education.

Description of the target groups

Using open badges to map refugees’ work life skills was a pilot in the Turku area in 2015, and has ended. Open badges have gained popularity in vocational education, with teachers measuring and enhancing their digital and pedagogical skills. According to Lius, now that the system is generally accepted and valued in the vocational sector, it pays off.

The use of the badges depends on the project and activities that surround them. Car mechanics and car sales students have collected badges in teams and competed with each other. In teachers’ professional training, there are gamification elements.

Policy context

In using open badges for teachers’ professional training, the National Board of Education and the Ministry of Education and Culture have been very supportive, promoting and helping to make the system more widely known in schools and municipalities. This shows the need for official support.

In the project conducted with the Finnish Red Cross, refugees were introduced to working life and met with employers, who assessed their competences, such as language and work life skills. Lius points out that those badges “have a bit more value [than open badges earned using self- assessment] because it’s somebody that the local other employers can relate to and understand”. That is, other employers would more likely recognise the badge as an accurate assessment of someone’s skills.

Impact for assessees

According to Lius, the advantage of open badges for both teachers and refugees is that the person with the skill owns the badges that they have earned and may decide how to share them. Using both self-assessment and employers to evaluate skills also proven successful.

However, the problem lies in making open badges known as a system. Open badges was a very new system to employers, who are used to recognising traditional certificates with official stamps, and may be unfamiliar with digitalisation. The project failed in making employers fully recognise the benefits of the

badges. Thus, in practice, “the usefulness of the badges [that the refugees had earned] was very limited because so few employers knew about them.” That is, the use of open badges can only succeed if both employees and employers have an awareness of and value the badges – and know how to use them.

+www.omnia.fi/internationalomnia;
<http://www.oppiminenonline.com/in-english/>

