

**ARBEITSBEREICH:**

**Empirische Lernweltforschung & Hochschuldidaktik**  
Empirical Learningworld Research & Higher Education Didactics

# CONTESSA

## Contemporary Teaching Skills for South Asia

**Sandra Hummel & Rudolf Egger**  
**Mirjam Brodacz-Geier, Bridget Sheehan, Mana-Teresa Donner**

**Funding:** Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE)  
**Project Duration:** 2021 – 2023  
**Partners:** TUD Dresden University of Technology (Germany)  
University of Cambodia, Cambodia (Cambodia)  
Paññāsāstra University of Cambodia (Cambodia)  
University of Colombo (Sri Lanka)  
Open University of Colombo (Sri Lanka)

### Background

CONTESSA, an Erasmus+ project initiated and funded by the European Commission under the Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) framework, unfolded its transformative journey from November 2018 to November 2022. Led by the University of Graz (Empirical Lifeworld Research & Higher Education Didactics) this initiative aimed to enhance teaching skills in Cambodia and Sri Lanka through strategic collaborations with higher education institutions and local educational organizations.

#### OBJECTIVE 1

A comprehensive Train-the-Trainer (TTT) program was designed for teacher trainers through multi-day workshops, emphasizing contemporary educational theories, approaches, and methods to enhance the quality of university teaching.

#### OBJECTIVE 2

Trainee teachers gained access to an online-based learning program comprising five modules, with a focus on acquiring modern and applicable teaching skills, available on an Open Educational Resource (OER) platform.

#### OBJECTIVE 3

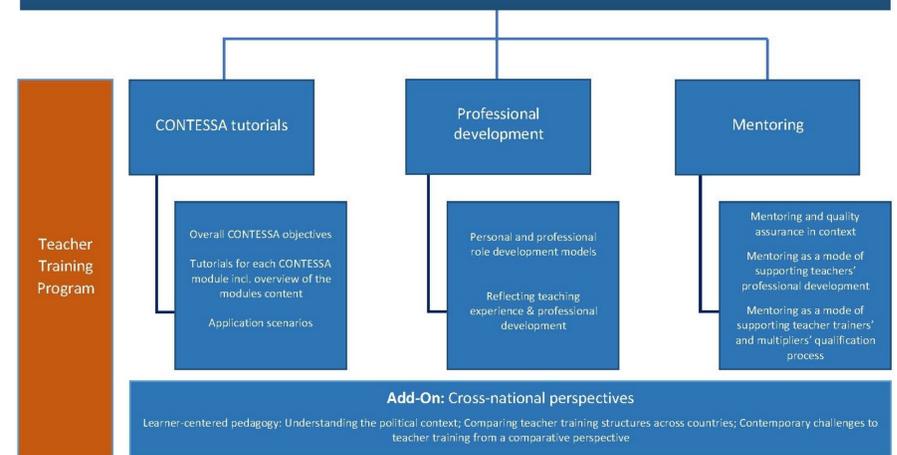
In-service teachers were granted access to modified online modules tailored to meet the continuing education needs of those actively working in classrooms.

### Train-the-Trainer Online Course



Our "Train-the-Trainer" (TTT) initiative imparts essential skills to teacher trainers for effective knowledge transfer to both educators and trainees. Termed the "multiplier program," its primary goal is to ensure the enduring impact of the project beyond its official conclusion. Rooted in needs analyses and interviews with project partners, the TTT program includes online modules focusing on professional development, mentoring, and cross-national perspectives in teacher training, along with in-person workshops in partner countries. It not only facilitates knowledge dissemination but also empowers trainers to seamlessly incorporate CONTESSA into teacher training. The program's development involved soliciting input through online surveys and expert interviews, with detailed results outlined in the comprehensive Online Survey on Training Needs Report. For a deeper understanding of the program's structure, refer to the Train-the-Trainer Didactic Concept and the overall Train-the-Trainer Concept.

