

Advancing Equity and Access to Higher Education through Open and Distance Learning (BUKA project)

Interim report, October 2022

External evaluators: Satia Zen and Fiona Crozier

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Executive summary

The Advancing Equity and Access to Higher Education Through Open and Distance Learning (BUKA) project is funded through the European Commission's Erasmus Plus programme and was initiated with a lifespan of three years, from November 2019 to October 2022. Due to the pandemic, the lifespan of the project was extended by one year to October 2023.

The main aim of the project is to promote equity and access to higher education in Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines through the use of inclusive instructional design (ID) and learning analytics (LA) in online and blended learning, especially in the context of Open and Distance Learning (ODL).

Eight partner institutions (two each from Europe, Indonesia, Malaysia and the Philippines) participate in the project, with coordination provided by the European partners.

The focus of this interim evaluation is to be on the success of the project in terms of the achievement of its outcomes overall, the value of those outcomes in the short, medium and long-term future (i.e. sustainability) and on the success of the project in meeting the timeline set for the project (taking into account the impact of Covid-19). The interim evaluation is based on desk-based scrutiny of documentation and interviews with partners.

The interim evaluation can conclude that there were some real positives to the impact of the pandemic, particularly as it provided a 'real-life' learning environment in which to pilot many aspects of the project's goals in a context of support from BUKA; the interest in the project within the pilot project was much broader as colleagues realised that they could benefit from their institution's involvement in the project and concepts such as inclusivity, diversity and equity were highlighted as areas for focus in the short rather than the longer term. The prospect of enhanced sustainability of the project was also assisted in the form of alliances forged during the pandemic among diverse stakeholders in HEI institutions.

Recommendations and suggestions to the project for its final year of operation include the need to ensure that the overall outcomes and objectives of the project are shared with the participants to ensure that all can clearly see how the pilots they are running fit into the BUKA project in the broadest sense; that the project's quality assurance framework is documented and sets out monitoring processes for the project's final year and that communication between all partners is facilitated in order to reinforce the overarching goals of the project as well as those of the individual pilot projects.

1. Introduction and purpose of the report

The *Advancing Equity and Access to Higher Education Through Open and Distance Learning* (BUKA) project is funded through the European Commission's Erasmus Plus programme and was initiated with a lifespan of three years, from November 2019 to October 2022. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the lifespan of the project was extended by one year to October 2023.

Background and aims of the project

The aim of the project is to promote equity and access to higher education in Malaysia, Indonesia and Philippines through the use of inclusive instructional design (ID) and learning analytics (LA) in online and blended learning, especially in the context of Open and Distance Learning (ODL).

The project's objectives are:

- to build capacity in inclusive ID and LA,
- to improve students' learning engagement, active learning and study skills with the help of ID and LA based interventions,
- to improve pedagogical and technical accessibility of digital learning materials, and
- to use LA for more effective, personalised support for distance learners.

The expected outcomes of the project are:

- tried and tested recommendations and guidelines for using inclusive ID and LA for promoting equity and access to higher education and
- the dissemination of the results of the project both regionally and more widely in the ASEAN region through multiple channels, including an international conference and a Handbook which will be published online with a Creative Commons licence.

There are eight project partners:

Europe

- Tampere University of Applied Sciences (TAMK) (Finland) (coordinator)
- Dublin City University (Ireland)

Malaysia

- Open University Malaysia
- Wawasan Open University

Indonesia

- Universitas Terbuka – Indonesia Open University
- Universitas Negeri Padang – Padang State University

The Philippines

- University of the Philippines – Open University
- Mindanao State University – Iligan Institute of Technology

This report represents the interim evaluation of the project and its progress to date. The purpose of the interim evaluation was originally to provide an analysis at the mid-way point as to the project's success (or otherwise) in achieving its goals within the timeframe set. However, due to the impact of the Coronavirus pandemic (which effectively disrupted the operation of the project within its first three months of operation), a revised approach to this interim report was adopted with the following objectives:

- An evaluation of the achievement of the project overall and of the generic outcomes of the work packages with the addition of an analysis of the impact of Covid-19
- Identification of strengths and challenges that emerged during the pandemic and commentary on how the project can make use of these lessons as it moves into its final year.
- Suggestions on changes that may be required in relation to actions for completing the project timelines in each of the university partners and for the work packages and project overall.

Due to the pandemic, this interim report is later than envisaged but has the advantage of taking a complete overview of the impact of the situation and to provide timely suggestions for the final year of the project.

2. Evaluation methodology for the interim evaluation

Two external evaluators, Satia Zen (Education and Learning Specialist/Phd Researcher at Tampere University) and Fiona Crozier (Higher Education Consultant - Quality Assurance and International) were appointed to carry out the interim and the final evaluations of the project. Their focus overall is to be on the success of the project in terms of the achievement of its outcomes overall, the value of those outcomes in the short, medium and long-term future (i.e. sustainability) and on the success of the project in meeting the timeline set for the project (taking into account the impact of Covid-19).

