

DEVISING AN ELECTRIC POWER SYSTEM: A CDIO APPROACH APPLIED TO ELECTRICAL ENGINEERING

**Rosa M. de Castro, Jaime R. Arribas, Luis F. Beites, Francisco Blázquez,
Araceli Hernández, Mohamed Izzeddine, Marcos Lafoz, Sergio Martínez,
Carlos A. Platero, Dionisio Ramírez, Carlos Veganzones, Eduardo Caro.**

Automatic Control, Electrical and Electronic Engineering and Industrial Informatics
Department.

Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingenieros Industriales,
Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (ETSII - TU Madrid)
c/ José Gutiérrez Abascal 2, 28006 Madrid, Spain,

ABSTRACT

The study of electric power systems within the field of Electrical Engineering is usually approached by computer simulations because any actual test is quite complex to be implemented. Having the aim to improve student learning about this topic, a new subject called “Devising an Electric Power System” was organized following a CDIO (Conceive-Design-Implement-Operate) approach.

The subject is programmed for one academic year and based entirely on laboratory work. The students are divided into three groups. Every group would have to work on a device that includes a solar PV generator and a pumping controlled drive, both connected to a three-phase grid.

The process followed by the students along the academic year begins with a short theoretical introduction and simulation studies where they conceive and design control strategies. These control strategies are for the solar PV generator (i.e., programming the “Maximum Power Point Tracking” MPPT) as well as for the pumping electric drive (i.e., following a V/f strategy or a vector control). The process is continued by practical implementation of the simulated algorithms previously obtained. In this step, the students implement and operate the systems until they become robust and well adjusted, and ready for the intermediate partial competition among the three groups. During this practical implementation stage, the innovative competence is better enhanced. At the moment that each group has implemented an electric generator and an electric consumption (load), they follow the third and last part of the subject that is focused on “electric utility” business strategy. The students will have to comply with the rules of the electricity market by offering energy packages to be generated and consumed at a certain price. The price and volume of energy to be generated/consumed are determined by the convergence point of supply and demand, as determined by the marginal pricing model. Once the market is cleared, the students have to realize their generation/consumption commitments by operating the real power system they have conceived and implemented.

After the first academic year of this subject, the students’ evaluation was highly acceptable. The specific technological contents of the subject were learnt by the method called “learning by doing” that allows students to improve their skills in team building, innovation and communications. In addition, a good work atmosphere among students and teachers has arisen.

KEYWORDS

CDIO as Context, Integrated Learning Experiences, Active Learning, Electrical Engineering, Solar PV Generation, Electric Drives Control, Electric Markets. (Standards: 1, 3, 5, 7, 8).

INTRODUCTION

Promoting motivation and engagement among students in a subject is considered as the key aspect that allows better and more efficient learning. For this reason, this type of practice has been introduced at the implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) in 2010. The case of technical sciences and engineering studies deserves special interest since their intrinsically complexity often requires dedicating most of the class time to theoretical description of the fundamentals and working principles and rarely allows promoting students' participation.

In order to overcome this constraint, the CDIO approach provides students with an educational framework which faces the study of engineering fundamentals through "Conceiving - Designing - Implementing and Operating" (CDIO) real-world systems (Crawley, et al. 2007).

In the field of Electrical Engineering, the study of different technologies concerning "Renewable Energies", "Electric Drives" and "Electricity Markets" is usually approached by computer simulations because any practical exercise is too complex to be implemented.

In this paper, the development process of a new subject called "Devising an Electric Power System" is presented along with the results obtained after the first year of implementation in 2014-15. This new subject was regarded as an opportunity to change traditional teaching-learning procedures within the electrical engineering area in order to promote the acquisition of different competences such as "team work", "creativity" or "communication". Fully based on laboratory work, the idea of the subject was to conceive a physical platform that would allow students to learn through innovation and experimentation and to have the opportunity to test improvement at any time. The strengths of the new methodology unites laboratory work (learning by "doing" instead of only by "listening/studying") with innovation to improve the physical systems and their control.

The device developed by the electrical engineering staff includes a solar PV generator and a pumping controlled drive, both connected to a three-phase electric grid. By using this laboratory setup, the students can conceive and design control strategies, both for solar PV generator (i.e., programming the "Maximum Power Point Tracking", MPPT) and pumping electric drive (i.e., following a voltage/frequency strategy or a vector control). In addition, this platform allows the students to comply with the rules of the electric utility market by offering energy packages to be generated and consumed at a given price. Once the price is fixed according to the marginal pricing model, the group that comes up with the best offers and best follows their energy generation/consumption commitments will be chosen as the winner in the final contest at the end of the course.