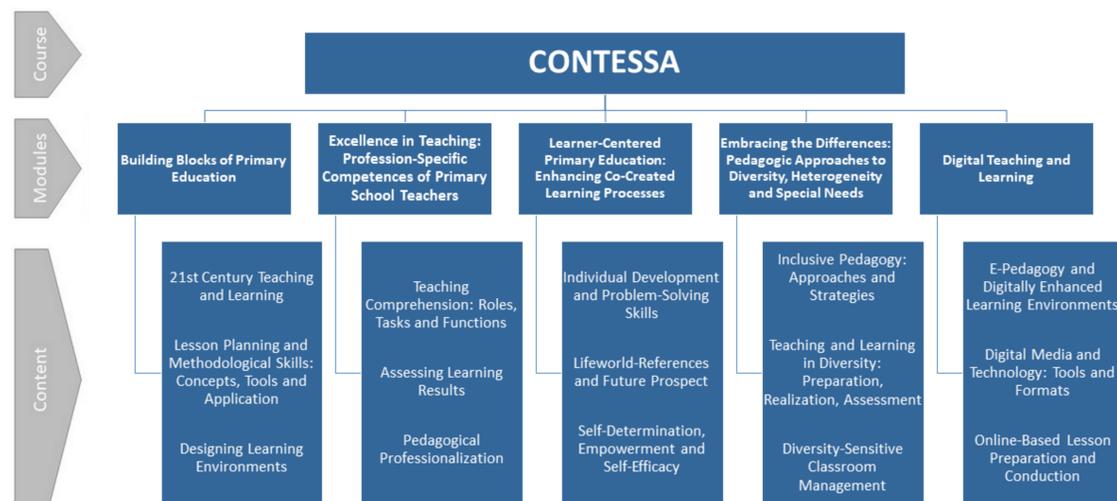
### CONTESSA Train-the-Trainer Workshops



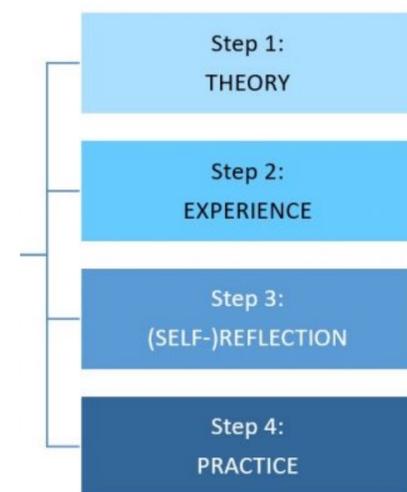
### CONTESSA Online Modules



In response to the evolving landscape of education, educators continually need to update their skills. CONTESSA addresses this need by focusing on the development of contemporary teaching skills through five carefully curated modules. The course explores best practices in digital teaching and learning, subject and learner-centered teaching methods, the evolving role of teachers, diversity in the classroom, and other essential aspects of modern teaching. Upon completing the course, participants will be equipped to apply these contemporary teaching skills, actively engage all students, and discover innovative methods to help students realize their full potential.



To ensure a cohesive structure, each module in the CONTESSA course follows a 5-STEP design:



#### Publications:

Bohlinger, S., & Hummel, S. (2024, in press). Digital Capacity Building in Teacher Education: An Environmental Case Study from Cambodia. In S. Hummel (Ed.), *Empowering Education in Cambodia and Sri Lanka: Advancing Quality in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Teaching and Learning*. Springer VS.

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# Digitalisation of Examination Formats in Higher Education Corona-Related Changes in University Examination Processes

Mana-Teresa Donner, Sandra Hummel & Rudolf Egger

## Background

**Introduction** | The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the digitalization of education, particularly in the realm of examinations. The shift to online exams presented challenges, necessitating a re-evaluation of exam formats and items (Pausits et al., 2021). Digital transformation led to restructuring and redesigning exams across various educational objectives (Bedenlier et al., 2021). Teachers faced the need to revise evaluation strategies, resulting in significant changes in assessment approaches (Adedoyin & Soykan, 2020). Vollmer (2020) notes that written exams constitute 85 % of assessments in higher education. While open exam formats are generally avoided due to economic reasons, the Bologna Process has prompted universities to adopt electronic exams, automating evaluation processes and introducing open questions (Reinmann, 2014).

