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Foreword: Quality Research for Learning, Education, and Training

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Introduction

Quality seems to be a complex concept, specifically in the field of learning, education, and training. The tradition of quality goes back to the ages of craftsmanship and to industrialization, when factories established post-production inspection departments. Several principles of Taylor's (1911) approach to process organization can still be found in today's quality approaches. The concepts of quality control (Juran, 1951) and total quality management (Deming, 1982) have been the main benchmarks in the evolution of quality management. Today, a variety of concepts and approaches are being discussed in the researchers' and practitioners' communities.

This special issue provides a comprehensive survey on concepts and approaches of quality for the field of learning, education, and training. It shall provide support to researchers and practitioners in improving quality in their organizations. This issue covers a broad range of both perspectives on and approaches to quality.

Pawlowski provides an introduction to quality and standards in the field of learning, education, and training. He states that quality cannot be seen as a fixed concept or methods, but that it must be adapted to the needs of organizations. The quality adaptation model provides a guideline on how to adapt the generic standard ISO/IEC 19796-1.

The learner's perspective is also the main focus of a paper by Alexander and Golja. They analyze instruments for quality, such as benchmarking and checklists. The presented approach shows how students' feedback and experiences can be used to develop institutional e-learning quality.

One main instrument for quality enhancement is evaluation. Deepwell shows how evaluation can be used as a participatory tool for quality enhancement within the implementation of e-learning programs. Nesbit and Leacock also use evaluation as an instrument to assure the quality of learning resources. Their framework focuses on different aspects of quality, such as content, motivation, accessibility, and interoperability.

Two papers in this issue present indicators that focus on the issue of how quality can be measured. Ellis and Calvo present a study comparing seven universities. They show minimum indicators as standards for learning management systems in blended learning settings. Yukselturk and Bulut present a study on predictors for students' success. Based on a study, they present factors that influence students' success.

S. J. H. Chen, Yang, Kinshuk, and N.-S. Chen present a specific quality approach for virtual learning communities. They show two perspectives: the identification of quality content and quality collaborators. The main aspect of this method is knowledge-sharing in communities.

The awareness of quality seems to be higher than the actors' competencies in this field. Ehlers develops the concept of quality literacy defining dimensions and competencies. Based on this model, he describes a participatory approach to quality development, focusing on negotiation and participation processes.

Finally, Chang-Barker presents a practical report on quality standards. Whereas the ISO/IEC standard focuses on processes, this paper focuses on the learner's view. The paper reports on tools for quality assurance: a learner's guide and the quality mark eQcheck.

This short introduction shows the diversity of views on quality in the research community. This issue shall help to define focus areas and show potential solutions for e-learning quality. However, new questions and research issues arise. Quality will still be an important issue for the e-learning research community in the coming years.

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