Chapter 5
360-Degree View of Digital Open Badge-Driven Learning

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ABSTRACT

This chapter describes alternative credentialing practices related to competence-based open badges and their different audiences. The authors provide insights into different theoretical approaches to digital badging practices that could potentially support a competence orientation in continuous professional development and enhance lifelong learning. One aim of this chapter is to summarise the first European doctoral dissertation to address digital open badges and digital open badge-driven learning. The authors offer novel insights into reforms in education aimed at addressing students' individual interests and meeting the recognised needs of working life. They also present a set of innovative Finnish applications of digital open badge-driven learning in the context of educational research. Moreover, they describe the potential of badges as a tool to build ePortfolios. This chapter draws attention to the motivational effects of digital badging and the use of ePortfolios as an informative and interesting way to demonstrate competences in different contexts.

INTRODUCTION

New "alternative credentials," such as micro-credentials, digital open badges, and industry-recognised certificates (OECD, 2020a), are gaining popularity as an alternative approach to career and professional development (Ghasia et al., 2019). Digital badging provides transformative and flexible options for competence development in various educational settings from K-12 to higher education (HE). However, the digitisation of graduation diplomas, in line with the digital disruption emerging in all fields of society, is overdue (Wolz et al., 2021). Alternative credentials can be considered further documentation of an individual's skills and knowledge in addition to traditional transcripts, such as degree diplomas (Wolz et al., 2021). In many cases, digital credentialing involves digital badging practices that reflect a complex understanding of the characteristics and specifications of digital open badges (Wolz et al., 2021). The current literature reviews (Noyes et al., 2020; Park & Kim, 2019; Wolz et al., 2021; Zsigmond et al., 2020) compare and contrast the present badge study's findings in different contexts. Furthermore, new ways to motivate, scaffold, and assess competence-based learning processes in professional development are emerging (Brauer, 2019a).

In addition to changing working life, digitalisation is also changing educational planning and the implementation of training. It has become increasingly important to develop training that meets the requirements of digitised working life as well as unique professional needs (Brauer, 2019a). This paper will focus on the context of professional HE, representing examples from early adopters in Finland. The Finnish models discussed in the chapter contain nationally mandated best practices that are applicable for wider audiences. Digital badges are often synonymous with micro-credentials (Lim et al., 2018; Rimland & Raish, 2019), smaller fractions of qualifications. Thus, badge development and implementation can also be linked to the revision of evaluation methods and reforms of European competence classification and transfer systems, such as ESCO (European Commission, 2020) and EuroPass (Cedefop, 2020). The European Union promotes the provision of competence-oriented education, training, and learning, the establishment of good practices, and better support for educational staff (EU, 2018). Moreover, the Finnish Government (2020) has promoted the idea of the digital ecosystem for lifelong learning, gathering competence information from childhood on and serving both individuals and working life. At the core of their service development are applications that map, identify, and recognise competence acquired in various contexts. The potential of badges as a tool to build portfolios in a digital format (ePortfolios) suggests similar features (Korhonen, 2020). Modern ePortfolios allow individuals to make their competence visible in multifaceted ways using a variety of digital materials (Jewitt et al., 2016).

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