**Impact of COVID-19 on Exam Formats** | The COVID-19 pandemic pushed for the widespread adoption of online exams, introducing new challenges for students, including increased stress (Elsalem et al., 2020). Students faced stressors related to the format of exam questions, fear of technical issues, and limited information about exam details. Structured communication channels, organization of examination rounds, and clear procedures for technical difficulties were identified as stress-reducing measures (Brodese & Lorenz, 2020). The shift to online exams also highlighted the importance of quick problem-solving in a remote setting.

**Objectives** | The research project explores the differences between digital exams and traditional face-to-face settings by analyzing exam forms before and after the pandemic. Central aspects include exam formats, question designs, preparation, time scope, and scoring. Insights from teachers' experience reports are interpreted to derive recommendations for effective digital examination scenarios.

## Research Design

This research explores the differences between digital and face-to-face examinations in higher education. The study employs a **two-stage design**, beginning with **guided interviews** with teachers from the University of Graz to identify various digital exam forms, incorporate teacher experiences, and derive recommendations for efficient online examination scenarios. In the second stage, examination forms from before and after the COVID-19-induced transition to online exams were analyzed through **document analyses**, focusing on exam formats, question designs, preparation, communication, and assessment.



**Guided interviews**

- N = 12 teachers
- Diverse faculties
- Focus: various aspects of online exams



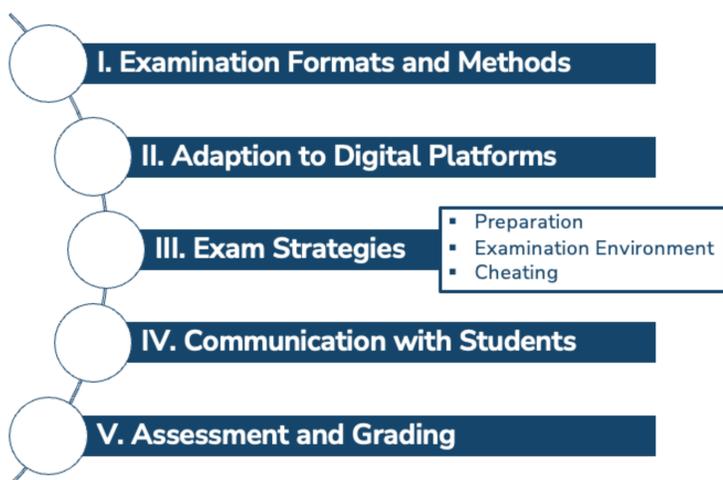
**Document analysis**

- N = 14 examination forms (7 online)
- Different faculties and years
- Evaluation grid

The research uses an evaluation grid for document analysis, encompassing factors like exam format, utilized tools, the quantity and nature of questions, and other pertinent parameters. Additionally, a comparative analysis was conducted between face-to-face and online exams, focusing on criteria such as question format, exam duration, and the tools employed.

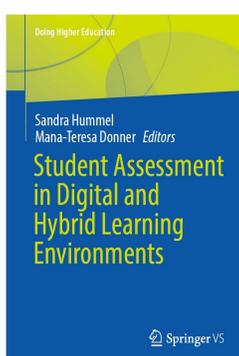
## Results and Recommendations

The analysis resulted in a category system consisting of **five main aspects**:



- I. Online learning replaced face-to-face exams with open-book assessments, increasing student participation. Digital platforms like Moodle and Perception posed challenges in adapting open-ended questions, leading some to revert to traditional exams in face-to-face classes.
- II. Online exams initially used short essay formats, but a shift back to face-to-face formats occurred due to perceived genuineness. Adapting to altered conditions became necessary, with persistent use of anti-cheating measures. Managing question dissemination and assessing open-ended responses in the online environment posed unique challenges.
- III. Online exam preparation mirrored traditional teaching, with consistent time allocations for student queries. Teachers conducted test runs, adapting to new formats and implementing security measures. Flexibility in preparation strategies was observed for different online exam types.
- IV. Structured communication during online exams is crucial. Students can address issues via email, phone, or UniMeet rooms, allowing prompt instructor responses. Concerns about fairness arise when clarifying questions that may impact the entire group.
- V. Online exam achievements are comparable to face-to-face classes. Instructors focus on independent wording to prevent cheating, using evaluation grids for streamlined and standardized assessments. Automated grading has limitations in assessing complex tasks, and potential technical issues pose challenges to the grading process.

**Summary** | The analyses revealed that a tailored approach to teacher training is essential, with seminars providing concrete advice and support for implementing online examinations. Information accessibility is crucial, requiring easily accessible resources to reduce the time spent searching for information. Additionally, fostering an informal exchange of experiences among colleagues can contribute to a diverse understanding of online examinations, promoting best practices. Responding to teachers' requests, there is a need for user-friendly examination programs that align with the latest AI research, enabling automated evaluation of semi-open questions. Finally, an emphasis on continuous improvement and innovation in assessment approaches, combining formative and summative methods, is crucial for the evolving landscape of digital education. These recommendations collectively aim to enhance the quality and efficiency of online assessments in higher education.



Digitalization of Examination Formats  
in Higher Education Corona-Related  
Changes  
Mana-Teresa Donner and Sandra Hummel

**Abstract:**  
A central element of any effective teaching and learning strategy is assessment. Covid-related re-evaluations of learning goals in the context challenge on the part of higher education teachers to derive assessment strategies adapted to the changed learning scenarios. The Corona-related view of digitalization in higher education in spring 2020 opened up new forms of assessment and assessment approaches which are closely related to changing teaching and learning methods. The aim of the study is to explore how digital examination formats have been combined in practice. In order to make decisions in the area of examination formats, changes and strategies for examination preparation, guided interviews with 12 university teachers at the University of Graz were conducted. Additionally, 14 examination forms from face-to-face and online teaching were analyzed. The results show that examination strategies as well as examination forms are strongly dependent on the size of the course and need to be adapted to the given framework conditions. Online examinations, communication and teacher experience as well as open-book examinations are increasingly used to construct the reduced content in the online setting.

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https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-42253-0\_5

**Publication:**

Donner, M.-T., Hummel, S. (2023). Digitalisation of Examination Formats in Higher Education Corona-Related Changes. In S. Hummel, & M.-T. Donner (Eds.), *Student Assessment in Digital and Hybrid Learning Environments* (pp. 85-104). Springer VS. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-42253-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-42253-0_5)



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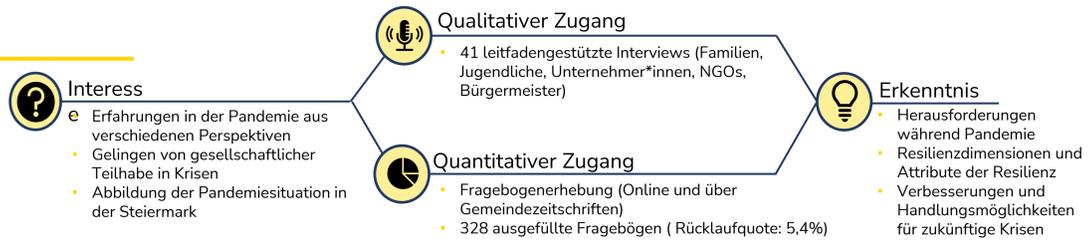
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**PARS**  
*Pandemieresiliente Steiermark*