CONTEXT OF THE COURSE "DEVISING AN ELECTRIC POWER SYSTEM": THE "INGENIA" INITIATIVE AT ETSII – UPM MADRID

The Master Degree in Industrial Engineering offered at ETSII-UPM Madrid is the result of the implementation of Bologna process. The academic implementation took place in the academic year 2014-15. The Master Degree at ETSII is a two year program with 120 ECTS credits, after a four-year Bachelor degree in Industrial Technologies with 240 ECTS credits, with a new subject called INGENIA, linked to the Spanish term "ingeniar" (to provide ingenious solutions) and etymologically related in Spanish with "ingeniero" (engineer).

INGENIA subjects use project-based learning methodologies following the CDIO approach. Therefore, their structure promotes learning the fundamentals and advanced disciplinary contents of engineering in a practical environment and, at the same time, improving students' motivation and engagement with their own learning process.

The principle that defines INGENIA subjects is to guide the students starting from the conception and design, up to the implementation and operation of a project, system or product in the field of engineering. All the steps previously mentioned would have to comply with a

series of requirements previously defined. Students will be given the opportunity to work in real conditions similar to the ones they could encounter in the field. Therefore, students have to work in teams, decide what information they need, find and manage the information, organize the work and communicate the results obtained, all in an efficient way.

INGENIA subjects are compulsory for all students and have 12 ECTS credits, which correspond with student workload between 300 and 360 hours, distributed along two semesters, with 14 weeks per semester. The distribution of this workload is the following: 120 hours correspond to supervised work, that is, work performed under teacher supervision, and between 180 and 240 hours which is allocated for group work.

The supervised work is divided into three categories:

- 30 hours dedicated to the explanation or adaptation of the basic theoretical knowledge to carry out the project.
- 60 hours for practical implementation in the laboratory.
- 15 hours for transversal competences. Several seminars and workshops are offered to students to acquire and improve team building, communication and creativity skills.
- 15 hours for social responsibility issues, such as, environmental impact and consequences of the project in social, political, security and health areas. All projects must include a study of this type.

Lectures, laboratory and seminars with teacher supervision are spread in 5 hours per week.

Several departments of the ETSII-UPM have carried out INGENIA proposals related with diverse disciplines such as: electronic and automation, electrical, automotive, mechanical and biomedical engineering.

INGENIA course “Devising an Electric Power System” has been developed by Electrical Engineering instructors (Electrical Machines and Electric Power systems) and Statistics instructors. Twelve teachers have participated in the subject and most of them have previous experience in CDIO activities, Veganzones et al (2011), and belong to two different Innovation Education Groups at the UPM university¹ having participated in several educational innovation projects, Veganzones et al (2009), Ramírez et al (2009), Blázquez et al (2010), Arribas et al (2011), Moreno-Torres et al (2015). The subject aims to provide an insight that integrates the most important and innovative advancement in electrical engineering and promote the capability for designing and implementing an electric power system with both generation (photovoltaic panel) and consumption (pumping electric drive), and at the same time operating under the rules of an electricity market.

DESCRIPTION OF THE COURSE

The students are divided into three groups of seven people and each group has to work on a device that includes a solar PV generator and a pumping controlled drive, both connected to a three phase electric grid. Thus, the hardware the students deal with, includes mainly a laptop connected to a DSP, two power converters (one DC/AC that connects the PV generator to the grid, and another AC/AC that feeds the pump motor from the grid), current and voltage sensors and energy measurement devices (Figure 1).

¹ http://innovacioneducativa.upm.es/informacion_grupo?grupo=276 and http://innovacioneducativa.upm.es/informacion_grupo?grupo=205

