

Challenges of Higher Education in Turbulent Environments

Ana B. Bernardo ¹, Adrian Castro-Lopez ^{2,*}, Leandro S. Almeida ³ and Silvia Fernandez-Rivas ⁴

¹ Department of Psychology, University of Oviedo, 33003 Oviedo, Spain

² Department of Business Administration, University of Oviedo, 33003 Oviedo, Spain

³ School of Psychology, University of Minho, 4710-057 Braga, Portugal

⁴ Department of Basic Psychology, Psychobiology and Methodology of Behavioral Sciences, University of Salamanca, 37005 Salamanca, Spain

* Correspondence: adriancastrolopez@gmail.com

New technologies will change personal and social life as we know it today. In the current society of information in which we live, we gather information and make decisions based on the virtual resources available to us. However, despite the increased quantity and quality of these resources, problems persist. One of them is that such resources are not generalized between countries and between social and ethnic groups within each country. The use and exploitation of new technologies and virtual environments are implemented in all areas of social life, including in the educational context, and such differences call into question the sustainability and scope of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) defined by the UN for 2030.

Thus, in the last few years, higher education systems and learning environments have developed in line with society and the changes that have arisen in the environment, thus influencing their long-term sustainability. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic highlighted the vulnerability of these systems worldwide, mainly due to the difficulty of adapting to new technological teaching resources (focused on new online teaching platforms), their integration into the teaching and research tasks of the academic workforce and the impact that the virtual environment may have on students' learning and assessment. In this sense, initiatives to strengthen the training of teachers and students in the appropriate use of new technologies and virtual teaching–learning environments must be reinforced. Indeed, immersion in the new teaching methodologies demanded by the new technological environments can lead to a paradigm shift in the teaching–learning process, affecting both the development policies of educational systems and the quality of the learning content taught, as well as students' satisfaction.

This book focuses on key factors regarding the sustainability of traditional education systems complemented by new virtual learning environments. Under this perspective, it raises important research questions in different scientific fields. For instance, concerning higher education institutions and their quality systems, is it possible to ensure the planned SDGs, are the opinions of all stakeholders involved in the teaching–learning process being taken into account, and can the educational dimension be strengthened in disadvantaged social environments to promote citizenship, employability and reduce poverty? As far as the new teaching technologies to be incorporated into educational systems and their impact on learning are concerned, are there clear guidelines to identify teaching technologies capable of promoting quality virtual learning, in which absenteeism and dropouts are minimized, are these new tools capable of adequately motivating and satisfying students, providing them with a constant updating of knowledge, and are they able to avoid undesirable aspects such as lack of teacher–student interaction, poor technical and instructional support, or insufficient collaboration for problem solving/group projects? Do they allow inclusive practices for students with some kind of disability? Can mobile devices act as a catalyst for improvement in specific learning processes such as languages? All these



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questions, and others, show the diversity and complexity of potentialities and problems that may occur in the ever-changing and unpredictable near future.

In brief, this Special Issue of *Sustainability* entitled “Ensuring Quality Education and Good Learning Environments for Students” consists of a compendium of 14 articles that provide interesting reflections on the above issues and raise the need to monitor the positive and negative factors observed in the different empirical studies carried out on sustainability in the educational environment.

This volume is an attempt to enhance the research contribution arising from the challenges faced by the current higher education system.

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