

THE FUTURE OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ALBANIA: HOW TECHNOLOGY AND ENGLISH WILL SHAPE LEARNING.

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“ALBANIAN EDUCATION IS ONE OF THE PRIORITIES OF THE PROGRAMME OF THE ALBANIAN GOVERNMENT. PARTICULARLY, THE REFORM IN HIGH EDUCATION AIMS AT SHAPING THE GRADUATES WITH SCIENTIFIC AND PROFESSIONAL KNOWLEDGE OF HIGH QUALITY, FOR BEING ABLE TO COMPETE IN A OPEN AND DEVELOPED ECONOMY, BY ASSISTING AND PROMOTING THE HIGH PUBLIC SCHOOLS TO CREATE POSSIBILITIES FOR THE ALBANIAN YOUTH.....” .

Abstract

The main goal of education is to enhance the academic qualities of the students by stimulating the critical approaches and increasing their independence. The vision of the higher education in Albania is deeply connected with the technological innovations, new approaches including English language as an important key thus helping the Albanian students to be competitive in the European market.

The purpose of this paper is to discuss how technology and programs in English are shaping the education process. To what extent these two instruments are helping Higher education in Albania?

Based on the analytical information, this paper highlights the future of the higher education in Albania closely related with the main reforms undertaken in our country promoted by the European Union's long term projects. While the development of the scientific research in the Albanian Universities is a strong base of ensuring future successes. Moreover, the role of the Albanian Government represented by the Ministry of Education and Science and other important actors' impact enhance strategic policies for the involvement of the English language in education and research. The study intends to demonstrate the future trends of the higher education of Albania on the framework of the Europe 2020 strategies, especially in promoting the scientific research.

The method of analysis and comparison of relevant literature sources would be undertaken.

Results. Projects already applied by the Albanian government in the higher education system in and the experience gained so far calls for major reforms. Deep reformation process of higher education is already occurring. It undoubtedly emphasizes the decisive role of English language involvement in the academic sphere.

Keywords: *Education, Research, Reform, Program, English language*

Introuction

This paper intends to highlight the state of the higher education within the most ambitious projects in Albania. The progress made by the Albanian higher education in implementin Bologna reforms is considered to be a true accelarating indicator for the European integration. Universities consist the primar driving engine towards progress, followed by governments, businesses and other industries. Regarding the conference meeting in London 2007, the Bologna instruments were orientated in quality assurance and recognition of reforms. The Albanian higher education system has been going through a deep transformational phase for the last 20 years. Coming from an inherited communistic regime where the education as well played a large part of propaganda, to an open market orientated economy the priorities for the development of education are crucial.

The study intends to ascertain that the globalization, post- economic crisis effects and the market urges for a better development of the educational system. Technological innovations along with the use of the English language have affected in a renewing the role of education. Facing these challenges, the Albanian higher education system has been focused in implementing the Bologna process and especially the Euro 2020 education strategies originating from the European Union.

The paper displays both technology and English language roles as primary driving engines towards the European Union integration. Through comparison and analytical arguments of the phases of Bologna process and development of technological strategies the methodology would provide clear and obvious conclusions on the future challenges for the educational system. Lastly, the paper would attempt in linking all the factor components to the clear vision of education being the top priority for the Albanian government and society.

Overview: *Bologna Process*

This section intends to analyze the Bologna process and its impact on reshaping the Albanian higher education system. These impacts have renewed the political, economic and academic extent of the Albanian universities. Being a country which aspires for entering in the EU framework, the very first steps would come from transforming education into the most powerful trace of change, progress and growth promoter. Institutionally, academically as well as legally the Bologna process highlights the wide range opportunities for development of technology processes regarding education. The case of Albania represents an opportunity for the Bologna process as well to profit from the cultural and academic aspect of this country. New young people are very eager to study and have deep interests in educating themselves to the best universities of the world; therefore the human and cultural resources show a great evidence of embracing these changes for the best outcome of the Albanian education.