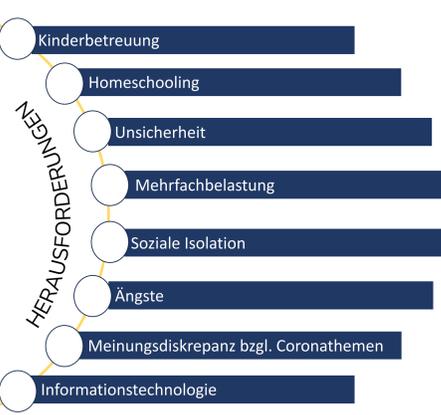
**Förderung:** Land Steiermark & AK Steiermark  
**Projektdauer:** 09.2021 – 04.2022  
**Team:** Christoph Bauer, Rudolf Egger, Maximilian Barth, Anna Kohler, Magdalena Seidl

**Hintergrund**

Die Corona Pandemie stellte die Gesellschaft und ihre Individuen vor bis dato nicht gekannte Herausforderungen. Im Zuge des Projektes PARS wurden diese Herausforderungen und die Erfahrungen in der Krise aus der Perspektive von Familien, Jugendlichen, Unternehmen und NGOs näher beleuchtet. Darüber hinaus dienten die Ergebnisse zur Entwicklung von Handlungsempfehlungen zur Unterstützung von regionalpolitischen Entscheidungsprozessen. Als Referenzgemeinden dienten Graz (Bezirk: Lend) Landl, Mureck und Straß.



**Familien & Individuen:**



Jugendliche und Erwachsene hatten als Individuen mit ähnlichen Herausforderungen zu kämpfen. Für Familien war die Mehrfachbelastung besonders fordernd. Dabei hatten Eltern gleichzeitig mit Homeoffice/Arbeit, Hausarbeit, Kinderbetreuung, Unterstützung beim Homeschooling und der Beziehungspflege zu kämpfen. Die Lockdowns führten zu einer stärkeren sozialen Isolation. Den Menschen fehlten ihre gewohnten sozialen Kontakte. Wenngleich die Digitalisierung hierbei half, ermöglichte sie dennoch keinen adäquaten Ersatz für persönliche Treffen. Nicht nur geringere Kontaktaufnahmen zu Mitmenschen, sondern auch unterschiedliche Meinungen zur Pandemie führten zu Freundschaftsverlusten und befeuerten die soziale Isolation ebenso, wie die Angst vor einer Ansteckung. Hilfreich war vor allem der Kontakt zur Kernfamilie und zu Peers. Diese dienten als Rückhalt und zeigten Verständnis.

