Editorial

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Biographical notes: Benno Volk is Assistant Manager of the E-Learning Center at the University of Zurich. His research interests are competency-based education, organisational learning, higher education, media literacy and eCompetence. He has many years of experience at different universities with the planning of further education programmes for academic instruction and university teaching, consultant for educational technologies and IT project management, curriculum development and design of trainings for the acquisition of media-literacy and ICT skills for students and staff.

1 Introduction

It is undoubted that e-learning offers a lot of positive aspects for teaching and learning processes at universities and that e-learning has the potential to improve the quality of the teachings in higher education.

Although the internet and many digital technologies are inventions of universities, e-learning is still not a common standard at every faculty. The main reasons for this situation are the lack of teachers' knowledge and competence as well as the 'unique organisational conditions' at universities.

This special issue focuses on the theoretical background of eCompetence for academic staff, practical examples and different concepts for the acquisition of eCompetence in staff development programmes.

2 Overcome prejudices

Some may think that staff development programmes for eCompetence are not necessary anymore because of the fact that new generations of students and academic staff seem to be more tech savvy. Due to studies concerning the digital natives debate this assumption has been disproved.

Because of the permanent development of new digital technologies and due to the fact that there exists a great diversity in students' and staff experiences with technology it is still necessary to offer trainings to acquire technology-based skills and pedagogical competences for the use of technology in higher education.

Furthermore, universities and colleges as educational institutions should provide a change management strategy in order to support and foster these processes toward an organisational learning.

This publication highlights some initiatives at universities in ten countries, on different continents. A number of specialists have participated in this special issue to report on current developments concerning eCompetence for academic staff.

3   Papers of this special issue

1   The first paper written by myself gives an introduction of the concept eCompetence. It points out that the acquisition of competences is more than simple skill trainings and that human resources development for academic staff should aspire to the acquisition of core competencies. As an example the 'Zurich E-learning Certificate' has integrated some important aspects:

   • As a cooperation between the three major universities in Zurich it has established a 'standard' for staff development programmes.

   • It is part of the whole programme for academic instruction, which means that the pedagogical focus is dominant and not the technological point of view.

   • Reflective learning in a social learning environment is a basis for the acquisition of competences for professionals like academic staff.

2   The second paper by Markus Deimann and Theo Bastiaens from the 'FernUniversität Hagen', (the only state-maintained distance teaching university in German-speaking countries) gives an example for a 'competency-based education in electronic-supported environment'. The specific instructional design of the postgraduate academic master programme 'eEducation' is presented and explained in this paper.

3   The third paper by the specialist for competency Dirk Schneckenberg (ESC Rennes School of Business, Strategy & Marketing, France) about 'Conceptual foundations and strategic approaches for eCompetence' gives an excellent overview of eCompetence as a holistic concept that has to be integrated in the strategies of universities. He favours portfolio models for the integration of formal and informal learning for academic staff.

4   The paper by Carmel McNaught and Paul Lam (Centre for Learning Enhancement and Research, Chinese University of Hong Kong) describes experiences with the institutional framework and a set of strategies at the University of Hong Kong.

5   The paper by Andréa Belliger and David Krieger (Institute for Communication Research in Lucerne, Switzerland) designs 'An e-competence profile for teachers in higher education'. The focus of this paper is on the organisational components in educational institutions.

6   The sixth paper 'Introducing innovative e-learning environments in higher education' by Maria Grigoriadou, Grammatiki Tsaganou, Evangelia Gouli, Agoritsa Gogoulou and Kyparisia Papanikolaou (University of Athens, Greece) presents an overview of a variety of e-learning tools with adaptive capabilities for teaching and learning processes.

7   Damian Miller (University of Teacher Education, Central Switzerland) offers in his paper an inside view of the postgraduate 'Certificate of Advanced Studies (CAS) e-learning'. He suggests a model for an online course that enable the combination of informal and formal learning with the integration of personal experiences in a further education programme.

8   The paper 'Managing the shortage of teaching faculty for technical education in India' by Thankamma Thankachan, P.B. Sharma and R.K. Singh (Delhi Technological University, India) highlights the core competency of engineering teachers and the educational profile for academic staff.

9   The ninth paper by Steffi Engert and Anke Petschenka is a report of the 'E-Competence Agency' at the University of Duisburg-Essen, Germany. The authors present the implementation of a strategy that combines support, services and consultation for academic staff.

10 The tenth paper by Ahmed Musa, Ayman Al-Dmour, Fares Fraij, Virgilio Gonzalez and Rafeeq Al-Hashemi (Al-Hussein Bin Talal University, Jordan) explains the development of a 'Virtual laboratory for a communication and computer networking course'.

11 The paper by Appavoo Paramasiven (University of Mauritius) shows a 'Constructivist's approach to teaching computing' subjects. This teaching and learning strategy was integrated in a curriculum and transferred to a computer-aided laboratory that integrates modelling and simulations.

12 The paper by Chia-Cheng Shen, Huan-Ming Chuang and Li-Chuan Wang (National Yunlin University of Science and Technology, Taiwan) describes 'Application of knowledge-sharing blog concepts to the information teaching'. In a study the sharing of knowledge and information between students in three different environments were compared.

13 The last paper of this issue by Avi Rushinek and Sara Rushinek (University of Miami, USA) explains the results of a study in which audio/video podcasts were used to learn pedagogical competences educational settings.

To sum up, all the papers point out that innovation with digital technologies in higher education typically requires the development of new learning and teaching competences. Therefore, much more efforts are still needed to qualify academic staff and to increase the quality of teachings in higher education.

Hopefully, decision-maker will remark this publication and may it help to foster the dissemination of eCompetence at universities.