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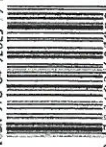
USING A VIRTUAL LEARNING ENVIRONMENT TO DEVELOP LEXICAL COMPETENCE: A BANK OF ORIGINAL MATERIAL

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Chapter 1. JUSTIFICATION

1.1 INTRODUCTION

The creation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) is considerably transforming the conception and nature of teaching at tertiary level across Europe. It presents a unique opportunity to revise and update Higher Education (HE) methodology (Michavila, 2007) and is spurring the reformulation of curricula, the revamping of study plans, and the reconfiguration of departments (Pratt *et al.*, 2008).

In the language teaching arena, this profound change is being felt intensely, with the EHEA and the new credit system it propounds – the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) – acting as the prime catalysts for reorientation and reform (Pérez Cañado, 2009a). Diverse communiqués and official documents have channeled the European convergence process both at a global (Graz Declaration 2003; Berlin Communiqué 2003; Glasgow Declaration 2005; Bergen Communiqué 2005) and local Spanish level (CIDUA 2005; *Informe de la Red Interuniversitaria de Innovación Docente de las Universidades Andaluzas* 2008). These texts offer valuable guidelines to steer the practical realization of the Bologna Process and, within them, ICT is a cornerstone for achieving improvement in language teaching. Pennock-Speck (2009, 183) underscores this idea: “Whether we like it or not, the role of ICT is becoming increasingly important. If our university and state universities in general are to remain at the forefront in teaching and research in the future, we have to make sure to that we implement ICT as effectively as possible in the new degree and postgraduate degree structures”.

This didactic renewal spurred by the EHEA, together with the heightened role of new technologies within it, has fuelled the governmentally-financed pedagogical innovation project whose original material is presented here. Its aim was to use virtual learning environments (VLE) and computer-mediated communication (CMC) to enhance the lexical competence of pre-service English teachers at the University of Jaén in Spain. To this end, an original bank of lexical activities was designed on the basis of extremely recent and popular TV series and sitcoms, set up on a VLE – the ILLIAS platform –, and exploited through blended learning. Telecollaboration – through the Blackboard platform – also came into play to try to improve the low lexical results which our students had been obtaining in English over the course of the past four academic years (cf. Pérez Cañado, 2008). Cooperative, autonomous, and lifelong learning were all targeted as part of the experience, which is the first in its nature to use sitcoms, VLE, and CMC to work on English lexical competence.

1.2 BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE: REASONS FOR THE PROJECT

The initial driving force behind the project was the extremely low lexical achievement of pre-service English teachers at the University of Jaén over the course of

- h. picked
- i. hold
- j. end

Question 9

- a. anyway,
- b. so,
- c. in any case,
- d. to get back to what I was saying,
- e. where was I?

- **Question 10**

- a. Take a raincheck
- b. Blew him off
- c. Calling the shots
- d. To postpone a date or an invitation
- e. To ignore somebody
- f. To take charge and tell people what to do

- **Question 11**

Whatcha reading?

- **Question 12**

- a. you know what
- b. so dead, totally
- c. was like
- d. kind of, mean, the thing is