The interim evaluation made use of the following resources:

- The Terms of Reference set for the external evaluation
- The detailed project description as submitted in the application
- The project website
- The online project resource platform (DIGMA)
- The revised work and travel plan

As well as a desk-based analysis of documentation, the interim evaluation drew on the results of a questionnaire (attached at annex one) which was developed to aid discussion with project participants around the impact of the pandemic on the achievement of the goals of the project and, particularly, despite the challenges of the first two years, if any benefits had been noted during the period of lockdown that translated into lessons that could be applied and exploited during the final year of the project.

One of the impacts of the pandemic was that the interim evaluation itself was somewhat delayed and the timeframe for its production therefore was in two stages: a draft of the

main content of the report was produced by the end of August 2022, with the questionnaire being sent to participants at the same time. Interviews to follow-up on questionnaire results were conducted in September. This allowed the external evaluators to finalise the report using these results and to provide conclusions for presentation (if desired) at the development meetings held in Tampere, Finland at the end of September and in Dublin, Ireland during the first week of October.

3. Analysis of the documentation and information

The external evaluators scrutinised the documentation and resources concerning the project that were available to date. Much of this analysis is impacted by the discussions under section 4 below. However, a brief commentary on the main resources examined is contained in this section.

The Terms of Reference, the project proposal and the revised work and travel plan

The Terms of Reference that guided the external evaluators in their task were revised to ensure that the interim evaluation was as useful as possible to the project partners as they moved into the final (extended) year of the project. The evaluators agreed with the project coordinators that a more generically focused interim evaluation that would highlight key challenges and opportunities arising from the pandemic situation would be more beneficial than a detailed analysis of the achievement of individual work-package objectives, many of which had been impacted by the situation caused by Covid-19.

The original project proposal that was approved for funding through the Erasmus Plus scheme provided the external evaluators with a significant amount of background detail and information about the project. However, due to the challenges raised by the pandemic (in particular some delays), the revised work and travel plan provided more pertinent information on which to base any analysis at the time of drafting the interim report.

In fact, the original timing of the project was profoundly impacted by the pandemic since only the kick-off meeting in Penang, Malaysia (February 2020), was possible as a face-to-face meeting before the world closed down. This meant that the normal, reasonably swift follow-up actions to cement a new project partnership were not possible and had to be carried out on-line.

The revised work and travel plan is set out in two parts: the first part indicates what adjustments were made to accommodate the impossibility of travel, for example, face-to-face meetings/training and on-line support of the partners in southeast Asia. The second part of the document sets out a revised travel plan which aims to plug some of the gaps that have either not been possible to achieve on-line due to timing or which can now more effectively take place presentially as the world opens up post-Covid. The two parts of the revised plan are as follows:

Table 1: Changes during March 2020 – May 2022

Month/Year	Original planned travel	Adjustment
April 2020	Intensive training (all partner locations) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · EU partners to visit project partners to provide intensive training in instructive learning design and learning analytics, to assist in pilot design and development. 	A series of webinars was offered to replace this in Autumn 2020. The content and pedagogy had to be adjusted to suit online delivery.
June 2020	Development meeting (Tampere, Finland)	This meeting was cancelled due to lockdowns and tremendous pressure in all partner universities to adjust to online teaching and other activities.
September 2020	Development meeting: pilot development (Dublin, Ireland) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · WP3 aims and goals are discussed · progress is monitored · WP milestones are agreed on · DCU specialists showcase inclusive instructional design and learning analytics solutions. · A study visit at National Institute of Digital Learning will be organized. 	A shorter online development meeting replaced this. Due to Covid and the extension of project timeline, WP2 was discussed at this point. DCU specialists offered webinars and added materials in the project online learning environment.

November 2020	<p>Development meeting: pilot development (Jakarta, Indonesia)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Monitor progress · Share lessons learned · present locally developed activities, materials and processes to the project group · Use the project team as a test audience for the developed items · provide feedback and suggestions for further development. · Determine next steps and procedures for testing, refining and finalizing pilots for implementation 	<p>These goals were mostly achieved through regular Online Project Meetings.</p> <p>Presenting locally developed outcomes and using the project team as test audience were only achieved partly because there was no possibility to visit and see the technical solutions in practice.</p>
January 2021	<p>Development meeting: pilot implementation (Padang, Indonesia)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Ensure pilots are tested, finalized and ready to be rolled out · Present and scrutinize the pilot plans of each Partner to the project group · Risk assessment and mitigation · Determine milestones and agree on regular progress check-ups during the piloting 	<p>These goals were mostly achieved through regular Online Project Meetings.</p> <p>The project team was not able to participate in the testing of local solutions on-site.</p>
March 2021	<p>Intensive training (all partner locations)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · EU partners to visit project partners to provide intensive training in instructive learning design and learning analytics, to prepare for pilot implementation 	<p>Online mentoring in country teams was provided. An online pilot check-point meeting was organized in June 2021 to monitor project proceeding and enable peer feedback and discussion.</p>

