

EDITORIAL  
EDUCATION IN VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENTS:  
CHALLENGES FOR TEACHERS AND TUTORS

In recent years, education in virtual learning environments and its associated scientific production has been growing at an accelerated pace. In 2007, the number of journals addressing e-learning topics reached 49 in the Scimago Journal & Country Rank (SJR), by 2017 this number was of 120, a rise above the normal growth for journals considered to be “traditional”. Perhaps what has made this topic attractive, among other reasons, is its strategy to tackle education from a perspective of “education democratization”, which intends to offer equal opportunities to people who, due to diverse reasons, have difficulties in accessing traditional education.

Moreover, several researchers have concurred in identifying certain number of advantages associated to this educational model, such as the ease to adapt to students’ individual characteristics and needs, the possibility to bring together students in different geographic areas, and learning flexibility, which relies on the student as an active agent (actual) of his/her own learning process (refer to Gros, 2011).

Research on this regard has ample range of interest topics. As the metanalysis of e-learning studies published in Spanish journals by Cabrero-Almenara, Marin-Diaz and Sampedro-Requena (2016) state, these are often circumscribed in academic efficiency, cognitive and teaching styles, and interaction and communication between these environments (including teacher-student or student-student interaction and communication).

The roles performed by teachers and tutors in said environments are of especial importance. To understand their role, it is key to know how virtual learning communities work and the socio-pedagogical particularities they entail. According to Simonette, Queiroz and Spina (2019) from the University of Sao Paulo, matters such as the way in which teachers and tutors apply technology to interact with their students, or the complexity of teacher-student relationships are of the greatest importance, even more when they involve individuals from different cultures with diverse training, concepts and ideas. In that regard, it is essential for the teacher or tutor to remember “the awareness of the teaching experience”, in particular concerning teaching interactions that are mediated by technology.

Issue 22 of Revista Panorama pursues this topics and others that are connected with the teaching processes taking place in virtual learning environments: Carolina Flores-Lue and her Chilean collaborators highlight the importance of preschool teachers’ digital competences, specifically measured using self-assessment. Jose Gregorio Sierra and collaborators, from Colombia, explain how teacher training, skills qualification to handle digital tools and the support of educational institutions to develop the competences have a role on understanding the difficulties to incorporate ICT in the classroom. We hope the articles herein extend the outlook of this topic.

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