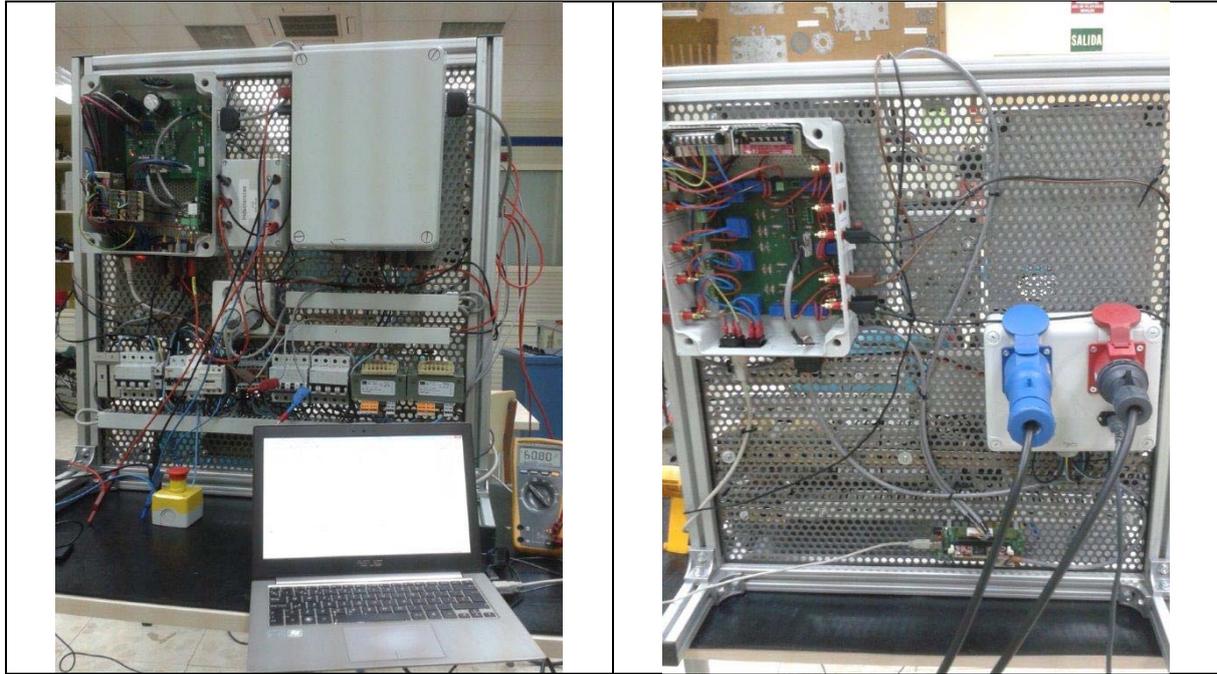


Figure 1. Frame with the lab setup including: two power converters, inductances, transformers, electric protections and laptop (left), and PV and grid connection supply, voltage/current sensors and DSP (right)

Although the subject lasts one whole course, it is divided into four two-month periods. The first one is used to introduce the basic theoretical contents of each topic in the subject (PV generation, power electronics, pumping installations, control of electric drives and the hardware platform the students will use during the course). All these theoretical contents are faced along with the physical systems being in front of the students, so as the students can learn quickly the working principles of each device in the system.

The second two-month period is used to perform laboratory tests in each component of the system, so as to acquire a deep knowledge and characterize them in order to be able to improve them or to take into account their particular behavior for the next innovation stage.

The third period consists of different partial competitions each one concerning only one system (PV generation or pumping control). In order to prepare each event the students must face a creative practice in which innovative competences are trained. This way the subject allows the students, for example, to learn about the grid connection of a PV generator and to program the Maximum Power Point Tracking (MPPT) along the sun day, by innovating and practicing with a real installation together with the motivation of a teamwork facing a contest. In this period, predictive models of PV generation, which are prepared by the students under the supervision of experts in statistics, are also used in order to improve the success options for the competitions.

The fourth and last two-month period deals with the study of electricity market rules. The complexity of this discipline itself makes it especially difficult to be taught by using real equipment instead of only simulation models. In this way, the subject that is being described is innovative, since it allows the students to learn this matter again by practicing, being conscious, for example, of the difficulties in real life of predicting the energy demand, the renewable resource, etc.

The three main disciplines the subject deals with are the PV generation, the pumping facilities and the electric markets. Each of them will be treated separately in the next sections of this subject description.

Solar PV generation

Each group of students have a solar PV system that comprises three PV panels connected in series, with a total rated voltage of 48V, a three-phase DC/AC converter as a solar inverter, some current filters and a three-phase transformer 25/230V to connect to the grid, since the low voltage range of operation at the PV panels require a low AC voltage to work properly. The students carry out the different stages to do the starting up of the solar inverter. They previously test the inverter supplying a passive load, firstly in open loop and secondly controlling the current in closed loop. Then, they connect the DC voltage supplied by the panels to the grid, by using a voltage reference value which is obtained every moment from the algorithm of maximum power point tracking (MPPT).