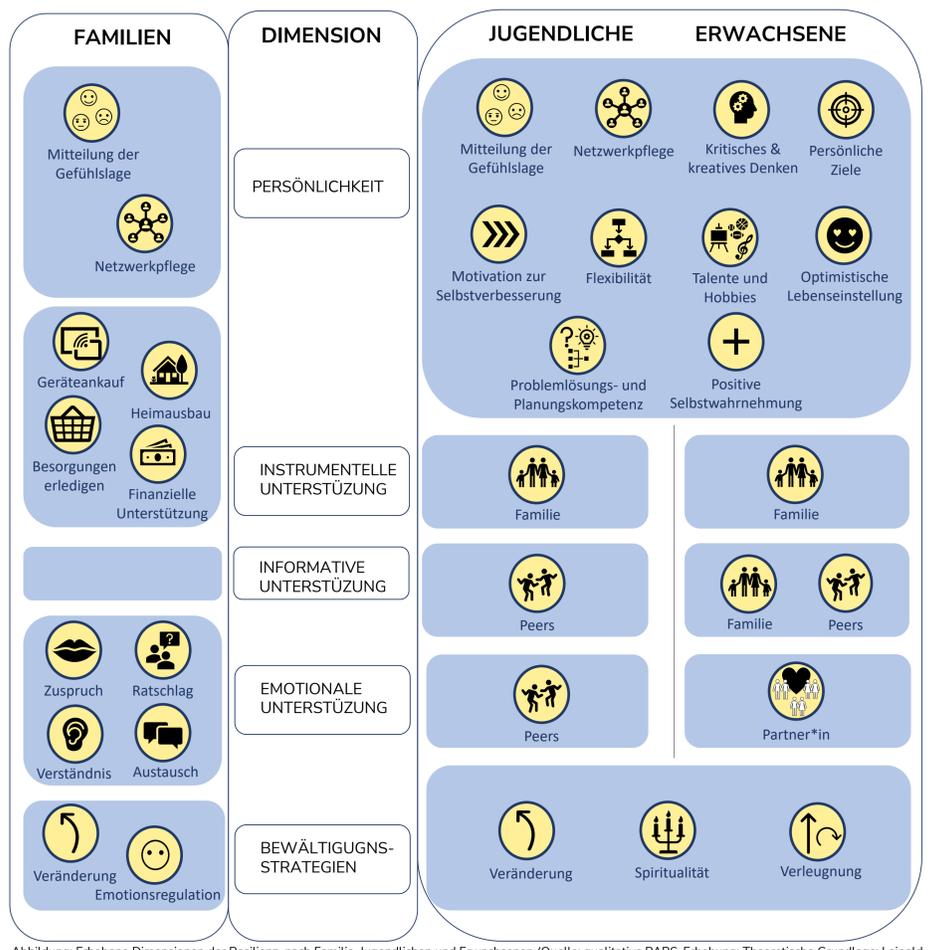
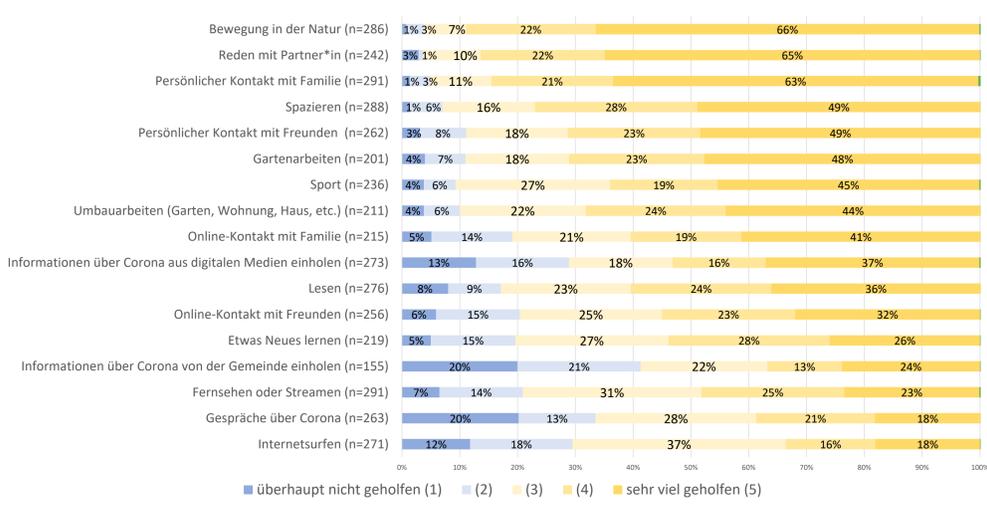
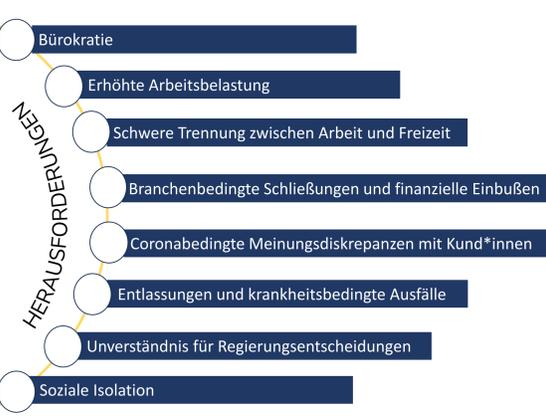


