

TAO Helps Reduce Student Drop Out Rates

The Comenius Program in Europe uses TAO to deliver self-assessment surveys to at-risk youth.



BACKGROUND

The Comenius Program in Europe seeks to solve the drop out problem

14% of European students drop out before completing high school. This alarming situation is both a cause and effect of unemployment, social exclusion, and poverty, and

is therefore a matter for great social concern. Although there are systematic and targeted strategies in place to prevent dropouts, the Comenius Program seeks to reconsider the position of both students and teachers in the system through student self-assessment and improved strategies for teachers.

CHALLENGE

To help address the drop out problem, the Comenius Program seeks to develop a computer-based self-assessment tool for students.

Such self-assessment will aid in a better understanding of the problem for students and educators, and thus impact the drop out rate, in combination with other strategic interventions such as the Local Actions for Youth and the Support Employment Contract.

To develop a self-assessment tool for students, the team needed an application that would allow experts to write questions for review from which to compile an initial survey. These items needed to be accessible to all stakeholders, so that authors and users could easily communicate with one another and share input to aid in calibrating the most effective questions.

The self-assessment tool must further allow easy access for students between the ages of 14 and 18 with modest technological skills, a process facilitated by its 24/7 availability

and TAO's easily understood interface. With that goal in mind, a tutorial is being developed for test takers to be completed by the end of May 2013. This tutorial will help teachers, counselors and psychologists to promote and diffuse the questionnaire throughout the test-taking population.

The self-assessment tool being developed is part of a coordinated effort involving multiple interventions intended to prevent drop outs, such as:

- Reaching students through the Local Actions for Youth program where students receive coaching in the preparation of resumes, telephone interview skills, and the development of new school or professional projects.
- Reaching students through the Support Employment Contract, which offers practical training during working hours to facilitate students' integration into the labor market.
- Reaching students who can be appropriately matched with "second chance" schools such as the Luxembourg "Izigerstee VTT" project.

SOLUTION

Why TAO

TAO met the team's requirements on a variety of fronts:

1. TAO has a proven track record of successful deployments in both Education and Professional employment.
2. TAO is Open Source and standards compliant, which allows interoperability and protects the team's investment in assessment assets.
3. As a web-based application, TAO is accessible 24/7, making it readily available to the target population.
4. TAO has already established a presence in Luxembourg.

RESULTS

The Luxembourg Ministry of Education, Youth, and Children chose to work with CRP Henri Tudor, a research and technology organization and TAO Authorized Partner. This made implementation an easy matter.

"We are pleased that TAO has established projects in multiple languages, as our questionnaire will eventually be hosted in multiple countries and languages including French, German, Finnish, Romanian, Greek, and Dutch," says Beatrix Charlier, Coordinator for drop out prevention.

Over a two-month period, the test was piloted to over 800 students, who approved one hundred and thirty items. Analysis indicates that students were open to help the teachers and that this experience provided a valuable opportunity for student self-reflection. As a result of the initial pilot and analysis, the questionnaire was reduced to 52 items.

The target date for implementation and diffusion of the final version is June, 2015.

CONCLUSION

The drop out problem is a complex concern, requiring responses on many fronts. The Comenius program provides a variety of interventions and now seeks to further its effectiveness by the incorporation of a student self-assessment that will both increase our understanding of the issues, and help in appropriately matching students with those interventions most likely to have a positive impact.



TAO's history of success with similar projects made it an easy choice for the Comenius Program," says Ms. Charlier. "Its Open Source nature, support of multiple languages, and easy access made it the perfect solution for our target population.