On the other hand, globalization processes have turned a major attention for the use of English language in academic education and research. Consolidating and expansion of English language comes as a necessity for the labor market. Internationalization of education at a rapid growing pace, prevalence of Anglo-Saxon worldwide economic power and integration processes in European Union are all examples of how the English language is dominating every sector of economic and legal life. We are living in a globalized world full of colors, value systems which intercept with each other at this contexts, English language represents a superior value which connects and gets closer different experiences in education as well. Labor market is fully oriented through the use of English language at every economic, juridical and governmental aspect. Therefore, teaching English language since secondary and elementary school would present a good model for boosting its knowledge level at higher education units. Especially UK, Nordic countries and Germany have the highest performance in implementing innovative processes of English learning due to their considerable economic achievements.

The Albanian higher education system has been adapting the Bologna process regarding every structural reform needed in the educational system like quality, recognition and meeting the relevant standards. The response to these instruments applied the higher education has improved its performance for example in supporting students and in creating a clear knowledge and understanding of the educational system. Improving the knowledge level on market research, modeling the universities at the context of the market necessity is being considerate for the Albanian higher education system.

If we try to parallelize the changes undertaken in the European higher education with the latest changes in the Albanian higher education, firstly we would say that the paces of the reforms are different. The European higher education system is being represented by hundreds of years of history and tradition in academic education. Developments occurred in this group belong to 20 or 30 years before in time and quality assurance terms. Whereas in the Albanian higher education system the overall concept of the institutional functionality of the university altogether with the academic reformation. Administrative and organizing cells have been modified the juridical and economic context of the university. Independence and self-administration embraced concepts of a university functioning as an economic unit as well at which profits would have been generated, managed and reinvested in academic offer. At this context the Albanian higher education has made secure steps in improving the institutional dimension. All over Europe there has been a big change in the higher education system for a fast implementation of these reforms at low costs.

Despite the particular attention in these details, still derived reforms from Bologna process need a long-term perspective to be well elaborated. In reshaping the education system a large extent would be considerate at the social context. The society is the major collector of benefits from academic system; therefore these reforms should maintain an up-to date contact with society needs and requests. In western academic system students are being treated with special policies orientated towards quality of the academic service as well as being very much orientated by career consulting units for a harmony of coming from university life to the labor market. The European Union needs an avant-garde education system, because universities lead and promote change for the future prosperity. The Bologna Process aimed to provide efficient means of connecting the European national education systems, therefore building a strong relationship of prosperous academic exchange and development for the national education systems. Member countries reached 47 countries which signed the treaty forming the European Higher Education Area. National systems would be permitted to diversify while the process would gain transparency and credibility. As far as recognition of academic degrees is concerned, Bologna process availed to the European institutions the opportunity for exchanges and mobility of students and academic staff.

On the basis of structural reforms, the Albanian higher education as well has been adapted to the three cycle system involving Bachelor degree for undergraduates, and Master, PhD degrees for graduates. Applying the EU and Bologna process directions was considered to be a turning point for the Albanian education system, the first ever integration towards the European family.

Expanding academic capacities at more competitive levels in the European higher education area comes along with the stabilized Bologna process. Reforms are needed every day in Europe to match the performance of the best performing higher education systems in the world. English language presents the success key in solving the common European questions of the future.

European Higher Education Area

The European Higher education area presents both an essential objective and opportunity to be fulfilled by the Albanian universities. The Sorbonne declaration precisely contains the principles for promoting the European higher education values that would affect the Albanian higher education system in the following objectives:

1. Adapting the two cycle system of comparable degrees: undergraduate and graduate and apply the Diploma Supplement
2. Only successful merit results of the first cycle could lead master and doctorate degrees
3. Establishing the ECTS system- integrated credits system as an accurate mean of widespread student mobility
4. Credit obtaining would be present even at non higher education units but would be recognizable from the universities
5. Study and Training access for academic staff, researches and administrative employees.
6. Promoting the European quality values and cooperation
7. Promotion of European higher education qualities consisting development in mobility schemes, training and research and inter-institutional cooperation between universities.

Reaching these European values and implementing them to the Albanian context is still an ongoing process. Major developments and results have been achieved but still reforms are needed to boost the education level at the same quality and stability that the European Union has. The Ministry of Education and Science of Albania has played a crucial role in ensuring these requirements to be met. Its competencies for supporting the tertiary education in Albania involve law implementation approved by the governmental bodies, legal decision issues, professional management and supervision of passing statutes. The Ministry of Education and Science of Albania is one of the direct institutions which supervises, directs and manages the reform implementation of the European Higher education area. To assure this support a new Law on Higher Education No 9741 was passed in March 2007 regulating the universities activities and establishing functions of governing. Principles were elaborated in terms like: European Higher education area values harmonization, fostering scientific research and training methods for the academic staff, ensure

students and staff mobility, assurance of quality and efficiency of studies and prompting student governance in decision making.