Abbildung: Hilfreiche und weniger hilfreiche Tätigkeiten zur Bewältigung der pandemiebedingten Herausforderungen (Quelle: PARS-Erhebung) / Erhobene Dimensionen der Resilienz, nach Familie, Jugendlichen und Erwachsenen (Quelle: qualitative PARS-Erhebung; Theoretische Grundlage: Leipold 2015; Wellensiek 2012; Fröhlich-Gildhoff und Rönnau-Böse 2021; 2022; Steinebach und Steinebach 2013; Grotberg 2011; Anders u. a. 2022)

**Unternehmer\*innen & NGOs:**



Unternehmer\*innen und NGOs hatten mit sehr unterschiedlichen Herausforderungen zu kämpfen. Dies war bspw. von der Branche abhängig in der sie sich befanden. Unter anderem profitierten Bauunternehmen vom Geld, das Familien durch nicht stattfindende Urlaube sparten und in das Eigenheim steckten. Auch andere Branchen waren von einer erhöhten Auftragslage betroffen. Dies führte unter anderem zu größerer Arbeitsbelastung und war ebenso fordernd, wie die damit einhergehende schwerere Trennung von Arbeit und Freizeit. Bereiche, welche von Schließungen betroffen waren, kämpften mit finanziellen Einbußen, notwendigen Entlassungen und sozialer Isolation der verbliebenen Mitarbeiter\*innen. Als größere Herausforderung wurde das eindeutige Verstehen von Regierungsentscheidungen und das Ausfüllen von Formularen bspw. für Förderungen gesehen. Jene, die sich an die neuen Gegebenheiten anpassten, flexibel blieben und kreativ und zukunftsorientiert mit den Problemen umgehen, viel es leichter mit den Herausforderungen umzugehen, bzw. nahmen diese sogar nicht wirklich wahr.



Abbildung: Attribute organisationaler Resilienz (Quelle: qualitative PARS-Erhebung; Theoretische Grundlage: Ruiz-Martin, López-Paredes, Weiner 2018; Rolfe 2019; Unkrig 2021)



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# VISION

## Virtual Interface for Smart Interactions Online

**Sandra Hummel & Rudolf Egger**

**Bridget Sheehan**

**Mirjam Brodacz-Geier,**

**Beatrice Kogler**

**Mana-Teresa Donner**

**Funding:** Erasmus+ Strategic Partnerships  
**Project Duration:** 2021 – 2023  
**Partners:** TUD Dresden University of Technology (Germany)  
University of Amsterdam (Netherlands)  
Smart-Study (Austria)

## Background

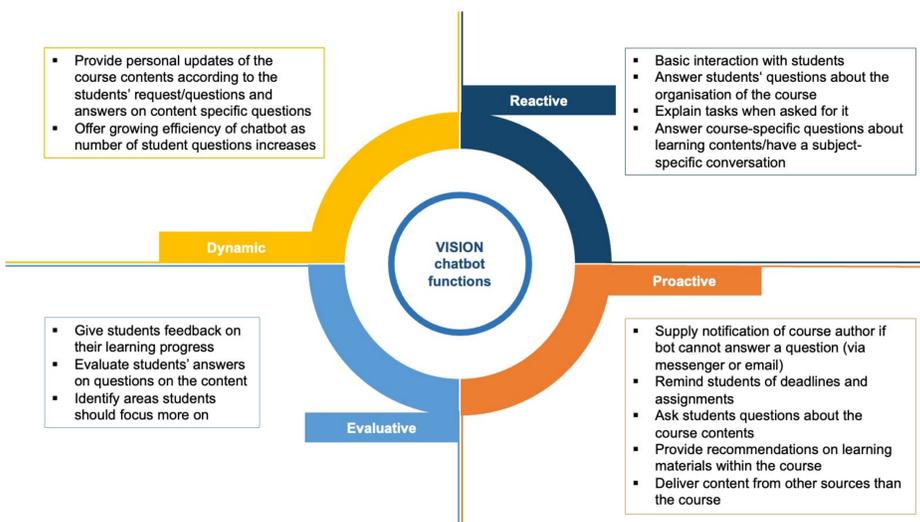
The digital transformation has brought significant changes to higher education, addressing the evolving needs of students and educators (Köhler et al., 2023; Ferrara et al., 2016; Winkler & Söllner, 2018; Hummel et al., 2022). Notably, chatbots for learning, like ChatGPT, have gained attention since late 2022. Led by University of Graz (Empirical Lifeworld research and Higher Education Didactics), in collaboration with the University of Amsterdam, TU Dresden, and Smart-Study, the VISION (Virtual Interface for Smart Interaction Online) initiative runs from June 2020 to November 2023. The project explores the role of AI-based technologies in supporting university teaching through personalized learning assistants. Utilizing cutting-edge AI methods, including natural language processing (NLP) and machine learning, this tutor analyzes student data, identifies knowledge gaps, and adjusts teaching strategies accordingly. Through tailored explanations, suggested learning materials, and personalized feedback, it aims to empower students to obtain support for their learning processes.