May 2021	Mid-term quality assurance meeting (Iligan, Philippines)	Online preparatory work, liaising with external evaluators online. This work has been delayed due to Covid, and the external evaluation is currently being undertaken.
October 2021	Development meeting: pilot evaluation (Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Monitor progress · Share experiences from the completed pilots · Determine next steps and milestones for evaluation data collection and analysis · Draft local schedules for further development and next iterations of the pilots 	IN THE REVISED TRAVEL PLAN
March 2022	Development meeting: dissemination (Los Baños, Philippines) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Sharing and reflecting on the results and experiences from the pilots · Deciding on dissemination goals and milestones · Roles and responsibilities in dissemination activities · Handbook planning and distribution of work · Conference planning and distribution of work 	IN THE REVISED TRAVEL PLAN
June 2022	Development meeting: pilot evaluation (Jakarta, Indonesia)	IN THE REVISED TRAVEL PLAN

It was clear to the external evaluators that a significant amount of effort had been made to ensure that the majority of activities were covered on-line to a greater or lesser extent. Indeed, many participants confirmed during the interviews that their involvement in the project and the timing of the pandemic were actually mutually beneficial in terms of active learning with the support provided by the project and also in terms of the increased level of

institutional interest in benefiting from the project and the expertise provided. This has added depth to the impact that the project can have and will also add to its sustainability in the future. However, due to the pressure of workload caused by the pandemic across all institutions, those areas that might have actually benefited *more* from presencial activity, due to the nature of the project (e.g. the testing of pilots) were restricted by a lack of time that could be focused solely on the project outcomes. In other words, the initial emergency response to the pandemic meant that piloting activities became a second phase. For some participants, the first and second phases may have happily coincided depending on the nature of the pilot. For others, with different pilot project goals, the emergency response to the pandemic may have required significant adjustment to the piloting with less time for implementation.

As recognised by project coordinators, this was the case across HE in many parts of the world where the need for an emergency response to the crisis resulted in a similar situation and reflected, following the initial response, for deeper learning and understanding of on-line and distance learning.

Table 2: Revised travel plan for June 2022 – October 2023

Month / Year	Planned travel	Justification
June 2022	On-site mentoring to support the development of local pilot: Jakarta and Padang, Indonesia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Supporting the implementation of the technical solution for the ODL capacity building at UT, including site visit to a remote campus · Supporting the implementation of the distance learning course production facilities at UNP · Establishing way forward 	The purpose of this trip is technical mentoring of the implementation of UT and UNP pilots. So far there has been no opportunity to visit on-site to see the technical solutions developed at UT and UNP (both local pilots involve a technical development aspect). A technical expert will travel to provide mentoring to support the implementation of these local pilots.

<p>October 2022</p>	<p>Development meeting and European benchmarking: Tampere, Finland and Dublin, Ireland</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Results of the mid-term external evaluation · Design self-evaluation principles and determine next steps · Share experiences from the completed pilots · Determine next steps and milestones for evaluation data collection and analysis · Benchmarking at TAMK and DCU · Meeting experts and showcasing hybrid learning solutions at TAMK and DCU · A study visit at National Institute of Digital Learning, Dublin 	<p>This is the first meeting with the entire project group since the kick-off meeting in Feb 2020. It is of utmost importance for capacity building and learning from others. Some of the aims from the cancelled Tampere and Dublin visits are moved here. Because of time constraints (only 1 project year left), the two European sites are combined. Larger project groups from partner universities will be provided with the opportunity to benchmark at the European universities.</p>
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November, 2022	<p>Training: Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">· Provide intensive hands-on workshop training in learning analytics at OUM to support the development of the smart learning environment.	<p>This trip is only to OUM because of the specific requirements of the OUM pilot, which requires more support in data analytics than other pilots in other universities. These needs have not been able to be addressed effectively through the webinar series. Although the webinar series that replaced the originally planned intensive trainings was successful, this is one of the aspects that was not fully achieved through an online delivery as it requires a hands-on training approach. This training is important for the OUM project outcomes. Therefore a small team of TAMK learning analytics experts will travel to OUM to conduct the training.</p>
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<p>January 2023</p>	<p>Quality assurance and Dissemination meeting & On-site mentoring: Los Baños and Iligan, Philippines</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Quality assurance: results from self-evaluation · Dissemination: handbook practicalities and conference planning · On-site mentoring in both universities to support the local pilot implementation and evaluation 	<p>This visit combines the purposes of the quality assurance and dissemination meetings of the original project plan. The filipin universities are lead partners in these work packages (MSU-IIT: quality; UPOU: dissemination). These two are combined as with the European visits.</p> <p>The EU team will also provide on-site mentoring in both universities to support local pilots. The EU partners will spend a week in each location, and the Asian partners join for 6 days. The program will be organized so that the joint program takes place during these 6 days and the mentoring is scheduled before and after it.</p>
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<p>March 2023</p>	<p>Development meeting (evaluation) & On-site mentoring: Kuala Lumpur and Georgetown, Malaysia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Monitor progress · Share experiences from the pilots · Determine next steps and milestones for evaluation data collection and analysis · Draft local schedules for further development and next iterations of the pilots · Checkpoint for handbook and conference planning · On-site mentoring in both universities to support the local pilot implementation and evaluation 	<p>This meeting was planned to be held in Kuala Lumpur according to the original plan. It is rescheduled here.</p> <p>The EU team will also provide on-site mentoring in both universities to support local pilots. The EU partners will spend a week in each location, and the Asian partners join for 6 days. The program will be organized so that the joint program takes place during these 6 days and the mentoring is scheduled before and after it.</p>
<p>June 2023</p>	<p>Final development and quality meeting & On-site mentoring: Jakarta and Padang, Indonesia</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Results of the final external evaluation · Results of the pilot evaluations · Determining next steps for rolling out project outcomes · Finalising handbook, conference plans · On-site mentoring in both universities to support the continuity and further development of project outcomes 	<p>The final project meeting is rescheduled here. Again, it is combined with on-site mentoring with a similar plan as the two previous meetings.</p>

