CHANGES IN THE MANAGEMENT OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALBANIA

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Abstract

Albania is a country in development which is situated in south east of Europe. As some other countries in the world, Albania is a member of NATO and soon will be a European Union (EU) member. Being part of this big union create the possibility at this country to be part of this global connection. But to be more competitive compared with other country, Albania need to create more qualified work force. In this process a most important role is played by the Universities of this country. This implies orienting education toward the demands of the global market. Here appear the importance to discuses about the impacts of the Bologna process on the management of educational program, and the importance of introducing new teaching methods in higher education. In this paper will emphases the experience of one research was completed in April, 2010 at George Washington University (Washington D.C. USA) within the framework of Interactivity Foundation (IF) special project "Teaching Methods in Eastern Europe – Policy Possibilities for Public discussion" and the other experience of introducing new teaching method in a course of graduate students in University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi".

Keywords: Higher Education, Qualified Work Force, Bologna Process, New Teaching Methods.

Introduction

Albania is a country in development situated in South Eastern Europe. Albania is a member of the United Nations, NATO, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe, Council of Europe, World Trade Organization, and one of the founding members of the Union for the Mediterranean. Albania has been a potential candidate for accession to the European Union since January 2003, and it formally applied for EU membership on 28 April 2009. Being part of this big unions and candidate to other organizations, create the possibility at this country to be part of this global connection. But to be more competitive compared with other country, Albania need to create more qualified work force. In this process a most important role is played by the Universities of this country.

The priorities for reforming the education system are emerging so from the globalization context which aimed the increase competitiveness of higher education on a world scale. This implies orienting education toward the demands of the global market[294].

As the higher education is connect with teaching method, does this mean that if we want to develop higher education it is necessary introducing new teaching method?

Teaching methods have been a perennial area of concern for democratic societies ever since the Athenians forced Socrates to drink the hemlock. Socrates, of course, was accused and found guilty of worshipping false gods and corrupting the youth of the city, charges that were bolstered by claims that he questioned the authorities of the city in the marketplace, making the weaker argument appear the stronger, and vice versa.[295] Today, some people believe that the use of the 'right' teaching method is critical to the learning process and the development of a young student. Others believe that the use of the 'wrong' method can seriously retard a student's learning and may even turn a student off to education altogether. Still others believe that different people learn in different ways and that the methods teachers use is far less important than the content they teach. And still others believe that different teaching methods are causal factors in the development of different kinds of societies, that some teaching methods lead to authoritarian 'closed' societies in which people take orders without question from above, and that other methods are catalysts for the development of democratic 'open' societies in which citizens hold their leaders accountable for what they do, and play an active role in the governance of their societies. The idea that the closed societies of the former communist block were partially the result of bad teaching methods and that replacing them with good teaching methods will be an important factor in their transformation.

One important step undertake by Albania government due to this change was reforming higher education through Bologna Process. But here raise so many questions like: What is Bologna Process? Was revealed this process important for improvement of higher education in Albania? Does this process mean involvement of new teaching methods?

Bologna process adopted voluntarily by 46 countries, create the foundations for convergence and even harmonization of management of higher education and education programs across the European Union and neighboring countries. The various elements of the Bologna process lead to a new model of higher education that enhances the mobility of students and researchers through a common training structure and the comparison between national qualification frames of educational programs. The Bologna process increases the fluidity of the job market and boosts European competitiveness as it is defined within the framework of Lisbon strategy. The Bologna process also serves as an instrument for the social-economic and cultural integration. The new model of good governance of higher education favors collective decision-making and rules of transparency in fair distribution of benefits among each parties involved in educational activities. The concept of good governance within the Bologna process leads to the deeper integration by supposing the acceptance of common rules of evaluation and the relevance of the results of educational programs.

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[294] Ia Natsvlishvili, "Directions of Changes in the Management of Higher Education and Curriculum Development".

[295] Mark & Ieva Notturno, Alkida Hasaj. MMK and other fellows of the Interactivity Foundation, "Teaching Methods, Policy Possibility for Public Discussion", 2010.