The solar inverter commutations are controlled by means of space vector modulation (SVM) technique, ensuring a better harmonic distortion and the possibility of overmodulating.

Both the MPPT algorithm and the inverter commutation are implemented in the system into a commercial digital signal processor (DSP), a F28335 from Texas Instruments®. The code is introduced in C-language and there is an instrumentation environment, MATLAB GUIDE, in order to represent the different waveforms, mainly the DC-link voltage and the line currents supplied to the grid. Figure 2 shows the instrumentation environment developed with MATLAB, allowing to modify parameters and to obtain the main variables from the system.

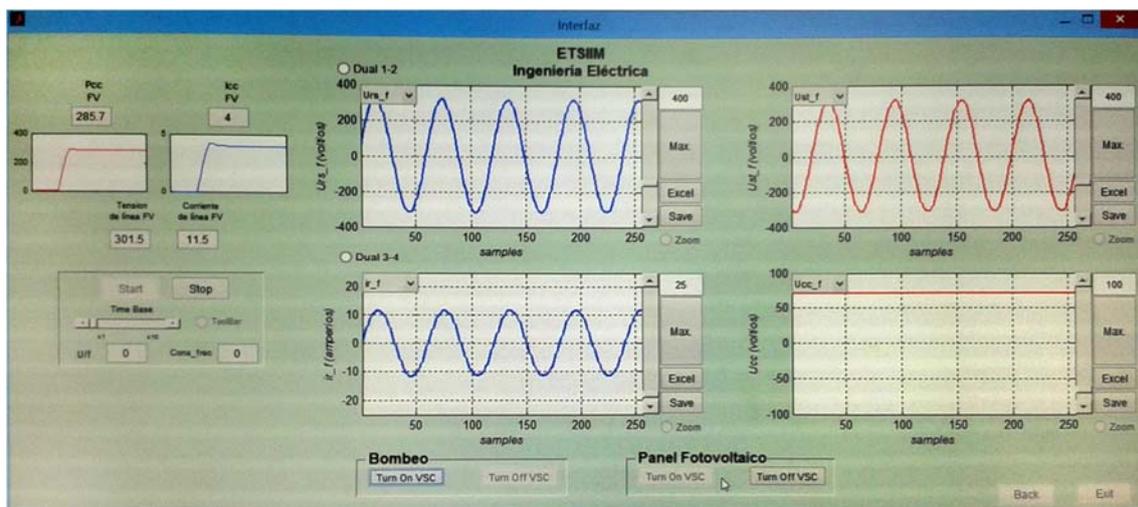


Figure 2. Screenshot of the Matlab interface showing the grid connection of the PV generator and the search for the MPPT

Pumping installation

In order to train students in the control of electric drives, a pumping installation has been chosen both to innovate around efficiency concerns and as an example to represent an electric load for each team when acting as an electric utility with generation and consume in the final contest. Three different types of pumps are available and each team should test them in advance in order to know which one would fit better the performance required in each competition. Different criteria will be used according to the water flow and the energy

consumed requirements, making each team to look for the best solution and to take strategic decisions in a short time manner. With respect to the motor control techniques the student are free to use a simple scalar control (open loop V/f) or a more sophisticated alternative (vector control with speed estimation). The inverter is controlled again through the DSP system using SVM technique.

The pumping setup includes, for each team, a water tank, flow and pressure measurement devices, and a calibrated deposit which allows to see/measure the amount of pumped water. In Figure 3, a picture of the pumping installations for the three teams is shown.



Figure 3. Three pumping installations for the three teams

Electricity markets contest

As a part for the development of the various objectives of the course, an electricity market simulation game is proposed. In this game, each of the three groups assumed the role of a utility that integrates a generation business and a large electricity consumer. The firm participates with two agents, a generator and a large consumer, in a competitive electricity market. In addition to these six participants, there is a seventh agent, the system operator, assumed by the instructor, whose role is to ensure proper operation of the power system. To do this, the system operator has an additional reserve generation or consumption, physically implemented as a connection to the external 50 Hz power supply. The market operator is also the instructor.

For each session of the competition, all the agents participate in the market with at least ten different offers or bids each. In a first step, the offers from generators are matched to the bids from consumers, using an algorithm developed in Matlab, specially design for the subject, and the clearing price is determined as the intersection point between aggregated curves. A picture of the laboratory screen taken during a session can be seen in Figure 4. According to a marginal pricing model, this price is paid to all generators with cheaper offers, which are committed to supply the corresponding energy blocks. Similarly, all consumers with higher bids pay the clearing price and are obliged to use their corresponding energy amounts.