October 2023	Final conference “Technologies and pedagogies to enhance equity and accessibility of HE”: Georgetown, Malaysia <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Disseminate the project results and recommendations to a wider international audience and involve an international group of stakeholders · Handbook launching event 	The conference will be held according to the original project plan.
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The revised work and travel plan is clear that, despite efforts made for the two year period from April 2020, some aspects of the project have suffered. For example, opportunities to learn from other partners have been limited since there has been no possibility to see local solutions implemented or to spend prolonged time in joint discussions and dialogue. The project’s own analysis is that it has proceeded successfully, but with limited capacity to achieve its goals. It therefore sees the revised travel plan as being of the utmost importance for a fully successful project outcome.

The external evaluators agree with this analysis and this is corroborated by what they heard during the interviews conducted with project partners (see section 4).

The project website

The BUKA project hosts a clear and accessible website with links to descriptions of the partner pilot projects and also to news, events and a BUKA blog. As the final year of the project progresses, and as dissemination of the project and the outcomes of the pilots become apparent, further information under each of the partners will be helpful. It may also be useful to consider providing some kind of index or signposting to articles of interest or themes that are picked up in the blog as more material is added during the final year. The website is one of the sustainable deliverables of the project, along with a Handbook so there will need to be focus on these areas from the start of the year.

The Digma online platform

The BUKA project avails of an online platform hosted by TAMK (the project coordinator). The key information on this online platform (that is not repeated on the public-facing BUKA website) is that provided under each of the three country teams. In particular the three country ‘checkpoint’ meetings that were held in January 2022 demonstrate the sharing of updates and timelines, the challenges (and opportunities) that the partner institutions have faced up until that point and the presentation of updated project plans with encouragement from the project coordinators to remember the need for dissemination of the project.

The country-specific links in Digma also provide each country with an on-line forum which is intended to encourage participants to post comments, questions and to learn from each

other. To date, only the Indonesian forum has any posts and these have all been made by Dublin City University. During the interviews, some participants said that there had been problems accessing Digma and others said that it was only accessed by those closest to the project with less interest shown by those who were not directly involved. The interviews highlighted the fact that each partner university has its own internal communication circle. Indeed, the project coordinators also found a combination of asynchronous email and synchronous Zoom or Teams meetings to be the most effective means of communication. This has created a sense of independence and autonomy at each HEI in creating their pilot project. But it adds to the sense of isolation from other partners and decreases the cross-institutional communication and collaboration that was expected within a project such as BUKA with multiple partners from diverse countries.

Although the platform has been promoted and encouraged to be used as the LMS and communication platform, there is little evidence that asynchronous communication between partners occurs in this platform. There may be a need to reconsider how asynchronous learning and communication in a project may have different dynamics to learning and communication that occur during a course. The repository function of this platform also enriches resources that each partner can use in their own pilot projects and beyond the project. In addition to website maintenance, curating and maintaining the platform may be needed in the last phase of the project.

As the project moves into its final year, it will want to pay more attention to the embedding of the discussion fora as a means of ensuring that partnership dynamics are alive and can lead to real value in terms of sharing information, challenges and solutions. This will require a balance between the existing, functional internal communication mechanisms and the need, following the pandemic, to create and/or improve cross-project mechanisms.

Internal and external Quality assurance plan plan

An internal and external quality assurance plan is mentioned in the project proposal. However, the external evaluators were unable to find an overarching QA or monitoring plan for the project as a whole. Elements such as the checkpoint meetings and, indeed, the interim evaluation are, of course, part of such a plan but these are not apparent in any document or plan. This is an area that could be improved in the final year of the project, especially since several partners expressed a wish for more monitoring to ensure that their pilot projects are on-track.

4. The objectives and outcomes set for the project and how far they have been achieved during the pandemic. What has been the impact of the pandemic on this achievement?

The project had just launched with its first meeting in Penang, Malaysia in February 2020 when the COVID 19 pandemic hit. Efforts were soon made to modify the initial plan and timeline of the project specifically since all project partners had to move their working and learning online. Thus in one sense, this situation reinforced the point for the partner institutions about the importance of inclusivity and equity in online learning. However, it

also influenced the implementation of the pilot projects as it needed to take into consideration the emergency responses taken by the partner HEIs and the additional accompanying workload.