But so many people expressed concern about whether or not the new teaching methods would meet the requirements of the Bologna process— and they are not at all clear about what the requirements of the Bologna process actually are, whether they have anything to do with teaching methods. But the Bologna Process actually does not require the use of any specific teaching method. Nor does it prohibit the use of any. It only requires teachers to specify the intended outcomes of the courses that they teach and to explain how the teaching methods that they use in those courses enable them to achieve those outcomes.

Statements about the impact of the Bologna process was given on the research projects which was completed in April, 2010 at George Washington University (Washington D.C. USA) within the framework of Interactivity Foundation (IF) special project "Teaching Methods in Eastern Europe – Policy Possibilities for Public discussion".[296]

But what is a teaching method? What are its different dimensions? What values and goals might people associate with the use of a teaching method? What concerns might different people in a society—teachers, students, parents, employers, and government officials have about them? And is there someone best teaching method that enables everyone who uses it to learn better and more easily than they would without it?

These questions reflect broad concerns about teaching methods that are fundamental for the future of education in a country considering the reality.

Methodology
The research is based on two methods.
Secondary data: This data collection is based on existing literature and publication on the issues of "Bologna Process" and "Teaching Methods" published from Interactive Foundation.
Primary data: Except this secondary data, in this research was used also primary data collected through an experiment and a 'mini-project' on Teaching Methods. The primary data is the main recourse for this research.
*I. **This mini project** was conducted in cooperation with the Research Program in Social and Organizational Learning at The George Washington University, which also provided space for the discussions. Its participants included eight young university teachers from Croatia, Macedonia, Albania, Serbia, and Georgia who had come to the United States under the auspices of the United States State Department's Junior Faculty Development Program and the Open Society Institute to learn about new teaching methods that they might use in their classes back home. These teachers met both individually and as a group, for over 50 hours to discuss their concerns about teaching methods. These scholars improve their knowledge of the Western literature in their fields and experience American teaching methods. Also, they are introduced to group facilitation and process improvement methods, since these*

methods make them more effective in introducing changes at their home universities.
Each scholar facilitated three of the thirty-eight discussion sessions project and wrote discussion summaries about them. They also served as note-takers for other scholar-facilitators. And each of them met for twelve hours of individual training discussions with the trainers Dr. Mark Amadeus Notturno and Ms. Ieva Notturno. The group also produced an 'IF Special Report' at the end of the training program, complete with seven contrasting policy possibilities.

Project participants were asked to develop contrasting conceptual policy possibilities pertaining to their areas of concern, and to then explore the practical policy possibilities that might flow from them if they were actually adopted as public policy. A policy possibility is a plan, or a strategy, or an approach that we might take toward action pertaining to an area of concern. It is typically based upon a particular way of looking at an area of concern, and upon certain beliefs, values, and goals that we might have pertaining to it. A conceptual policy possibility is a general plan for action that is based upon a specific way of looking at an area of concern. A practical policy possibility is a more specific plan for action that would constitute a way of implementing a more general policy possibility.[297] The conceptual policy possibilities pertain to what policy might be while practical policy possibilities pertain to *how* it might be implemented. In the project, panelists were asked to explore and develop an area of concern and the various conceptual policy possibilities pertaining to it. But the group discussion facilitator also tried to prevent them from focusing upon problems – and especially from trying to find solutions to them. There is, of course, a close relationship between a problem and an area of concern. The area of concern may give rise to problems. Thinking about an area of concern, and developing contrasting possibilities pertaining to it is very different from thinking about a problem. Thinking about a problem calls to think about how one should respond, here and now, to something that it – the problem – has put in front of one's face. But thinking about an area of concern calls to think about the different ways in which one might respond, sometime in the future, to the various possible "something's" that it – the area of concern – might run across one's imagination. Thinking about a problem is thinking about to respond to something very specific in the here and now. But thinking about an area of concern is thinking about how one might respond to something that might develop in ways in which it has not yet developed in the here and now. This is the reason why thinking about areas of concern is fundamental to Interactivity Foundation. The policy decisions are too often made in crisis situations in which everybody is faced with problems that call upon them to act before they have explored the full range of the possible responses pertaining

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[296] This research project is better explained in followed paragraph about the primary method used in getting data.

