Chapter 11
Training of Teachers in Virtual Scenario:
An Excellence Model for Quality Assurance in Formative Programmes

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ABSTRACT

The integration of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) into higher education instruction is receiving growing attention from university scholars and administrators. The Canarian Government funded the Faculty Professional Development project (FPD) to enhance the quality of formative programmes. Political and socioeconomic forces are inundating the two institutions with more strenuous demands for student competence and teaching accountability. FPD aims at developing and implementing online courses for training faculty members. Thus, understanding what makes faculty development effective is critical to understanding the success or failure of the FPD innovation. The arguments in this chapter response the following needs: (a) an explanation of the potential impact of e-development on faculty and agency staff members' learning, and (b) electronic training for quality assurance specifications.

ORGANISATIONAL BACKGROUND

The Canary Islands comprise seven major islands and are situated on the north-west African coast. They have been one of the seventeen Spanish autonomous communities in 'ultra-peripheral regions' of the European Union since 1982. The regional parliament exercises political power and oversees educational policy.

The expansion of the universities and training industry in the Canary Islands was brought about by the increase in distance education and better quality management and accountability. The first university in this case under reference was founded in 1701 on the island of Tenerife. Nowadays, the university is composed of 25,000 students, 1,700 faculty members belonging to 63 departments, and 819 University Administration and Services Personnel. It offers 56 official three- and four-year

degrees, 43 master's degrees and 33 postgraduate degrees. Nine institutes of the university carry out research activities.

The second university of this case under reference was founded by Canarian government in 1989 for students who could not afford to leave their homes and jobs to pursue higher education on the island of Gran Canaria. The university has 24,145 students, 1,554 faculty teachers and researchers, and offers 55 grades of study in both liberal arts and professional studies and 41 doctoral programmes. The most prominent research areas are cybernetics, telecommunications, medical technology, oceanography, marine crops, renewable energy and environmental conservation. In addition, the university has a moodle-based virtual campus primarily providing a service to five fully online formative programmes and four postgraduate programmes.

Today, the two higher education institutions are providing online courses in formative programmes and postgraduate degrees. These universities therefore focus on the transfer of relevant knowledge and learning competences to their students, and that is the product result exchanged in online education. In this context, it is an educational aim, or even mission, to promote 'transferable skills' – discipline content with learning competences – such as 'problem-based learning', and 'communication technological skills', which are certainly forms of learning mastery and proficiency.

Course digitalisation requires an extra faculty design effort. In addition, students must participate more, and be far more actively engaged, in order to communicate and respond to learning tasks. Hence, most distance learning needs face-to-face and web trained faculty on an amalgamation of new technologies. In addition, online faculty training programmes for learning curriculum and teaching and assessment capacities require a rigorous audit.

Higher education ministers responsible for higher education from 29 European countries signed the Bologna Declaration (1999). Later, the Bergen Communiqué (2005) welcomed "the principle of a European register of quality assurance agencies", and underlined "the importance of cooperation between nationally recognised agencies with a view to enhancing the mutual recognition of accreditation or quality assurance decisions" (p. 3).

The National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) was funded in 2002. At the same time, Canarian regional government was taking strong action to solve major social and community problems such as the quality of higher education services, that is, the educational principles that must be met and maintained to attain specific university goals. This led to the creation of the regional Canarian Agency for University Evaluation and Accreditation (ACECAU) for quality assurance in 2002: in other words, an institutional procedure to check whether the set of university objectives was adequately achieved. ACECAU's further goal was to pioneer quality assessment of the university system according to regulated standards, also known as 'standards', 'criteria', 'guidelines', 'subjects', 'facets', 'principles', according to Aelterman (2006, p. 228), which had been subject to consultation with stakeholders. This written mission statement made it clear that external quality assurance was a major activity of the ACECAU, and it was translated into a clear policy or management plan, recognising that quality assurance was primarily the responsibility of the two Canarian higher education institutions themselves. The ACECAU also had its own criteria for the selection, appointment and training of experts, and for establishing legal frameworks, procedures, forms, and other documents (e.g. codes of ethics). Furthermore, this agency promotes quality in higher education, through courses and training stages for faculty and for other agency and community personnel involved in quality assurance processes.

These universities and ACECAU agreed on important joint objectives for the development of a coherent and cohesive European Higher

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