

COMPETENCES OF THE UNIVERSITY TEACHERS. EXAMPLES OF GOOD PRACTICES

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Abstract

According to Europe 2020 Strategy, in 2017, the Commission published „A renewed EU agenda for higher education”, which made education and skills a priority of European cooperation. It focuses on four priority areas: tackling future skills mismatches and promoting excellence in skills development; building inclusive and connected higher education systems; ensuring higher education institutions contribute to innovation; supporting effective and efficient higher education systems. The communication seeks to emphasize the essential role of the university in achieving sustainable development at the global, European and national level. We mainly consider the strategic documents of the European Union. From this perspective, the paper will emphasize examples of good practices around the world regarding the training and development of competences for university teachers that are in line with these new requirements. Based on proposals made by Louvain Learning Lab (Louvain-la-Neuve University, 2005), the communication develops the content of 10 basic competences of the university teaching activity, in order to focus the educational steps on the formation of professional and transversal competences. We also argue the need for the involvement of universities in the process of initial and continuous training of university teachers.

Key words: university reformation; lasting development; the paradigm of centred competence; university teaching staff skills; training of university teachers.

According to Europe 2020 Strategy, the Commission published *New EU Agenda for Higher Education* (2017), which made education and skills a priority for European cooperation. It focuses on four priority areas: aligning the development of skills in the field of higher education with the needs of the labor market; ensuring that higher education is accessible widely and more favorably to inclusion and increasing its degree of interaction with society; stimulating the innovation capacity of higher education; increasing the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education.

All these objectives can only be achieved by competent university teachers (CUTs). The quoted document (EC, 2017) draws the attention to the psycho-pedagogical training of the CUT (initial and continuous).

The higher education system in Romania does not yet rise to the level of the demands of a postmodern society, in accordance with EU standards. *The Times Higher Education World University Rankings* (2019) does not include any Romanian universities in the top 200. Three universities in Romania are between 801st -1000th and four after the 1001st place. In an international ranking *The 2019 Change Readiness Index (CRI)*,

Romania ranks 54th out of 140 countries. The EU countries that follow us are Bulgaria (60) and Greece (65), the statistics of 2019 being centered on the ability of countries to face the climate change.

MATERIAL AND METHOD

The communication seeks to point out the essential role of the university in achieving sustainable development at global, European and national level. We mainly consider the strategic documents of the European Union. We exemplify the creation of a hackathon by Louvain University in Neuve to design the university in 2035.

From this perspective, the paper will emphasize examples of good practices worldwide regarding the competencies of university teachers who are in line with these new requirements.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The development of universities in the world was made following two models: the Napolenian one and the Humboldtian one, that were developed almost simultaneously (Reisz R.D., 2018). **The Humboldtian model** has the following

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characteristics (Reisz R.D., 2018): the unit of education and research; academic freedom in education and research; inclusion of sciences in the philosophical faculty; the national role of the university. The development of American and Japanese universities is also under the sign of the Humboldtian model. **The Napolenian model** also has several defining notes: separation of research education; higher schools should not be autonomous as organizations; his main product will be the engineer; typical faculties are technological ones (Reisz R.D., 2018). Polytechnic schools in Soviet Russia took over the French model, which spread to other socialist countries, including Romania. There are known attempts to rethink the development models of universities having in view the challenges of the contemporary world. Today's students will live in another world and universities must make a collective effort to project their development from this perspective.

The danger of turning education into a profitable commodity (Renaut A., 2007) is manifested by several indicators: the importance of the utilitarian discourse; fascination for international rankings (ranking); the evaluation practices will focus on the number of published articles and patents obtained; the emergence of a third mission of the university (besides the ones of education and research), to be in the service of the society (Valenduc Gé., 2016).

Higher education experts are looking for alternative models for the two classical models (Humboldtian and Napolenian). A significant example is **the entrepreneurial university**, which is based on a new type of management (*new public management*). "The role of the entrepreneurial university is increasingly being seen as important to find new ways to compete and succeed in uncertain and unpredictable environments and to find new solutions to the multiple challenges that need to be addressed for the public good, whether local or global" (Hannon P. D., 2013).

The search for alternatives should not lead to a reductionist approach to the universities' mission, but to think of building a university with several missions. University missions are multidimensional. "For example, it is very difficult to prioritize the importance of improving advanced knowledge, citizens' education, high-level professional training, support for social mobility, etc." (Paradeise C., 2007).

The conference of university presidents (CUP, 2018, 2019) in France made several recommendations on the development of European universities. "What we need is an approach [*Design Thinking*] to innovation that is powerful, effective, and broadly accessible, that can be

integrated into all aspects of business and society, and that individuals and teams can use to generate breakthrough ideas that are implemented and that therefore have an impact." (Brown T., 2009). *Louvain Learning Lab* organized in 2016 an innovative formula to reflect on the future of the university on the horizon of 2035, entitled *Hack'apprendre*, that was attended by around 80 participants, which were organized into 8 groups. University features in the year 2035 were summarized as follows: modular; confident in the students' potential; catalytic (contributing to the emergence of new trades); circular and systemic; fluid (allowing different types of learning); open to human experiences; will advise people's projects; high heterogeneity of students (Lebrun M., 2016).