On the other hand, the pandemic also influenced how HEI partners approached online learning as they considered the role of their institutions during the pandemic and their responses to the changes brought about by the situation. This further influenced how they designed their pilot project. Furthermore, the partners may now have real time examples and the urgency to implement knowledge gained from the online training conducted by the project (see also section 3). The following subsections will describe in more detail the influence of pandemic on the project goals, the timeline of the project and how HEI partners incorporated their experiences during the pandemic into their pilot project design and implementation. Possible limitations arising from the pandemic will be discussed in the last part of this section.

4.1 Delivery of the Work Packages

Project documentation shows that an initial one-year extension was applied for due to the unavoidable delays in implementing the project; HEI partners were informed of this during their meeting in October 2020.

There are seven work packages (WP) that are initially going to be implemented in the BUKA project. Development WP includes Work packages 1 to 4 that are directly involved with pilot projects, while WP 5 to 7 are involved with quality plans, dissemination and exploitation and management of the project. The following table describes how the Development WP's delivery was modified from the original plan.

NB: for further detail on WPs 1-4, please see annex 2.

WP		Initial Description from project documents	Modification
1	Preparation	The project begins with the setup of the project platforms and tools, as well as the required local infrastructure and equipment that will be used in executing the project activities. The partners will	Local infrastructure and equipment procurement are postponed. Partners modified their pilot projects. Introduction of the Digma platform for the project and initiated communication.

		<p>choose local pilots to be developed. The pilots are teaching, learning and guidance interventions in which ID and/or LA will be implemented and tested</p> <p>Milestone and indicator: setting up project online tools, purchasing equipment, choosing pilot projects.</p>	
2	Inclusive ID & LA analysis and design development	<p>WP2, the local infrastructure is set up and the design of the pilots begins with Analysis and Design (A&D of ADDIE), supported by intensive training offered at each Partner HEI and an online module for support and coaching which is hosted in the project online environment (TAMK Moodle LMS).</p> <p>Milestone and indicators: Local infrastructure setup, context and resource analysis, pilot objectives and milestones</p>	<p>Meetings and sharing of practices about pandemic responses link to learning analytics and instructional design.</p> <p>Seminars online about learning analytics, inclusive learning design, models of online learning for capacity building to wider audiences.</p> <p>Pilot projects' iteration by HEI partners.</p> <p>Reorganisation and promoting Digma Platform to support continuous communication and repository of project materials.</p> <p>Starting procurement process for equipment in HEI campus in Indonesia, Malaysia and Philippines.</p>
3	Inclusive ID & LA development-development	<p>WP3 concentrates on the actual development of the pilots. Again, intensive training and online support are provided to scaffold the process. Collaboration and shared expertise are</p>	<p>Initiating peer mentors for each country team.</p> <p>Some HEI partners are in the process of securing necessary equipment amidst a slower supply chain and fluctuating currency.</p>

		<p>promoted with LMS discussions, peer feedback and progress reports.</p> <p>Milestones and indicators: infrastructure complete, pilot materials and activities, pilots tested and finalised</p>	<p>Initial implementation of pilot projects in each partner is still ongoing.</p> <p>Some materials and activities are piloted using existing infrastructure available in HEI partners.</p>
4	Inclusive ID & LA implementation and evaluation-development	<p>WP4, the pilots are ready for implementation (I) with the actual target groups. The implementation process is supported by ongoing online support, reflective practice and action research. The pilots are then evaluated (E) with the help of target group surveys, self- reflection, and peer feedback.</p> <p>Milestones and indicators: Piloting 1st iteration complete, evaluation complete, further development complete</p>	<p>Implementation has begun in some of the pilot projects.</p>

Despite the additional one year extension to October 2023, the activities within this time were no longer following the initial design of the project. Some of the milestones in the original developmental WP's are not yet met. However, this is offset by the fact that other milestones such as rolling out the results and lessons learned at institutional level are already being met due to the experience of the pandemic. The awareness of inclusivity and equity in online learning was increased during pandemic and HEI partners were able to gain valuable insights and knowledge from each other. The pandemic also offered the chance for each partner to analyse and assess their online learning capabilities, readiness and to chart new directions, specifically through the opportunities afforded by the project to learn about instructional design and learning analytics through online training, seminars and meetings.

During the interviews, some participants indicated that they would appreciate more systematic monitoring during the final year of the project to ensure that they are on the right track. This is something that should be built into the project's quality assurance framework.

4.2 Impact of pandemic on the design of the pilot projects

As evidenced from the videos of the checkpoint meetings and also through the on-line pilot project presentations, throughout 2020, the European coordinators and Southeast Asian HEI partners continued to communicate and pivot from previously intensive training to a series of online training and meetings. The modules presented during these online training introduced diverse frameworks to support ODL. These meetings became a space for European and HEI partners to share their experience of pivoting to online learning due to COVID. The sharing is becoming more relevant and timely, providing an additional dimension to the project, although it is not generally pan-project but between coordinators and a specific partner. Where online learning is not an alternative to traditional learning, rather it is the only option during a pandemic. So the discussion about response from faculty and academics that the team found are mostly positive, urgent and insightful. The HEI partners also found themselves suddenly becoming a vital part of the university to provide support and strategies for their colleagues in their own institutions.

