Voorstelling van het proefschrift

The study investigates the nature of the concept of e-readiness and proposes a theoretical and operational model representing the concept of e-readiness within the context of higher education institutions in developing countries. The research for the doctoral thesis was carried out as an additional project line within the framework of a multiplier project called TOHOST-CA (Tourism and Hospitality Studies in Central Asia) in five higher education institutions (HEIs) in Uzbekistan, Mongolia and Kyrgyzstan. This initiative, funded by TEMPUS-TACIS, not only co-ordinates curricula in hospitality and tourism studies among these countries, but also facilitates the introduction of a virtual open source platform for the delivery of electronic courses, and thus the opportunity to embrace the e-learning paradigm.

The measurement of e-readiness is originally related to the digital divide in and among countries. Consequently, e-readiness has usually been studied on an aggregate level. The result consisted of a number of complex ranking models with regard to e-readiness. In the second generation of studies e-readiness is applied at micro or organizational level. The input of the present research has to be situated in this context.

A review of the relevant literature shows that very few conceptual models have appeared to approach the characteristics of e-readiness for e-learning, particularly for higher education. Therefore, this study aims to widen the understanding of contextual factors by examining three fundamental dimensions in the construction of an e-learning environment in HEIs of developing countries: facility, ability and capacity.

In combination with an audit tool that assesses the cultural aspects, infrastructure and expertise concerning learning technologies in educational institutions, the three abovementioned dimensions are used to identify levels of e-readiness of HEIs to introduce e-learning activities in the classroom.

Thus, progress of these HEIs towards implementing learning technologies is measured particularly by the degree of their abilities (based on the strategies and policies available), organizational facilities (in terms of infrastructure able to sustain the electronic delivery of the content of the courses), and the capacity of the end users (e.g. skills, attitude, motivation of teachers and students). Interviews with key stakeholders, surveys among end-users (e.g. teachers and students) and participative observation were used as research methods. One of the main findings is that although computers are available in these institutions and end-users are relatively able to operate with learning technologies, there are other important conditions that are not put into place. For example, these HEIs are placing too much emphasis on the technological aspect of these technologies and less on their pedagogic opportunities. Likewise, in some occasions there is a lack of coordinated policies within institutions, faculties and departments.

Curriculum Vitae

Carlos Machado studied Political Sciences and Sociology at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid. In 1998 he gained also a joint master degree in Science, Society and Technology at the University of East London and the Vrije Universiteit Brussel. While working as a researcher (since 1998) at the study group TESA of the department of Social Research at the Faculty of Economic, Political and Social Sciences and the Solvay Business School of the VUB he obtained a master degree in Management and an MBA. His main current research interest is the analysis of the level of preparedness of higher education institutions in developing countries prior to the implementation of learning technologies. He has published widely in international scientific journals and books. In 2006 he was awarded the prize for Best Conference Paper in Taiwan at a conference on education and tourism in the Asian-Pacific countries.