

# INSTITUTIONAL POLICIES FOR IMPROVING THE QUALITY OF UNIVERSITY TEACHING AND LEARNING

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## Abstract

Changes taking place over the last two decades on the whole educational scene in Europe suggest that social, cultural and economic requirements have led universities to redefine their educational policies and systems of education and professional development. University education has a great responsibility in preparing students for life in the modern world of change and uncertainty. The idea of creating a European space of higher education which should be compatible and harmonious sets out daily the key issues of today's university, such as how efficient, flexible and competitive it is. These issues are directly related to the quality of teaching and learning, i.e. to the quality of the acquired knowledge. This paper attempts to analyse the initiatives, conclusions and recommendations of several international organizations that promote the quality of teaching and learning in higher education and what is the opinion of university professors, professional associations and policy makers. Several key documents have been analysed over the past 10 years, such as: OECD-UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education; the European Commission's report Modernisation of Higher Education, (Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's Higher Education institutions); The European Science Foundation (ESF) and their report The Professionalization of Academics as Teachers in Higher Education (2010).

*Keywords: quality of teaching, higher education, certified pedagogical training.*

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## 1. Introduction

University education has a key importance as well as huge importance and responsibility in building professional competencies and personal qualities of students and teachers. Changes taking place over the last two decades on the whole educational scene in Europe suggest that social, cultural and economic requirements have led universities to redefine their educational policies as well as the system of educational and professional development. University education has a great responsibility in preparing students for life in the modern world of changes and uncertainty. The idea of creating a European space of higher education which should be compatible and harmonious sets out daily the key issues of today's university, such as how efficient, flexible and competitive it is. These issues are directly related to the quality of teaching and learning, i.e. to the quality of the acquired knowledge.

This paper analyses the initiatives, conclusions and recommendations of several international organizations that promote the quality of teaching and learning in higher education as well as the opinion of the university professors, professional associations and policy makers. Several key documents have been analysed over the past 10 years, such as: OECD-UNESCO Guidelines for Quality Provision in Cross-border Higher Education; the European Commission's report Modernisation of Higher Education (Improving the quality of teaching and learning in Europe's Higher Education institutions); The European Science Foundation (ESF) and their report The Professionalization of Academics as Teachers in Higher Education (2010).

The main objective of our research are recommendations 2 and 4 from the the European Commission's report Modernisation of Higher Education (the McAleese Report) and based on the educational policies on institutional level, level of the study program as well as the individual level (of every teacher).

**Recommendation 2**

Every institution should develop and implement a strategy to support and continuously improve the quality of teaching and learning, dedicating an appropriate level of human and financial resources of the given task, as well as integrating this priority in its overall mission, in teaching and researching.

**Recommendation 4**

Every employee teaching in the higher educational institutions until 2020 year should acquire certified pedagogical education (training). Continuous vocational education as a teacher should become a condition for teachers in higher education.

**2. Improving the quality of teaching a learning**

In this context, from a great importance is the document of the European Commission from 2013 year named as Improving the Quality of Teaching and Learning in Europe's Higher Education Institutions, which emphasizes that in the process of universities entry as well as in the academically improvement , the teaching process should be equally important factor as the other improvement conditions.

The plan defining the capabilities needed to be built in the graduates are categorized in several general levels:

- Capabilities referring to the study field
- Capabilities referring to the future profession
- Transferable or general capabilities, which are emphasized in the curriculum, and which are especially emphasized in the documents of the European commission for education, for instance, building arguments and solving problems, bringing judgments and communicational capabilities, as well (Working on the European Dimension of Quality, 2002).

All this means stimulating pedagogical practical work, participating in various project activities, working in small groups or in pairs, keeping a diary for the activities which were carried out and other forms of monitoring of the personal engagement and contribution, as well. Hence, this approach will enable the student to become an active subject in the process of learning and teaching, i.e., through personal engagement, taking responsibility as well as the ability to act in the wider environment, to create the image for himself/herself and his/her own importance and role in the world in where he/she lives .

The question of university teaching and its goals and tasks is a matter of building students' abilities and competences, which are always determined by the labor market, i.e.by the socio-economical conditions.

The contemporary teaching and learning has a triple mission:

1. To enable understanding of the world as a precondition for facing and adapting to it;
2. To provide active participation in the world, because that is the only way through which promotion and change are possible;
3. To provide creating of personal identity, this means understanding of the value of the personal contribution, responsibility and place of belonging.

At the 2009 conference in Leuven i Louvain-la-Neuve, was stressed that European higher education faces major challenges and opportunities which arise as a consequence of globalization and the accelerated development of technology, and influence the development of new learning ways and strategy. Such strategies involve student-centered learning, and the mobility of the student population will further help them

develop skills that are necessary for changing the labor market and will also enable them to become active and responsible citizens, as well. (Leuven & Louvain-la-Neuve communiqué 2009).

Also defined are specific goals in regard to the development of the curriculum and improvement of the teaching process which emphasizes the importance of the teaching mission of the higher educational institutions and the necessity of the current curriculum reforms to be directed towards the development and formulation of appropriate educational outputs. It is emphasized that student-centered learning requires new approaches to teaching and learning, effective support, and a curriculum that is clearly pointed at students of all study levels. In this context, the curriculum reforms will be key processes leading to a higher quality of education and flexible educational approaches.