Reformacion proces

The previous overview displayed the requirements that the Albanian higher education system is facing to adapt to the European Higher education system. Challenges of adapting may increase if we consider the impact of the economic crisis. After the 2008 economic crisis with a European Union facing the toughest recession since the Great Depression, the vision for implementing these legal requirements is more vivid. This framework has shifted the focus from the institutional legislative implementation of reforms to a student-centered politics based on learning. Additionally, Albanian higher education universities realize that following rapidly the European Higher education area is vital. Priorities include these areas:

- a. Degree structures* Structural reforms are the basic reforms which could lead the overall transformational processes for the Albanian higher education system. But its implementation is connected with the right support and management in order to succeed. Harmonization between cycles is considered to be critical because of the continuous co-existence of old and new education patterns. Institutionally, facing the increasing social demand for higher education is a by-product of these structural reforms.
- b. Employability* The future of Albanian education is strictly correlated with the development of the labor market. Employability remains a high priority of the curricula reforms in both cycles. What is considered fundamental is the developing of the labor market as well to absorb the graduates and modeling the labor demand and supply. Starting from employers and stakeholders, it is on their interest to hire qualified professionals with a very good knowledge of English language. Moreover, at the governmental aspect it would be important to promote new labor market policies and build necessary structures to support the reforms undertaken in higher education universities. This would be profitable for the employers and alumni as well.
- c. Student centered learning* Problems faced by the Albanian higher education involve moving slowly towards a student-centered learning. The use of English language and technological innovations create the perfect layout for decentralizing the learning process. Reforms are reshaping the student's vision as well as their potentials for reaching the best academic opportunities. Integrating and understanding the leading role of English language at every step of the learning process would enable them to raise their academic performance and improve the progression between cycles in a long-term perspective.

- d. **ECTS** The European Credit transfer and Accumulation System support the goal of European integration of education systems. Programs delivered, qualifications of common standards tend to become competitive because the European vision of the ECTS concords with increasing the profitability of businesses by serving them graduate experts that shall provide business solutions. Introduced in 1989 as a beginning colon of Bologna process it was applied especially in Erasmus and Socrates programs of exchange students, academic staff and university partnerships. This system represents a chance for the future of the Albanian students as well in recognition of the study abroad by availing them the opportunity to obtain qualified academic learning through mobility. Albanian institutions yet do not offer facilities like consulting services, guidance due to the lack of provisions for the student services. Involving beneficiaries and students would be a right path to start reforming the economic functionality of universities.
- e. **Quality assurance** The future of the Albanian higher education system has to be oriented to quality assurance. Universities have to follow the European pattern in learning processes and effectively manage the relations with the public authorities and student involvement as well. Quality in academic performance comes along with the economic emancipation of universities as business offering the best service to the potential clients- students. Institutional autonomy ensures internal quality, therefore universities have to move forward the creativity and technological innovations to renew the old uncompetitive format. The Bologna process enhances students and academic staff mobility between countries, or both within degree cycles and between degree cycles. International students' mobility would be an excellent chance for the Albanian students for enriching their academic preparations and lays an important socio-cultural impact of education.\

English Language and Learning

The role of English language is crucial for a successful integration. The term “lifelong learning” derives from the European Union initiatives and is considered to be an emerging priority. Learning processes are focused in two substantial categories: well qualified graduates who are supported by continuing the education and disadvantaged groups supported in providing them part-time education. Deriving from the Bologna process, the use of the English language becomes a successful key in implementing these priorities at a lifelong perspective. The English language need to be implemented in the curriculum developments, institutional analysis and condition creating for these higher education systems stand as a powerful connection between innovation and knowledge.

