

## ENHANCING TEACHING IN HIGHER EDUCATION – EVALUATION AND TRANSFORMATION

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### ABSTRACT

*Teaching is an important part of the academic profession, in a continuous process of improvement, therefore the paper searches through sources on the evaluation and improvement of teaching, at both higher levels (UNESCO, EU), and at institutional level, underlining important points of view in the search for teaching and learning enhancement, with the purpose to formulate conclusions that will aid the assessment and evaluation process of teaching and learning, which is an important part of the educational process, to bring about improvement and progress, beneficial to teachers, students, and the higher education institution itself.*

**KEYWORDS:** *academic teaching, enhanced/effective teaching, teaching evaluation, scholarship of teaching, transforming teaching*

**JEL CLASSIFICATION:** A10, A14, A20, A23

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The main purpose of teaching is to orientate, coordinate, and train students in their field of choice for them to become competitive on the job market; teaching is the “core service” of a university, providing direction and support for students at the level of excellence (Yan, W. 2022). In this light, enhanced quality teaching depends on several factors, such as the learning environment, teachers, learning activities, theoretical and practical courses, availability of the newest learning resources, research work, availability and use of information technology, the engagement and motivation of students, the attraction of the university (Yan, W., 2022).

## **2. HIGH QUALITY TEACHING AS THE MAIN CONCERN OF THE UNIVERSITY**

University teaching is a scholarly activity that draws on extensive professional skills and practices and high levels of disciplinary and other contextual expertise (Devlin, M., Samarawickrema, G., 2010, p.1).

In order to have a broader perspective on what high quality teaching requires, we have focused on several details that improve teaching, as this is a permanent process, continuing from year to year, given the requirements of quality assurance, changes in the student population in terms of expectations and needs, labour market requirements, the speedy evolution of technology, and the necessity to cope with a continually changing work environment.

Therefore, focusing on efficient and enhanced teaching, with experience in university teaching, we have consulted works by authors on the same topic to draw several conclusions on what our approach to teaching should further develop into.

Universities support quality teaching as “it is the core of the service for higher education institutions” (Yan, W., 2022, p.1), based on a wide base of research assisting teaching. There are two fundamental concepts on which good teaching relies, according to the author, that of constructive alignment, with the main objectives, activities, assessment, aligned to the objective, and the principle of powerful learning environments, with essential elements, such as effective teaching and learning competence in a specific domain, a system for progress monitoring, enhancing learning and teaching (Yan, W., 2022, p.1).

Teachers need to assess and improve their teaching each academic year, adopting a student-centered pedagogy, analyzing their courses from the students’ perspective in terms of skills provided, relevant content and learning activities, new learning resources, teaching methods, and student engagement.

As each course curriculum contains elements like course objectives, grading and evaluation criteria, learning resources, contents and references, compulsory and additional learning sources, prerequisites, skills to be learnt, teachers have a clear view on items to be analyzed and reviewed. Another set of data is represented by the examination results, to the manner in which they reflect students’ learning and knowledge retention.

Other sources are student, peer, and department evaluations of the teacher and course. From here, teachers can draw their conclusions on the changes they need to make in content, activities, learning resources, methods and strategies of teaching, to enrich and improve the learning experience for students. A review of the skills the course provides students with is also necessary, as they will have to employ these at work.

In order to integrate the best practice in their teaching, the further learning within the professional development programs is a continuous process for teachers.

Defining effective teaching, The Institute for Learning and Teaching created a collection of tools (the Teaching Effectiveness Framework) in 2018, a process for evaluating teaching at

Colorado State University (J. Todd, T. Buchan, D. Colbert, K. Falkenberg, 2024). The model consists of four stages, starting with assessment and reflection, identification and alignment, planning, engagement and integration. Its usefulness stands in the fact that faculty can evaluate courses and improve them, having the right elements to aid them in assessment and improvement (J. Todd, T. Buchan, D. Colbert, K. Falkenberg, 2024).

As teaching is an evolving process, there have been several improvements proposed within a wider framework, formulated within the *Vision Statement of Secretary-General of UNESCO*, or in the *EFFECT Report of the European Universities Association*, calling for action in the transformation of education and the promotion of effective and impactful teaching and learning.

The *Vision Statement* (2022) promotes the idea of “learning to learn” (Vision Statement, 2022, p.2) which requires every learner to be equipped “with the ability to read and write, to identify, understand, and communicate clearly and effectively, to acquire and develop numeracy, digital and scientific skills, and instill curiosity, creativity, and the capacity for critical thinking, to nurture social and emotional skills, empathy, and kindness” (Vision Statement, 2022, p. 2). With such skills, the “learning to do” views the possibility of reskilling and up-skilling for people of all ages, promoting life-long learning (Vision Statement, 2022, p.3).

In order to respond to educational requirements in the light of the above, teachers need to become “agents of change” (Vision Statement, 2022, p.4-5). They become knowledge producers, facilitators of learning, and guides in the comprehension of complex realities, basing on their experience, enquiry, and academic curiosity, thus developing the capacity of problem-solving in their students (Vision Statement, 2022, p.5). In order to meet these requirements, teachers need a broadened capacity, agency, and autonomy to design, interpret, and manage the curriculum and to adapt and prioritize content and pedagogy, and to monitor evaluation and teaching (Vision Statement, 2022, p.5).

