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Knowledge transfer strategy by ICT: The Master ACREDITE experience
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ACREDITE (Analyse, Conception et Recherche dans le Domaine de l'Ingénierie de Technologies en Education) is a 2-year distance Masters degree for professional purposes (120 ECTS). It is offered by a consortium of the Universities of Cergy Pontoise (UCP, FR), Mons-Hainaut (UMons, BE) and Geneva (Unige, CH), with the financial support of the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (AUF). It has existed for over 10 years and was developed by the University of Strasbourg under the name of Master UTICEF. It is designed for professors and university trainers who must develop their own teaching by creating partial or full distance teaching projects that are highly context-specific. Originally the basic objective was clearly the design and implementation of a professional training course in order to provide distance education experts to the Global South countries, particularly African French speaking countries, based on a knowledge transfer strategy, in a relatively short time period. Today, ACREDITE is open to all teachers, from secondary or higher education, but also to the staff of other departments or attached to other organisations (NGOs, international organisations, private education).

Master ACREDITE is resolutely pragmatic and adapted to professional contexts. It promotes:

- a consideration of local contexts, particularly in terms of access to technology;
- educational options that are guided by experts provided to Southern countries;
- a knowledge transfer strategy leading to efficient participation in the programme.

In each university, a professor is responsible for the masters and has a coordinator, who takes charge of administrative and pedagogical tasks, and a team of tutors responsible for the animation, monitoring and evaluation of students in seminars. The pedagogical design of ACREDITE relies on the virtual seminar concept. Each virtual seminar is taught by a university in the consortium and promotes on one hand collaborative work in small groups about case studies and problem-solving and on the other hand coaching and tutoring in synchronous and asynchronous communication. Each ACREDITE university team has a particular way of managing their teaching and the choice of techno-pedagogical devices is different. Currently 2 online learning platforms are available: ESpace (http://espace.u-cergy.fr/login/) managed by UCP, and Esprit (http://deste.umons.ac.be/esprit/), managed by UMons. The Unige team uses both platforms and also designs activities with a large range of web tools such as wikis, mind maps, blogs, podcasts, animations, and encourages the use of other online collaboration tools. The different choice of platforms and their various uses allow students to experience a range of online tools for distance learning so that they are able to assess the advantages and disadvantages of available environments. Depending on the context and their needs, they eventually make their personal choices and guide their institution.

Tutoring has a large place in this programme: tutors supervise a small number of students (15 maximum), who in turn work in small groups of 3-4 persons for 2-3 weeks. This approach promotes efficient and accurate follow-up during training. An additional feature is that ACREDITE tutors are almost entirely former students of the Masters and...
they are gradually trained within the programme by an expert tutor. As there are only a few training opportunities for online tutors, this solution provides an opportunity for individuals to gain experience as a tutor and for ACREDITE to convene a number of tutors who are familiar with the instructional programme.

Master ACREDITE has a graduation rate of 75%, which is high in comparison to other distance education diplomas, which have failures up to 75% (Peraya, Depover & Jaillet, 2013, forthcoming). One of the keys to the low dropout rate is the application process. This process is challenging. Only 40% of candidates are invited for the interview in which the jury checks the suitability of the candidate in relation to: the course modalities, motivation and availability (at least 20 hours per week). At the end of the interview, 60% of candidates interviewed are declared eligible.

To determine the impact of Master ACREDITE on the professional practices of former students, a survey was conducted in March 2011, by the ACREDITE team of the University of Cergy Pontoise. 250 former students were contacted through the platform. Among the 109 respondents, 61 former students (43.6%) are involved in distance education projects, 22 have projects under development and 26 are not involved in projects. Those who have not invested in a techno-pedagogical innovation project (28.3%), emphasise the huge problems of project implementation: technical and institutional difficulties, non-operational network, lack of servers and terminals, lack of human resources for system administration, etc.

The CEMAFORAD association (Communauté Euro-Méditerranéenne et Africaine d'approfondissement de la Formation à Distance) was founded by former students and the ACREDITE team. The association is active in participating in seminars, writing contributions to collective works, and also is the initiator of scientific events in research in distance education. In addition, several former students have pursued studies in the PhD level.

The programme is a success. However, despite the advantages of the programme’s consortium it has some limitations. One of the challenges is the progression towards an interuniversity degree. This project responds to an objective of the AUF, and is also part of the strategic perspective of the development of European universities. Interuniversity programmes are a consequence of new forms of mobility, both virtual and physical and they are widely promoted by Bologna Framework. In addition, an interuniversity programme would better promote the participation of each university partner. It would also be an opportunity to rethink the whole training to adapt to the evolution of ICTs and their uses in the society.

A second issue concerns how to animate and revitalise the alumni community to strengthen South-South collaboration in research and in exchange of experiences and good practices.

References

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