[297] Jack Byrd, Jr. (2005), "Facilitation Guidebook", Interactivity Foundation.
Jack Byrd, Jr. (2009), "Facilitation Guidebook for Small Group Citizen Discussions", 2nd Edition.

to those problems. Focusing policy thinking upon areas of concern, before they have developed into problem situations, may help to solve the problem of being continuously jostled from crisis to crisis. The IF Discussion process itself is a research and an exploration generating the ideas about policy possibilities and specific actions of addressing them. Panelists go through a three-stage process in discussion groups. Stage 1: the facilitator of the discussion describes the area of concern by developing questions trying to think about the area of concern from multiple perspectives. At times this might be challenging. Being overwhelmed at this point is a typical reaction, but moving ahead with the process helps the facilitator to keep explorations manageable. Stage 2: generating policy possibilities that respond to those questions. In some cases several questions are grouped together and the panelists explore the answers to these questions as a set. The panelists try to be conceptual in their thinking. They do not look for specific answers as one would expect when solving a problem. Rather, the panelists look for broad, qualitative thoughts about what might be done in response to the question(s) they have developed. The panelists then begin to shape answers into a limited number of broad or conceptual possibilities. These possibilities represent contrasting approaches that society might take to deal with the questions. The possibilities are contrasting in that they provide different ways of approaching different aspects of the area of concern. Possibilities are not recommendations. The facilitator may not personally agree with every possibility. The criterion for considering a possibility is whether it represents an interesting choice for others to consider. Stage 3 consists in exploring consequences to revise the policy possibilities. The panelists examine consequences of the possibilities, exploring some of their real-world implications. This is an exploration rather than a quantitative analysis. The panelists look for general indications of how the possibilities might take shape in the real world and how they might relate to the issues. The panelists can also modify the possibilities to make them more acceptable or understandable. At this stage the panelists make an overall review of the possibilities in terms of what might be useful for spurring thoughtful discussions among citizens.[298]

II.   *The experiment* was conduct with the graduate students in the course of "Economics of Tourism", at University of Shkodra "Luigj Gurakuqi", in which is introduced the discussion IF method. The classes of 20 students were divided in two groups with 10 students each. The students facilitated the discussions and used the flipchart to capture the major points that the other students made. During the facilitation in different groups, two different students take notes on the discussion.

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[298] An Overview of the IF Discussion Process – 3 stages (Prudhomme, 2009); 2 pages http://www.interactivityfoundation.org/about-if.

To create a connection between the subject and the facilitation process is specify as discussion issue "Tourism and Economy". The aim of this application was to evaluate the reaction of Albanian students toward these new teaching methods and at the same time to help them in achieving new capability. We can also emphases that tourism is one of the most important industries in Albania. But still they are a lot of problem in developing this industry in sustainable way. So applying this method during the course of Economics of Tourism at graduate students for Sustainable Tourism Development, gave them the ability to articulate actual concerns and also to make individual choices about which policy possibilities to be taken. These possibilities after was suggested to governmental stakeholders in Albania. Some of these students work oneself in local or center government of Albania.

All the students were required to participate in the discussions especially choosing one aspect of sustainability tourism and economic development in Albania. At the beginning the students have to describe the current policy debate on the issue under discussion, the arguments offered in favor of the issue and against it.

The course was exploratory. The students explored and developed the possibilities themselves. They improved their discussion skills and their ability to think creatively about possibilities by doing so. During students facilitation process the teacher observed and after suggested them about possible improvement in their facilitation.

What makes different this course from some other courses usually instructed in the Albania Universities was the application of the new method like Facilitation Process or Discussion IF Method. Applying this method in this course guarantee to the students a better understanding of the subject and not only, but helped them in discussion of topics, exchanging of their views, and the development of their critical thinking.

Conclusion

- Some teachers, students, and other stakeholders may resist the use of new teaching methods due to their fear of change.
- Students may not like a teaching method or may not be able to learn from it.
- Faculty members are generally more interested in research than in teaching.
- Their universities may not have the materials and financial recourse that a teaching method requires.
- New teaching methods may not be in accord with the requirements of the Bologna process.
- It is not clear how teaching methods will be evaluated.
- The knowledge that students acquire may be suitable to meet the job needs of the future.
- Introducing new method like discussion using IF methodology works very well with Albania students. They accept the method and were very happy to learn about that.
- Applying this new method in graduate students helped them in discussion of topics, exchanging of their views, and the development of their critical thinking.
- The students frequent regularly the class, not only they are obliged to frequent a part of this hours but they

were very interested in participating in something that for them was totally new.