The university is in the European area, which is increasingly competitive, but that space is both compatible and efficient. In order to meet these requirements, it is necessary to improve the teaching process and the quality of knowledge that is being acquired. They should not be factographic, but functional, not as a personal goal, but as an initial stage in the learning process and instruments for acquiring practical experience.

"However, does the curriculum reflect or mirror contemporary problems and modern knowledge, or does in some way reconstruct and shape knowledge available to society at any time? Could it even be suggested that the curriculum in higher education, itself, is a social force that helps define the values, morals and problems of modern society? Are any of these concepts sufficient to indicate the strong role of the curriculum in itself, and yet is it possible that the curriculum in higher education plays all three roles" (Coate, 2009).

It is a fact that there is a difference between knowing something and knowing how to teach it, but also, the difference between knowing how to teach and the ability of successfully teaching it, should be recognized.

New approaches in education involve the inclusion of modern teaching methods and tools, implementation of effective learning strategies and much greater participation of students in their own educational process. Modern time and new teaching require partners who participate, ask, think, criticize, explore, collaborate and thus develop autonomy as well as needed competencies. From all this, we can say that, teaching is a place where exchanging experiences, knowledge, information, ideas and suggestions occur, and should be respected and organized in this way. Challenges, dilemmas and tasks that are intellectually stimulating and interesting should be given to students. Only in this way they can be expected to develop critical and analytical thinking, creativity and ability of constructively approaching and solving the problem.

### **3. The need for continuous professional education of university teachers**

It means that, at all previous levels of teaching education, it is necessary to visit a program that ensures the acquisition of basic pedagogical-psychological and didactic-methodical knowledge. But at universities where teachers are expected to transfer advanced theoretical and practical knowledge to students and to encourage the development of cognitive and practical skills and competences, the capability to work in teaching is not the key criterion?

The university teacher's job refers to a scientific and research activity, but also to transferring knowledge, scientific truths, teaching, learning, as well as leading the students to the knowledge necessary for their professional engagement for a continuous improvement and life. So the higher education teacher must have competencies for a lecturer, educator, mentor, and not just a researcher. Hence, the university teacher should have a thorough didactic and docimological knowledge as well as general knowledge about

the learning and teaching process. In this context, as key competences of teachers are considered: (1) planning and realization of the lesson; (2) applying different teaching methods according to educational outcomes; (3) understanding and applying the theories that are a basis of the learning and teaching process; (4) application of different procedures for evaluating students' success according to educational outputs; (5) creating an incentive and stimulating learning environment; (6) application of techniques for active learning in the teaching process; (7) education of students as socially responsible and active citizens; (8) being acquainted with the principles of negotiation and conflict resolution; (9) knowing the ethical principles in teaching and research; (10) presentation skills as well as application of the results of the research in teaching (Turk i Ledić, 2016a).

The development of the competences of the university professors is in direct causation in regard to quality assurance and the development of higher education didactics. Analysts dealing with this issue point out that the lack of quality pedagogical and didactic methodological competences among university professors can have a negative effect the alignment of higher education with the intentions of the Bologna Process, especially because we do not pay enough attention to the competencies, and this negligence is rarely associated with students' failure.

This precise set of teaching competencies points out the fact that the teaching role has many demands and that the acquisition of teaching competencies is one developing process which depends on numerous factors, such as: motivation, experience, mentoring and collegial relations as well as opportunities for professional development and work in teaching.

Taking into consideration the different educational tradition, the researches show that in our educational environment there is no single understanding of the teacher's profession (professor), nor only understanding of the ways that the teacher (the professor) should be, what he/she should know as well as what his/her professional development should be. Hence, two concepts appear out of all this: 1. A traditional view of university teaching that is basically focused on the contents or knowledge (subject-centered teaching or knowledge-centered teaching); 2. Progressive teaching, oriented towards the student (student-centered teaching).

#### **4. Conclusion**

The contemporary University teaching prefers the so-called active methods of work, i.e. methods and techniques that encourage active, responsible and cooperative learning. These types of learning methods and conditions create numerous techniques for working in small groups, debate techniques, project work, individual and group presentation, discussions after reading literature. Their application is the result of the need for building abilities for analytical and critical thinking, as well as for empowering students for self-learning and self-education.

The teacher's priority are the programs which should be to be realized and the with whom he/she will work, while the choice of the methods and techniques which will be used depends on his/hers ability to assess their effectiveness in delivering the expected learning outcomes. Therefore, the promotion of teaching in regard to its methodical innovation will include:

- Creating a university environment that will stimulate the continuing expansion of the teaching techniques' repertoire managed by the professor and assistant,
- Empowering the selection of teaching techniques in accordance with the nature and character of the contents that should be realized,
- Qualification for practical application and creative modification of teaching techniques,

- Constant reassessment of the success in the realization of classes based on students' reaction and personal observations.

Taking into consideration the autonomy of each professor, the forms, methods and techniques of teaching are primarily instruments, working resources, not just an objective.

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