Taking some of these ideas further in his book entitled *Teaching Competencies for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, Practical Approaches to Learning*, and presenting them as *Key expectations from Education Systems in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, author P. K. Misra points out that teachers, and teaching have to ensure a holistic development for learners, providing them with skills and knowledge to succeed in a constantly evolving world, with more personalized, inclusive and innovative learning experiences, to teach them critical thinking, problem-solving, and creativity, skills relevant to the real world, offer them flexibility in learning, facilitated by technology and digital resources, to prepare them for the job market or self-employment, helping them to become socially responsible citizens(P. K. Misra, 2024).

To enable teachers to adopt this approach, the author details several expectations from them: provide assessment and feedback to ensure student learning and progress, move away from didactic forms of teaching and learning to active learning, include critical thinking in courses, include digital learning into practice, provide learners with diverse learning experiences relevant to the 21<sup>st</sup> century (P. K. Misra, 2024).

The author emphasizes the importance of learning deeper conceptual understanding, connected and coherent knowledge, authentic knowledge in its context of usage, collaborative learning (P. K. Misra, 2024). For such learning needs, teaching, and learning, the systems of the 21<sup>st</sup> century must undergo transformations (P. K. Misra, 2024).

The European dimension to effective teaching, termed as teaching enhancement, is seen as an important component of quality assurance meant to enhance the quality of learning and teaching in favour of students (EUA, 2022). As teaching is an important part of the academic profession, it is necessary to have a scrutiny of the strategies and measures for learning and teaching, of the way teaching responds to the demands of the society in an ongoing change, and have synergy and collaboration for a European dimension of learning (EUA, 2022).

The European Forum for Enhanced Collaboration and Teaching emphasizes the enhancement of the education mission of European universities, with a proactive response to change. As “change is ongoing, knowledge is developed, transmitted and applied at an ever faster pace” (EFFECT, 2022, p.1).

The Forum has formulated the *Ten Principles for the Enhancement of Learning and Teaching*, which re-emphasizes the educational mission of the university (EFFECT, 2022, p.1), that promotes the values of the European Higher Education Area, focusing on the 21st century skills: critical thinking, problem-solving, life-long learning (EFFECT, 2022).

The main ideas found in the Principles are the following: learner-centered learning and teaching, the support for the advancement of learning, collaboration in the higher education community, the interconnectedness of learning, teaching, and research, teaching as the core of the academic practice, the provision on sustainable resources and structures, enhancement and a shared responsibility of teachers and students (EFFECT, 2022, p.2).

Another method of enhancement can be interdisciplinary teaching, an approach that requires transformation, coordination among faculty members, negotiation of teaching styles and grading criteria, which are very challenging (J. F. R. Mazzoni, 2024).

Interdisciplinary teaching is a comprehensive and holistic treatment of topics, enhances communication style, and improves student outcome, being an effective approach (J. F. R. Mazzoni, 2024).

### 3. CONCLUSIONS

The higher education institution should have a model of course evaluation and improvement, monitor the process each academic year, keeping in view the requirements of the national authority on higher education that aligns these requirements to those formulated and updated at international level.

In order to become knowledge creators and facilitators of learning, and have the freedom to change and adapt the curriculum with content and activities within a student-centered teaching

and learning, teachers need to keep updated not only in their domain of teaching, but also in the pedagogy and methodology required, continue their own learning in the professional development programs, and be open to all the information on skills required on the labour market. Thus, they can change and improve not only the theoretical background of their courses, but also the practical activities, keeping students engaged and motivated in their learning.

Searching and accessing the newest learning resources available is also a basic condition for the development of good teaching and well-documented course materials and new activities, to support students in learning the skills they will have to apply at work.

Technology needs to be involved in teaching and learning, to open more pathways for students in learning and research, to develop their critical thinking and digital skills, stimulate their creativity and enhance their innovating capabilities. Orientation and coordination in obtaining the best results in using resources available online is an essential activity of the teachers.

Besides keeping up-to-date information on the evaluation on courses, on student participation and examination, on the latest requirement in the establishment of the curriculum, teachers need to carry out a detailed reflective activity on their courses and teaching, to provide them with the necessary information on content changes, to refine learning and teaching activities, to have a clear image on how their teaching methods and pedagogy help students in learning, on the sources used and updated permanently, in order to monitor and progress in the process of continuous evaluation and improvement.

Teachers need to enhance the interconnectedness between research and teaching, to improve their capacity to design practical learning activities for students, to elaborate papers, reports, and learning materials of support, enlarging the perspective of students in their domain, and stimulate their curiosity in research and use of findings.

It is also necessary to view course elaboration and teaching as a process with several stages, that is the establishment of objectives in relation to skills to be formed, the search for resources on the topics to be included, the planning of the course, the design and elaboration of materials and activities, the establishment of requirements, assessment, and grading criteria, the monitoring of results, the evaluation of the course by the teacher, students, peers, and department, and the change and improvement period. This is a continuous process which ensures improvement and progress, oriented towards the enhancement of teaching effectiveness and student training.

Therefore, teachers need to perfect a teaching strategy to accommodate improvement, and to include the following: educate and instruct students on what learning needs and change attitudes to it, inform them about the outcomes, skills, and level they need to reach; content and selection of resources to support the course and extend learning beyond the course; plan and prepare assessment materials, online assessment, tasks, establish means of immediate feedback; establish student workload and means of support, communication, collaboration and coordination. We also have to help students to improve their learning experience by developing their self-study methods, learn to take responsibility of their own learning, expand their capacity to involve additional

resources, and acquire the knowledge and skills they need. At the end of the course they need to use their knowledge to support the future job tasks.

Each course needs a specific technique of teaching, in relation to student level, type of course, means and tools available, assessment and learning outcomes. The condition is to support deep learning and equip learners with the skills and knowledge they need.

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