The pilot projects' design was also influenced by this dynamic. For example Universitas Terbuka (UT) in Indonesia revised their initial location where centres for students clinics will be implemented. Initially, they set these centres outside of Java Island where the main campus is located. The initial assumption was that internet penetration is much lower in islands outside of Java hence additional learning centres would be more in demand. However due to the restriction of travelling within Indonesia during the pandemic, UT decided to change the centre by mapping the blind spots areas in internet penetration in Java Island and change the location of the centre to these areas and form partnerships with the local communities. This enables the team to continue implementing their pilot project in different locations while still being relevant to achieve objectives of the project and supporting their faculties and students. Nevertheless, this pilot project also faced considerable setbacks due to the delay in setting up its infrastructure (which should have happened at the beginning of the project).

Other HEI partners also changed their plans for recruiting targeted participants in the pilot. For example, the University of the Philippines Open University (UPOU) decided to open access for more institutions in other parts of the Philippines to be included in the initial training phase. Initially the plan was to select only a few institutions to undertake the training, but the increase in participants allowed UPOU to replicate its process in the BUKA project further afield and to develop into a network of zonal centres in the Philippines. As the pandemic highlighted the widespread needs of other institutions to learn about

instructional design and learning analytics that support equity and inclusivity, the team decided to open the access for learning to all motivated institutions and will support the development of some institutions into zonal centres in different areas in the Philippines. They also highlight the motivation to implement their pilot projects with existing infrastructures and using current tools. Even though the purchase of equipment is taking a back seat, the conceptual tools such as Inclusive Learning Design models and Learning Analytics strategies are relevant to the existing needs of the partners and can be immediately implemented in the field.

The pilot projects also underwent more iteration as HEI partners had more time to reflect on their institutions' responses to the pandemic. For example, the break during Spring 2020 helped the OUM team to look through their initial plan in 2019 and enhance it a little further. Their participation in the BUKA project aims to support faculties in creating digital learning materials and use them in their course which became relevant during pandemic. WOU in Malaysia also used their participation in the BUKA project as an opportunity to create a unified framework for teaching and learning in the university. Based on their observation during the pandemic, the shift to online learning was still hampered by traditional learning models and the project will support WOU's effort to experiment with ODL learning models that engage learners and support independence.

For some universities who are not primarily a distance learning institution, the pandemic stimulated a faster adoption of a fully online learning process and the necessity to establish an online learning environment during pandemic. For example, UNP, who already had an initial plan to establish a university-wide hybrid model of learning due to changes at the institutional level, was forced to move to fully online learning during the pandemic. This situation supported the establishment of an innovation centre in the university to support development of online learning expertise and materials. Their participation in the BUKA project gained even more relevance as the urgent need for professional development for faculties and other supporting staff is highlighted during this period. Similarly, MSU IIT also faced such a challenge during the pandemic which highlighted some gaps in their online learning. During the pandemic, MSU IIT team immediately designed development programmes for faculties and created a support system for them. Their participation in the BUKA project provides much needed professional development for faculties who are used to teaching on-site.

Sharing the experience and practices within the HEIs in the BUKA project more widely, which would normally have been part of a final dissemination workload, seems to have already begun, since HEI partners already involved other interested colleagues in the seminars and workshops and created immediate training and provision support in their own institutions. Some materials from the training may already be implemented through these sessions. In a way, the seminars and workshops also supported rapid experimentation in

the institutions. Based on these examples, the pandemic shaped how inclusivity and equity may take different conceptualisation in the pilot projects and it highlights the fact that online learning is becoming a vital part of HEI in the future which required systematic and strategic responses from the institutions.

4.3 Limitations and downsides of Pandemic to BUKA implementation

The previous sections described how modifications occurred in the project's implementation and how this may have shaped the pilot projects design of HEI partners. Despite some positive impacts of pandemics described in the previous sections, the project was also negatively impacted by the pandemic.

The first limitation is related to time constraint and increased workload due to rapid adoption of online learning in HEIs. Some partners had additional workload to train and support professional development of their colleagues or other institutions that had to pivot online. The pandemic provided the necessary incentives for faculties to implement online learning directly in their teaching and participation in BUKA may have provided the much needed materials and content that help them in this role. Some seminars were also open to wider audiences from HEI institutions as inclusive learning design and Learning Analytics gained relevance and importance during this time. The BUKA team in the HEIs became a support system for HEI partners in pivoting online during their emergency learning. However, the initial learning process in the project itself may suffer or take a different direction as the cycle of intensive training, pilot project implementations to testing the evaluation and dissemination were revised considerably. There is a need to map how the modified cycle actually occurs in the initial years of this project to help identify the partners on the learning process that actually emerge.

The second limitation imposed by pandemic is the decreased opportunities to have intense interactions during meetings and training that were originally designed as on-site activities. This may reduce the possibility of cross institutional communication and collaboration.

