



INTRODUCTION

Collaborative learning in virtual environments is a key element of higher education, especially in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and even more so in online education. Likewise, as Barberà (2010) stated (or rather, *stressed*) in the first volume of the eLC Research Paper Series, the time factor also plays a role in e-learning.

In this context, then, the monograph focuses on the effects of time on collaborative learning, putting forward a range of different views, as described below. It thus seeks to analyse how time affects collaborative learning processes and the role that it plays in them.

All of the research adopts the *Universitat Oberta Catalunya* (Open University of Catalonia, UOC) as the general scenario. Given that all learning activities and communication at the UOC take place in a virtual environment, we can distinguish between two relevant elements in relation to time: time management in collaborative learning processes and time management in relation to the context in which these processes take place - in our case, the virtual environment.

In relation to time management in online learning processes, Guitert presents an overview by identifying two key elements connected to the time factor that shape how learning occurs in a virtual collaborative experience. Adopting the student point of view, Romero quantitatively analyses how the time factor affects the collaborative learning activities carried out in a particular subject at the UOC. Pérez-Mateo and Guitert deal with the time factor in relation to a key issue in virtual environments: social dimension.

In the context of time management by students in connection with the use of different tools in virtual environments, Hopkins gauges the effectiveness of assessed student-led language learning tasks performed with a synchronous audiographic conferencing tool. Caballé reports on an experience using an innovative collaborative learning tool to support real collaborative learning through asynchronous discussion.

Lastly, the monograph is rounded off with the voices of different experts in the field dealing with collaborative learning and the time factor in virtual environments in order to provide a global view of the topic.

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