## AI Learning Assistance in Education

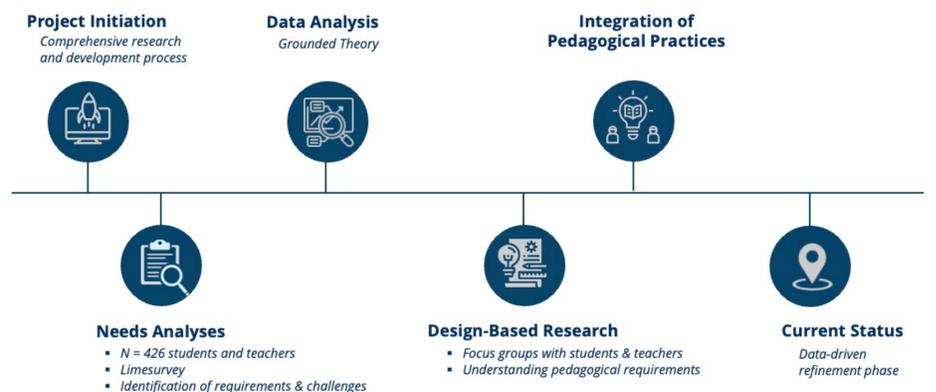
The development of the VISION chatbot involved extensive needs analyses with students and teachers across Austria, the Netherlands, and Germany. Grounded Theory, a qualitative research method, was employed to comprehensively explore data and identify unique needs and preferences. The findings informed the chatbot's features, functionalities, and support mechanisms, ensuring alignment with learner-centered and competency-based learning processes. Collaborative focus groups involving teachers and students further contributed to the chatbot's meaningful development, emphasizing its alignment with educational objectives and values. The project is now in a data-driven refinement phase, utilizing focus group insights to optimize the chatbot's capabilities.

## VISION chatbot functions

At the heart of the VISION project lies the AI-based learning assistant, designed to elevate the quality of learning experiences through the deployment of the following functions:



The VISION project's AI-based learning assistant aspires to be a versatile companion in the realm of education, dedicated to optimizing the learning journey for each student. Through its multifaceted functions, it seeks to foster engagement, empower self-directed learning, provide valuable feedback, and adapt to the evolving educational needs of students.



## Intellectual Outputs



**The Visionar E-Course** empowers higher education teachers to seamlessly integrate the Smart Authoring Tool and Chatbot Tutor for effective online learning. Bridging the technical and didactic dimensions, this hands-on course shall support the transition from theory to practical application, addressing the critical need for enhanced online teaching capabilities highlighted during the COVID-19 pandemic.



**The Vision Smart Authoring Tool** aims to improve the creation of higher education courses by offering educators an interface to develop interactive and visually appealing course content. By integrating AI technology and a Chatbot Tutor, this tool dynamically adjusts to students' learning experiences through their interactions, delivering a feature for fostering effective, self-guided, and optimized learning results.



**The Visionary Chatbot Tutor** enhances online education by simulating student-teacher interactions through embedded AI software. Linked to the Smart Authoring Tool, it tailors courses to students' needs, providing 24/7 academic support and dynamic updates

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