The third negative impact is related to the procurement process of equipment and tools. The process to set up the ODL environment in HEI partners universities was delayed due to a slower global supply chain, changes in currency and bureaucratic backlogs. Therefore, the learning environment for intensive training and support on-site was not available as intended or was limited in its capacity to support the type of online learning design that was initially intended. Depth of understanding may have been impacted by the lack of on-site intensive training and support. Additionally, this also impacts the way the budget is spent and distributed in the project. The exact nature of budgeting problems cannot be fully described in this report. However, for some pilot projects that relied on initial setup of physical learning centres, this caused major setbacks in their pilot project implementations.

Despite these setbacks, some piloting in relation to faculty development continued using existing LMS and tools.

Based on the description in this section and previous ones, the impact of pandemic to BUKA project may be viewed as a mixed blessing with some unintended consequences. There is increased awareness of inclusiveness and equity in online learning that will be part of regular features in any HEI in the future. Despite the manner of how pivoting online may occur, the principle of equity and inclusivity will need to be part of the learning process in these institutions.

5. Interim conclusions, observations and suggestions; especially in relation to any benefits from the pandemic period that can be taken forward

As highlighted in section 4, there were some real positives to the impact of the pandemic, particularly as it provided a 'real-life' learning environment in which to pilot many aspects of the project's goals in a context of support from BUKA; the interest in the project within the pilot project was much broader as colleagues realised that they could benefit from their institution's involvement in the project and concepts such as inclusivity, diversity and equity were highlighted as areas for focus in the short rather than the longer term. The prospect of enhanced sustainability of the project was also assisted in the form of alliances forged during the pandemic among diverse stakeholders in HEI institutions.

The following headings set out the areas that the external evaluators feel will be helpful in guiding the focus of the project as it begins its final year of operation.

The BUKA project overall

Whilst the external evaluators heard many positive comments through the interviews that it carried out, in relation to the individual pilots, it heard very little to suggest that there was an understanding of the aims and outcomes of the BUKA project overall. Project participants were very clear about their own input into the project through the individual pilots but they were a lot less clear about the purpose of the BUKA project as a whole.

The project management will want to ensure that, during the final year, overall outcomes and objectives of the project are shared with the participants to ensure that all can clearly see how the pilots they are running fit into the BUKA project in the broadest sense. This will be supported by further development key deliverables such as the website and the proposed handbook by the project coordination team.

The overall goal of advancing equity and access of ODL in HEI and specific goals described in the TOR are mostly achieved. There are some goals that need to be addressed specifically in the final year. The first specific goal is *to build the capacity of teaching, technical and instructional design staff in the Partner HEIs in inclusive instructional design and learning analytics*. Some partners describe positive response and rapid adoption to instruction design capacity buildings that are relevant to their needs during the initial period of

pandemic. However, they also express their desire to learn more about learning analytics, especially now that data from the pilot projects are available.

The second objective is *to improve learner engagement and retention through inclusive instructional design and learning analytics*. The HEI partners describe positive responses from university lecturers and teachers that participate in the training and adopt the tools into their classroom. However, students' voice about their experience in the classroom is not yet visible.

The third goal is *to improve pedagogical and technical accessibility of online and blended learning materials*. In the interviews, HEI partners provided a lot of evidence that this goal is achieved and even scaled up to university-wide policy, although some partners also expressed the need to ensure consistency in its implementation.

The fourth goal is *to provide more effective and personalized support for distance learners*. There is evidence that considerations of students' needs and conditions are integrated in the way courses are designed and delivered, although students' feedback will be necessary to gain understanding how these changes are felt and experienced by them.

Results of each Work package

The initial design of the pilot project was based on Analysis, Design, Development, Implementation and Analysis (ADDIE). It is possible that the process analysis and design of the pilot project took another direction when pandemic hit. There is a need to map how the modified cycle actually occurs in the initial years of this project to help identify the partners on the learning process that actually emerge.

Partnership Dynamics

In this section, one notable dynamic is in relation to the turnover of team members in HEI Southeast Asia and within the EU BUKA project. For example, changing of project leaders from TAMK happened twice. There are changes in some team members in the HEI partner teams from Southeast Asia.

There is a need for BUKA team management to ensure consistency and coherence throughout the project duration due to high turnover of team members.

Additional tools that provide a snapshot of the state of the current project such as handbooks or particular sections in Digma may support this purpose. For example, as the final year of the project progresses, and as dissemination of the project and the outcomes of the pilots become apparent, further information under each of the partners will be helpful. It may also be useful to consider providing some kind of index or signposting to articles of interest or themes that are picked up in the blog as more material is added during the final year.

As mentioned above, it was clear to the external evaluators through the interviews that it carried out, that project participants were very clear about their own input into the project through the individual pilots but they were a lot less clear about the outcomes and purpose of the BUKA project as a whole. Therefore, as the project moves into its final year, it will want to pay more attention to the embedding of the discussion fora as a means of ensuring

that partnership dynamics are alive and can lead to real value in terms of sharing information, challenges and solutions.

Sustainability of the project

The legacy of the pandemic is how it altered the way HEIs view ODL: from something that supports on-site learning, to an integrative part of HE. By capitalising this momentum, BUKA partners were able to disseminate knowledge about Instructional Design and Learning Analytics to a wider audience. And due to the emergency learning policies implemented in the HEI institutions, BUKA partner team found a captive audience that needed the tools and support they could provide. The final year of the project can build on this advantage to further embed the sustainability of its outcomes.