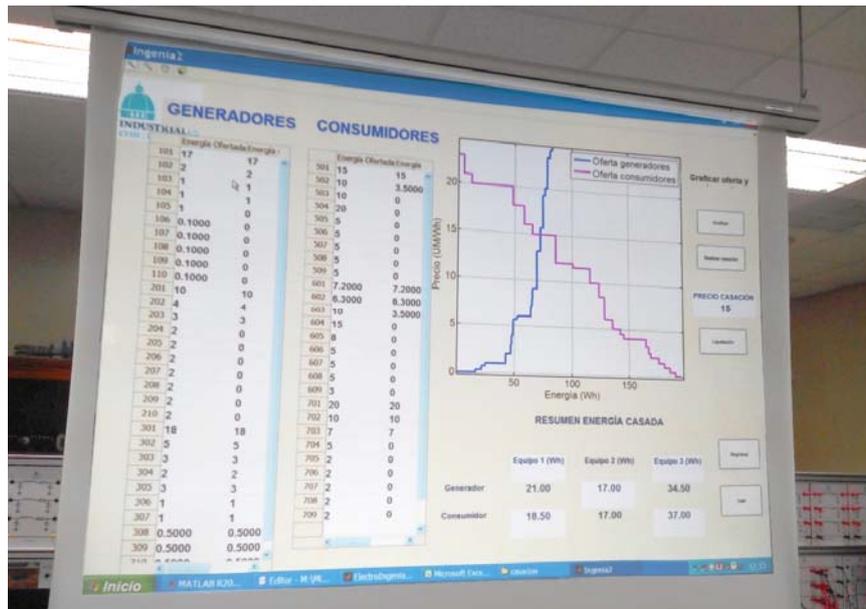


Figure 4. The price and volume of energy are determined by matching offers from generators to bids from consumers

Once the market session is cleared, the second step is the physical operation of the power system with the developed real equipment. The agents try to do their best to meet their energy commitments but, as in the real world, this is not always possible and some deviations occur. All the energy interchanges are measured and recorded.

In the final step of the session, the market operator proceeds to the liquidation of the energy blocks actually generated or consumed, taking into account the marginal pricing model and the settlement of deviations.

The goal for every company is to obtain maximum profits after a predetermined number of sessions. To do this, the groups integrate income and expenses of their generator and consumer agents. Obviously, the implementation details of the game are designed with the aim that a good result is the consequence of a good job of prior design, construction, and testing of the developed generator and consumer devices.

RESULTS

The described INGENIA course “Devising an Electric Power System”, to the authors’ knowledge, is the first course held in Spain that complete a CDIO cycle in the field of Electrical Engineering with laboratory and practical implementation which includes not only the generation and demand of an electric power system, but also carrying out an electric market. The results obtained have been highly satisfactory for teachers and students. Teachers have proved that the new learning methodology carried out helps the students in understanding the theoretical principles, and the physical implementation favors their comprehension and learning. The success ratio (student completion rate) has been 100%, significantly superior to the one obtained in conventional subjects within the electrical area, which is usually between 70% and 80%.

In the case of the students, the course has provided them with the “conceive-design-implement-operate” teaching-learning activities, which include the acquisition of transversal skills such as team work, communication and creativity.

At the end of the course the students answered a questionnaire that asked them about their overall assessment of the subject, as well as about each of the modules in which it is divided. Table 1 summarizes the most relevant students' answers to this questionnaire. The consideration about their improvement in supervised work and global consideration of the course is significantly good, however, the results obtained in the part of improvement in transversal outcomes are lower than those obtained in the part of supervised work. Transversal skills acquisition modules represent an educational innovation in the electrical engineering of the ETSII experience. General courses on transversal outcomes were offered so students could learn how to work more efficiently in groups and to improve their techniques in public expositions, carrying out individual presentations. However, it has been necessary change the methodology of transversal skills acquisition. During the 2015-2016 course it has been worked individually with each INGENIA course, within the ETSII, adapting to their own peculiarities and trying to reinforce transversal skills by introducing practical sessions rather than theoretical presentations.

