Editorial

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Biographical note: Francisco J. García-Peñalvo received a PhD in Computer Science (2000) from the University of Salamanca, Spain. He works as a Teacher in the Computer Science Department of the University of Salamanca. He is the Director of the research GRoup in InterAction and e-Learning (GRIAL). His main research interests are e-Learning systems, web engineering, semantic web, human–computer interaction and software reuse.

The Bologna Process (European Ministers of Education, 1999) aims to establish a European Area of Higher Education by 2010. The general objectives are the introduction of undergraduate and postgraduate levels in all countries, with first degrees no shorter than 3 years; a European Credit Transfer System; and finally the elimination of remaining obstacles to the mobility of students and teachers. But in a deeper sense, this process represents a philosophical movement; it is a unification of the European university model that goes towards a more active learning model, i.e. a transformation from a Napoleonic model, centred in the teacher figure (deeply rooted in the South of Europe), to an Anglo-Saxon model, centred in the student figure (deeply rooted in the North of Europe).

This new reference space for higher education presents the universities, implication in the lifelong learning as a strategic point, further away from the official undergraduate and graduate studies. Lifelong learning could be defined as a permanent learning process, which qualifies persons to acquire and update their knowledge, skills and abilities in various stages of their lives and in various learning contexts (both formal and informal contexts). Also lifelong learning contributes to the improvement of the citizens' opportunities according to their aspirations and abilities, and consequently in their personal, social and professional development (Cieza, 2006).

The integration of our higher education systems to the Bologna framework is a great challenge in which e-Learning approaches became a great allied in order to make easier and more flexible the learning process in a continuous formation or training framework.

Lifelong learning is, undoubtedly, one of the learning contexts that generate a more significant growth and demand regarding e-Learning, and also in distance learning contexts as for mixed or blended experiences. However, it is important to underline that after an initial technological fascination and self-learning phase, whose balance is far from being satisfactory, corporations, public administrations and learning institutions prefer initiatives based on the dynamism and tutoring presence (Santillana Formación, 2005), because they consider that there are more possibilities to achieve learning success and quality following this model.

In the last edition of the Virtual Campus 2006 Workshop (García, Lozano and Lamamie de Clairac, 2006), which was held as part of the 2006 International Expoelearning Conference (http://www.aefol.com), lifelong learning inside the European Higher Education Learning Space was the main discussion theme. Both Academia and Enterprise tried to combine efforts in order to define experiences and reference models that could help the evolution and improvement of the continuous formation and abilities certification. The most interesting and quality papers have been selected by an international committee to configure this *IJCEELL* special issue.

These papers are a very good representation of the adaptation process that is suffering the European University to converge with the lifelong learning guidelines of the Bologna model, showing a clear example of the role played by e-Learning.

In the first paper, Sergio Vásquez Bronfman analyses how e-Learning solutions open very interesting doors; but the reality shows the failure of a huge majority of these projects, perhaps due to an excessive focus on technology (technocentrism) and on 'content' (infocentrism), presenting a black and white e-Learning, according to Martínez (2006). The discussed solution is related to address the learning proposals through a more practical orientation based on information technologies.

One the most promising fields for e-Learning-based lifelong learning is the language learning. In this area, the Sánchez-Villalón and Ortega's paper is devoted to present AIOLE, a personal learning environment that enables learners to establish their own paths for lifelong learning in a more open and student-centred system.

Talking about lifelong learning based on e-Learning solutions entails taking into account the storage facilities that enables the use and reuse of the contents organised in defined learning units. The learning object approach is a very accepted reference model that allows the definition of learning content distributed repository systems. The paper by Soto-Carrión, García-Gordo and Sánchez-Alonso presents the necessity to introduce ontological representations to make more flexible repositories that permits more mature learning object reuse facilities.

The European Higher Education Learning Space requires more active learning methodologies. Regeras-Santos et al. present Quest Environment for Self-managed Training (QUEST), a web system that allows the development of cooperative and competitive workshops. It presents individual and group work environments in which several intellectual 'challenges', to be solved in a time-constrained way, are proposed to the students by students and/or teachers.

All the papers in this special issue are related to technology and they present e-Learning solutions in a more precise way. However, as presented in Bronfman's paper, the technocentrism is not enough to guarantee the success in the learning activities. This way, human factor in e-Learning processes is an essential condition to achieve excellence in e-Learning training; and it is an indispensable element to design more comprehensive solutions that span training, improve knowledge sharing and offer more intelligent ways of collaboration and interaction. The two last papers of this special issue are compliant with the ideas above. Marcelo and Perera centre their work in the didactic interaction, analysing the processes of asynchronous communication in the forums of e-Learning. On the other hand, Seoane et al. stress the human factor in e-Learning processes over each other variable, defining a tutoring methodology in which the students perceive the presence of their partners, losing this way the loneliness of the virtual environments, which causes a direct improvement of the success ratio in their learning approach.

With this special issue, we present a very interesting reference framework of good practices in lifelong learning based on e-Learning approaches. The experiences are very valuable and indispensable to achieve a methodological change and an increase of the continuous training inside the framework defined by the European Higher Education Learning Space.

Acknowledgements

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