Annex 1

Questionnaire used in the interim evaluation to get the views of project participants

BUKA project

Interim evaluation questionnaire

Dear project participant

In order to help us effectively evaluate the achievement of the BUKA project goals to date, we would like to provide some questions for you to reflect on and discuss with us during a short interview session.

The questions focus on the impact that the pandemic has had on the project, the achievement of its goals and on the challenges or opportunities that this has raised for you as participants.

There is no need for you to respond in writing (unless you wish to); we will schedule some interview sessions and look forward to meeting with you.

Satia and Fiona
External evaluators

General questions: learning from the project implementation during the pandemic

In relation to the project:

- What did you learn from the pandemic? What were the main challenges to the project from your perspective?
- What did it make you do differently?
- Was there any lasting benefit to the change?

In relation to your institution:

- Did participation in the BUKA contribute to or help your institution in its processes for responding to the pandemic?

Impact of pandemic in realising the goals of the project

- How did the pandemic affect equity and access to HE pilot projects and in what way?
- How has your initial understanding about achieving this aim been challenged and reformulated during pandemic? (Specifically on the objective to improve technical accessibility to digital learning materials).

The project's goals in relation to the learners/students

- In the project background there are objectives to improve learning engagements, active learning and study skills of the students. How do the partners assess these impacts on their students? How is feedback from students used in the pilot process?

Sustainability: the alignment with institutional response to pandemic

- How do you integrate the project to the wider institutional response to pandemic?
- What are the institutional goals that may be supported by the BUKA project? And how did the pandemic influence the achievement of the goals?

Communication

- How would you describe internal communication in the project?
- What platform and channel do you find most useful?
- How would you describe external communication in the project?
- What external communication channels do you find effective to disseminate the project to a wider audience?

Support for the projects and their implementation during pandemic

- What support did you find useful during this period of the project implementation?
- What support do you still need (or need more of) during the final phase of the project?

Concluding questions

- Are there any project objectives that simply can no longer be met in the time left due to the delay?
- What do you suggest in relation to these: simply delete them or expect that they are taken on board by participants as part of their post-project implementation plans?
- Did any of the lessons learned during the pandemic lead you to believe that some of the original outcomes or objectives could be usefully revised or are there any objectives that should be added that were not originally included?
- Any other comments?

Annex 2

WPs 1-4 milestones

WP	Milestones and Indicators	HEI Partners					
		UT	UNP	OUM	WOU	UPOU	MSU IIT
1 Preparation	Local infrastructure setup, context and resource analysis, pilot objectives and milestones	<p>Pilot target location identified</p> <p>Assessment of existing infrastructure.</p> <p>Pilot objectives and milestones formulated</p>	<p>Location for Digital Learning Centre (DLC) provided by university</p>	<p>Pilot project iteration during break in Spring 2020</p> <p>Capacity building for three different participant groups and models</p> <p>Equipment delayed</p>	<p>Local set up using sister's institution's lab</p> <p>student and staffs analysis conducted and used for pilot project development</p>	<p>Purchase of equipment delayed</p> <p>changing in pilot participants targets and means of recruitment</p>	<p>Analysis for pilot project design and target participants done</p>

<p>2 Inclusive ID & LA analysis and design development</p>	<p>Milestone and indicators: Local infrastructure setup, context and resource analysis, pilot objectives and milestones</p>	<p>Equipment partially purchased, some adjustment to the equipment. Infrastructure partially ready (5 hotspots installed).</p>	<p>DLC to be Digital Learning Innovation Centre (DLIC) additional research activity Procurement of equipment is done Workshops on blended learning, ID and LA Workshops on animation, video and web development</p>	<p>Equipments purchasing are done software purchasing is on going Analysis lead to changes in balancing between LA and ID</p>	<p>Will move studio to other locations capacity building for staffs is done content creation done developing guidelines for online facilitations</p>	<p>equipment purchased and set up Training programs ongoing including development of materials for Blended Open Learning (BOL) for participants from 23 institutions</p>	<p>training for faculty is done participants come from different colleges with diverse needs - leads to different implementation in different colleges</p>
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<p>3 Inclusive ID & LA development-development</p>	<p>Milestones and indicators: infrastructure complete, pilot materials and activities, pilots tested and finalised</p>	<p>Content development and deployment done. Mockup development and trial.</p>	<p>Development of teaching materials on going Purchase of equipment still ongoing</p>	<p>Modules development on going, need more time due to changing of academics Capacity building for academics focus group on going</p>	<p>Ongoing implementation</p>	<p>Some equipment is in the process of procurement modules for participants are used in ongoing training</p>	<p>Purchased of equipment for learning centre is completed, venue will be move Institutional recognition for capacity building program lead to additional certification</p>
<p>4 Inclusive ID & LA implementation and evaluation-development</p>	<p>Milestones and indicators: Piloting 1st iteration complete, evaluation complete, further development complete</p>	<p>On going</p>	<p>Implementation of teaching materials to students is ongoing</p>				<p>Mentoring and community building is ongoing</p>