Table 1. Result of students' questionnaire

Question: What is your consideration about.....?		Subject on Devising an Electric System	Typical deviation
The whole course		4,48/5	0,6
Improvement in Supervised work	Conceiving	4,25/5	0,72
	Planning	4,15/5	0,59
	Designing	4,38/5	0,77
	Experimenting	4,95/5	0,22
	Implementing	4,76/5	0,44
	Continuous work	4,48/5	0,68
Improvement in Transversal outcomes	Team work	4,10/5	1,22
	Communication	3,65/5	0,93
	Creativity	3,30/5	0,98
Social responsibility Teacher contributions		3,52/5	1,12

As an overall conclusion of the results obtained in the first year implementing this new subject, it is important to highlight that the students also included personal comments in the questionnaire that pointed out their high motivation and engagement with the subject.

CONCLUSIONS

A new subject called "Devising an Electric Power System" has been presented including its conception, the development along the course and the results obtained after the first year of implementation in 2014-15. Following the CDIO concept and fully based on laboratory work, the starting point for this experience was to conceive a physical platform which would allow the students to learn through the innovation, all facilitated by the ability of testing any improvement any time is needed. The strength of the new methodology presented is putting together the laboratory work (better "doing" than only "listening/studying") and the capacity of innovation applied to improving a physical system and its control.

In the course "Devising an Electric Power System", a hybrid simulation-reality game is proposed by simulating electricity markets integrated with an actual power system, in which the emphasis is put on the conception, design, implementation, and operation of a real system and its components. The integration of this real system into the game, in addition of serving as an incentive to the student and an assessment method of the developed work, aims to provide

the mere engineering tasks with an orientation towards meeting customer needs while considering resource constraints.

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BIOGRAPHICAL INFORMATION

Rosa M. de Castro, Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering (from UPM in year 2013). Since 2001 she has worked in the Electrical Engineering Department of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, teaching graduate and postgraduate courses in electric power system analysis. She has participated in several projects on educational innovation.

Jaime Rodríguez Arribas, Ph.D. degree in Electrical Engineering from UPM. Since 1992 he has worked in the Electrical Engineering Department of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, teaching graduate and postgraduate courses in electrical machines and their control. Since 2006 he coordinates a Group in Educational Innovation concerning the Electrical Machines and has participated in several projects around this topic.

Araceli Hernández Bayo, Ph.D. degree in Electrical Engineering (from UPM in year 2000). Since 2000 she has worked in the Electrical Engineering Department of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. She is currently Vice-Dean for Quality Assurance at ETSII-UPM.

Mohamed Izzeddine, M.Sc. in Industrial Engineering and Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering, both from the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), Spain, in 1989 and 2001,

respectively. He is an Associate Professor in the Area of Electrical Engineering at the UPM. His research interests include electrical power system analysis and power quality.

Sergio Martínez González, M.Sc. in Industrial Engineering and Ph.D. in Electrical Engineering, both from the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid (UPM), Spain, in 1993 and 2001, respectively. He is an Associate Professor in the Area of Electrical Engineering at the UPM. His research interests include electrical generation from renewable energy and electrical metrology.

Marcos Lafoz Pastor, Ph.D. degree in Electrical Engineering. He works as a researcher in CIEMAT and as an assistant teacher in the Electrical Engineering Department of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid. He has worked in many educational projects developing laboratory setups.

Carlos Veganzones Nicolás, Ph.D. degree in Electrical Engineering. He works in the Electrical Engineering Department of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, has participated in several projects concerning educational innovation.

Dionisio Ramírez Prieto, Ph.D. degree in Electrical Engineering. He works in the Electrical Engineering Department of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, has published different papers and contributions concerning teaching methods and educational laboratory systems.

Francisco Blázquez García, Ph.D. degree in Electrical Engineering. He works in the Electrical Engineering Department of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, has participated and coordinated different projects concerning the innovation in education.

Carlos Platero Gaona, Ph.D. degree in Electrical Engineering. He works in the Electrical Engineering Department of the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid, has participated in several projects concerning the educational innovation.

Luis Fernández Beites, Ph.D. degree in Electrical Engineering. He works in the Electrical Engineering Department of the UPM, is a member of the Group in Educational Innovation concerning the Electrical Machines and has participated in some of its projects.

Eduardo Caro Huertas, Ph.D degree in Electrical Engineering. He works in the Universidad Politécnica de Madrid and collaborates with the Electrical Engineering Department and has participated in several projects concerning the innovation in education.

Corresponding author

Dr. Rosa M. de Castro
Escuela Técnica Superior de Ingenieros
Industriales, Universidad Politécnica de
Madrid (ETSII - UPM Madrid)
c/ José Gutiérrez Abascal 2,
28006 Madrid, Spain
+34 91 336 41 59
rosamaria.decastro@upm.es



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