

Chapter 5

Curriculum Development through Competency–Based Approach in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this chapter is to present existing research about competency-based approach curricula and its implications on the higher education system. At first, a broad European framework about harmonization and lifelong learning is presented. Second, competence-based learning is explored and its consequences on interdisciplinary and authentic learning situations are analyzed. Finally, some challenges for higher education institutions are presented with the ways in which some of these institutions are resolving them.

INTRODUCTION

Content of this chapter:

- A glance on transnational strategies for higher education
- An analysis of the challenges and effects that competency-based training designs have on higher education management
- Proposals for new policies of higher education institutions.

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STARTING POINT: EHEA

The implementation of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), inspired by the fundamental principles set out in the Magna Charta Universitatum (Bologna, 1999), has led to structural changes in national university systems, with the object of attaining transparency of qualifications, harmonization of qualifications and changes in the management of universities, especially arising from new curricula (Teichler, 2004).

The creation of the EHEA aims, among other goals, to increase the social credibility of the university, responding to the demand for

qualified people. It advocates the adaptation of an educational system in two cycles and the use of a mode of work based on the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) system. This change involves learning that is centred on competences and not on content, and places the role—and the responsibility—of learning onto students (Trends V, 2010). On the other hand, it involves designing competence based curricula, taking into consideration not only the perspective of academics but also the current job market.

From this perspective, competence is the selection and combination of relevant knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and rules that allow us to respond to a complex situation in a given context (Perrenoud, 2004). This forces a change in methodology, looking for contextualised and authentic learning (linked to simulations, cases, problems, projects) and increased external practices and relationship with society and the workplace. This approach requires a change on the part of teachers, from an instructor role to that of a facilitator of learning. The transformation in the work of teachers (EUA, 2005) is evident both organizationally (teamwork, vertical and horizontal coordination, ...) and at the curriculum level: content selection and planning based on the competences necessary to promote active development methodologies (simulations, practical cases, problem-based learning, projects,...) and the implementation of evaluation of learning and competences systems that, in turn, require changes in ways of working and in coordinating times, spaces and structures. (Valcárcel, 2007; Capano & Piattoni, 2009; Bain, 2004).

OPPORTUNITIES AND LIMITATIONS OF EHEA

The European Higher Education Area comes at a time of deep economic and social crisis. A new world order in which, more than ever, the most important asset of any organization is human capital can be imagined. Access to knowledge not as an initial training period but as permanent

commitment to stay current and to access certain occupancy levels will be essential. That's why universities should provide adequate training programs to different profiles of students and citizens. In this line the challenge of providing individualized itineraries and multiple monitoring systems courses in various modalities could be proposed (the MOOCs are a good example of this diversification and extension of the university offer, looking strategically position). That is, the university should pursue the formation of citizens and qualified professionals, knowing that the added value that university grants continues to carry on the wage differential.

However, in recent years the social prestige of the college has decreased and therefore another challenge of the EHEA is to increase the credibility of college, so that both employers and all the citizens recognize the value and usefulness of this educational stage. Therefore it is necessary to rebel against budget decreases; it must not affect university education (especially when the budgets are been cutting in countries that had not come to dedicate enough of its GDP to that matter). Moreover, in a context of globalization, the promotion of mobility is sought and it requires the harmonization of degrees, resulting in a new challenge: the combination of the requirements of each context and a more generic skills to enable future professional for analyzing each context and each problem, finding the resources to solve and applying it successfully seeking not only efficiency but also adding social value to their actions. Then, the main focuses of the Development of Curriculum through Competency Based Approach in Higher Education are the following:

Seeking a Qualified Population in a Life-Long Learning Framework: Higher Education Marks the Difference for This Challenge

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