Tracing the use of communication technology in Portuguese higher education towards teachers' professional development

a research proposal

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Abstract:

Over the last decade we have experienced an exponential increase in the use of Communication Technologies (CT) in all levels of education. The presence and use of CT in Higher Education Institutions (HEI) in Europe has increased as a result of the Bologna recommendations towards a rise in students' autonomous work, enhanced by the use of CT. Different perspectives about innovative uses of CT in teaching practices have emerged: several authors state teaching practices are not changing significantly, while others face CTs as major drivers of change, modeling new ways of teaching and learning when compared with more traditional models. Current research emphasizes the strengthening of teacher training as a key element for the enhancement of competences regarding the use of CT for teaching practices. Therefore, it becomes crucial to gain up-to-date knowledge on the institutional infrastructures that support such practices. Understanding the conditions in which such training is happening is critical, considering that effectiveness of teacher training policy depends on the quality of the structures and mechanisms designed to support it, and of the resources available to deliver its objectives – information, human, financial and technological. This paper focuses on the preliminary results of a pilot survey conducted in the scope of the project "TRACER - use of communication technologies in Portuguese public higher education institutions" , under development at the University of Aveiro, contributing towards a large-scale and comprehensive study in Portugal that allows us to characterize the use of CT for educational purposes. The pilot survey was implemented online between December 2011 and January 2012, with a convenience sample of 4 HEI (2 universities and 2 polytechnic institutes), and 8 key-respondents were inquired: 4 leaders and 4 CT services coordinators. Preliminary results will allow to understand an estimated scenario of how CTs are used, unveiling what are the HEI's main concerns and goals for CT use, which CTs are used, which infrastructures support the use of CTs, most particularly, in teaching and learning practices, which specific training plans HEI have for faculty concerning the use of CTs, what types of teaching and learning modalities are used in the training of teachers for professional development in the use of CTs; who are the actors for such training in HEI, and which CT resources are use for this purpose. The ultimate goal of the survey is to contribute towards valuable and up-to-date information concerning the use of CTs in HEI, potentiating research that may support actual innovation towards a new stage of technology-enhanced teaching and learning practices.

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