Marie-Anne Paveau (2019) proposed a benchmark of the competences of the university teacher:

The pedagogical dimension

1. To have a representation of the teaching-learning activity that is becoming more and more effective.
2. To plan and implement teaching-learning activities (choosing and articulating objectives, teaching strategies, scientific content, educational resources, etc.) relevant, effective and efficient.
3. To plan and put into practice activities to evaluate learning outcomes (choosing and articulating criteria, assessment methods, tools, correction techniques, etc.).
4. To master various forms of pedagogical communication (oral and written, nonverbal communication, multimedia use, etc.).
5. To animate and manage interactions in groups of students of different sizes (teacher-student, student-student relationships).
6. To support students in the learning process (tutoring, methodological support, formative evaluation, etc.).

The institutional dimension

7. To promote the success of as many students as possible and ensure the personal development of each one.
8. To work in a multidisciplinary or interdisciplinary team for projects or pedagogical programs.

The socio-professional dimension

9. To develop a reflective thinking on the pedagogical practice.
10. To overcome duties and ethical dilemmas involved by the profession of a university teacher.

Following a constant theoretical effort, Institute of University Pedagogy and Multimedia (which in the meantime became *Louvain Learning Lab*) published a strategic document (2005), which

identified 10 basic competences of the university teaching activity, in order to professionalize it:

Competence 1. *To adopt a representation of the teaching-learning activity that can make this activity as effective as possible;*

The document suggests 5 clues to promote effective learning:

a) **Motivation.** Are the content and teaching strategies tailored to the students' skills and do they carry meanings? Is the teaching situation close to real life to interest the students?

b) **Information.** Do students have the necessary resources to understand and overcome teachers' contribution?

c) **Activating the mental structures** (analysis, synthesis, critical thinking, resourcefulness);

d) **Interplay** (between teachers and students, between students);

e) **Product** to be evaluated.

Competence 2. *To plan and implement teaching activities (articulated with the objectives, contents, teaching-learning strategies) relevant, effective and efficient;*

The teacher must ensure an "active and constructive" learning process by which the student will understand the available cognitive resources in order to create new knowledge (Kozman R.B., 1991). "Each student has concepts and competences with which he will build the knowledge necessary to solve the problems that the environment poses. The role of the community - other students and teachers - is to provide a device, set the challenges, and provide the support that will encourage this construction." (Anderson R.D. *et al*, 1994).

Competence 3. *To plan and implement the activities of assessing the learning activities (articulated by assessment criteria and methods, tools, correction techniques, etc.);*

From a systemic perspective (Stanciu M., 2018), evaluation is the component that gives the measure of the efficiency of the teaching-learning process. It must be articulated with the other components of the university curriculum (competences, scientific content, teaching-learning strategies, forms and modes of organization, learning place). The university teacher will harmoniously combine the types (forms) of evaluation, emphasizing on the training (continuous) evaluation. Also, the methods and assessment tools appropriate to the subject (oral or written examination, practical tests, etc.) will be chosen. Before the start of each discipline, the teacher has to communicate to the students the assessment methods.

Competence 4. *To master different forms of pedagogical communication (oral and written, non-verbal communication, use of multimedia resources).*

Competence 5. *To animate and manage interactions within students groups of different sizes.*

A pillar of the education in the 21st century is considered by UNESCO to teach that individual to live together with other people (Delors J., 2000). Man is a social being and, therefore, each individual is linked to the others through a multitude of invisible threads. This especially in this world of interdependence, which further accentuates the need for human solidarity beyond all ideological hues.

Competence 6. *To advise students in the learning process (tutoring, methodological support, formative evaluation).*

We consider the paradigm of focusing the didactic approach on students, on their needs and interests. The university teacher cannot learn instead of the student, but he / she can enable a pleasant and efficient learning process.

Competence 7. *Promoting success for a growing number of students and personal development*

USAMV Iași won two ROSE projects financed by World Bank: "Success chances for agronomist students in the 1st year of study" (2017-2020) and "USAMV Learning Center Iasi-Learning for Life", mainly aiming at supporting the 1st year students from USAMV Iași, who are exposed to the risk of abandonment and who belong especially to the disadvantaged groups.

Competence 8. *Work in multi- or interdisciplinary team for projects*

The pedagogy project tries to place the pupil /student at the center of education and training. Interdisciplinarity is one of the major directions in the upgrading of the school curriculum (Văideanu Ge., 1988; Stanciu M., 2018).

Competence 9. *Developing a reflective thinking about its pedagogical practice*

The professional educator, "the reflective practitioner" is able to analyze his/her own practices, solve problems and invent strategies. The training relies on the input of practitioners and researchers and aims at articulating the theory with practice in order to build the "analysis capabilities" of its practices. According to Altet M. (1996), this is a metacompetence that allows other competences to be built.

Competence 10. *To deal with the ethical responsibilities and dilemmas specific to the profession of university teacher*

Academic freedom must be correlated with a great responsibility regarding the quality of the training programs, the manifestation of the university as a nucleus of the socio-economic partnership, of the progress and innovation from the perspective of the demands of the society, approached from the perspective of systemic paradigms, of the complexity (Morin E., 1990, 1992) and a prospective vision.

CONCLUSIONS

By its contribution to the meeting of European leaders in Gothenburg, the Commission set a vision for a European Education Area by 2025, "in which learning, studying and doing research would not be hampered by borders" (European Commission, 2019).

Creation of *European universities* - networks of excellence in research and training, to promote Europe's core values (results of the 1st call, 2019: 17 alliances, 114 Higher Education Institutions, 24 member states).

Rethinking the university curriculum specialized in the initial and continuous training of university teachers. It must have a predominantly innovative character (Wagner T., 2014; Lison Cr. et al, 2014).

The creation at the level of the Romanian universities of institutional structures that will deal with the initial and continuous training of the university teaching staff.

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