-   The student develops not only the ability in facilitation a group of people, but at the same time participating as contributor with their ideas during the discussions.

-   The students begin to consider "Tourism and Economy" not only in the theoretical aspect but at the same time practical one. This method helped students to think more deeply about "Tourism and Economy", something that was totally new for them.

-   Our universities, and our society as a whole, generally regard research as much more important and prestigious than teaching—and from a concern that university professors generally have little motivation to improve their teaching methods as a result.

-   The Bologna Process is a process poorly understood by teachers and students.

-   Learning new teaching methods may require a lot of time and energy; that teachers, like most people, are liable to get set in their ways; and that they are likely to resist new teaching methods for the very reason that they are new. Change is often a long and painful process, and many people both fear it and have difficulty adjusting to it. But that is no reason to avoid it. On the contrary, the future of our educational system, if not the future of our world, depends upon using the best teaching methods that are available.

-   Even if the universities agree that they should take student input more seriously, they might still feel skeptical about letting students decide which teaching methods their teachers should use. They might think that students are far from being interested consumers of teaching methods—and that it would be too romantic to think that they are always interested in doing whatever is necessary for them to learn a subject.

-   Future job market needs are predictable, and that employers and experts are in a better position than teachers and students to know what they are, and that the value of an educational system can be measured by its success in preparing students to meet them. But it also flows the concern that our current curriculum and teaching methods might not be in tune with the real job market needs of the future, that our universities may not adequately prepare students to meet them, and that our students will be unable to get good jobs when they graduate. These beliefs and concerns have become all the more pressing in recent years as globalization, and especially the development of information technology, has turned the job market into a more global—and much more competitive—affair than it was just a few years ago. Today, businesses and employers around the world are finding it easier and easier to cross borders, to outsource their jobs to workers in foreign countries, to relocate their operations abroad, and to hire employees who are ready, willing, and prepared to meet their needs wherever they can find them.

Recommendations

-   The facilitation process as a teaching method is totally new in Albania, not only for the students but at the same time for teachers in general. Some of the teachers would like to implement new teaching methods and new materials in their courses. But the reason why they don't do this is because they do not know any new methods. Sometimes they are limited in doing this because they did not take part in the foreign experience, or because they do not know the English language and cannot read about the new materials. So, it is worthy to train them about these new methods, but at the same time to translate these training materials from English so that they can read it in their native language. This is the way to achieve development.

-   Good teaching involves the use of good teaching methods that good teaching methods constantly evolve over time and that it is thus necessary and desirable for teachers to keep up with what is happening in their profession and to change their methods whenever new ones evolve that seem more effective.

-   We should regard teaching as at least as important as research, and it would try to provide teachers with a variety of different incentives to improve their teaching. This possibility would thus attempt to motivate teachers to focus upon improving their teaching and teaching methods by elevating the status of teaching and teachers in our society. It would establish special academic degrees for teachers, and require such credentials to get teaching jobs. It would also raise salaries for teachers relative to researchers. It would base professors' salary increases and promotions primarily upon their performance in the classroom. It would, in this way, generally encourage universities and their professors to focus more upon teaching than upon research.

-   Allow teachers to select not only the teaching methods that are most appropriate for their courses.

-   Clarify the Bologna Process —what it is and what it isn't, and especially its implications for teaching methods—in an attempt to relieve the fears that people might otherwise have about it.

-   Try to better prepare students to enter this competitive global job market by encouraging universities and teachers to seek out the advice of both local and international employers, experts, and government officials to design a curriculum and teaching methods that will meet the job needs of the future.

-   What we can suggest to the other who might like to implement this method are;

●   To find out if it possible to apply the method in their course. So if the course is appropriate.

●   The number of students in the course and how much they are motivated to work with this new method.

●   To create the appropriate physical condition like the round table, flipchart, etc.

References

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