In my view, the English language importance has been highlighted as an influential factor in reshaping the Albanian higher education system to become more competitive, coherent with the latest European developments therefore more attractive. Conception of new programs adaptable for the students' level of knowledge, expanding the business English programs and developing interactive courses would boost the performance of the degree cycles. Moreover, these reforms taken by the Ministry of Education and Science of Albania come as a very straight collaboration with the coherent indicative guides for education and English language development of the European Union strategies Euro 2020. The Albanian higher education system is responding very well in increasing the universities awareness of developing more and more subjects and curricula in English language. Strategic cooperation between universities is being playing a great role in creating real bridges of cultural exchange and sustainable academic performance.

Additionally, the increasing role of the English language brought new patterns of academic functionality not only from the institutional aspect but also in the curricula program. The other dimension of the English language is that its introduction and implementation in the higher education system of Albania increases the chances for a lifelong learning process. Western cultural values are transmitted to the local culture, business and academic values of conceiving and doing things with a high responsibility and dedication. I judge that role of English language is played is that of opening a new future successful path for these students who aspire to be comparable with their peers in EU countries and that have a chance to follow their career dreams beyond restrictions and borders. This freedom of choice comes from learning and investing in their future education. According to the foreign publications, this challenge represents a successful opportunity to get involved in great interconnectedness projects between universities around the world. Consolidating the English language is one of the biggest priorities that Albanian higher education system would consider, because it would transform the human resources in real future potentials for the EU market.

Technology in Learning

Technological processes have been developed especially at the light of the globalizing world, latest efforts of Euro zone for coming out of the recession. Science and technology are very much related with the European strategies for education development. The European Higher education area considers implementation of the strategies strictly correlated with the technological innovations. Learning through technology defines the success of the university. We are living in a world where information is considered to be power, therefore if this knowledge comes from the professor

gathered from very specific sources literature, and text books but altered with visual and audio presentation and e-learning techniques the success would be bigger.

Scientific research is based on the use of the science innovations because of the adapting with the rapid techniques, best developed patterns and new ways of dealing with the information. Academic performance of the universities is considered to be equivalent to the adapting with the new technological developments. Including technology and English language would generate an obvious profitable success. There are three components which affect in the use of technology in lifelong learning:

1. **Means of communication.** They play a vital role in information delivery and describing the knowledge. Libraries are enriching services like e-library for example. Technological innovations like ipads assure that the students may have access to the information sources no matter of their location. Use of internet and innovative applications or Google scholar provides excellent chances to improve the English language levels and the academic performance as well.
2. **Benefits of information technology in education.** Technology in learning provides excellent ways of managing knowledge through scientific research, economic patterns and global awareness. Moreover, it induce adaptability and managing complexity by reinforcing students way of perceiving issues and developing their analytical and communicative skills at open workshops and seminars developed in classes.
3. **Boosting collaboration and interpersonal skills.** Technology is an outstanding way of managing the learning process, presenting it with the use of innovative tools leads to a high productivity of the students. Technological innovations have reshaped the meaning of learning as well in gaining and elaborating the information and transforming the student into a lifelong learner with a critical approach.

FUTURE CHALLENGES

All of the issues addressed have implications for the development of the Higher Education in Albania, but three key challenges for the future can be highlighted:

- **Strengthening the relationship with European governments, higher education institutions and other stake holders** that is essential to sustain the goals of the Bologna process.
- **Institutions in Albania need to develop their capacity with the aim to respond strategically to the lifelong learning agenda.** This means that institutions shall develop and enhance student-centered and flexible learning, as well as greater mobility. There are to

meet the needs of a society and economy in which knowledge becomes rapidly out-of-date, thus reforms are welcomed in the future.

- **The Albanian Higher institutions are thinking through the implications of the existence of the European Higher Education Area .** Some aspects of Bologna are likely still to require implementation or reconsideration. The European Higher Education Area is also being developed in an increasingly inter-connected global context, and its international reception. Once again government and higher institutions in Albania are responsible to explain reforms, and to support these major cultural processes

Conclusion

The Albanian higher education system has undertaken many reforms at the framework of the European Union strategies for education. The English language is one of the advantages of the Albanian higher education system. While the development of the scientific research in the Albanian Universities is a strong base of ensuring future successes. English language importance has been highlighted as an influential factor in reshaping the Albanian higher education system to become more competitive, coherent with the latest European developments therefore more attractive. Conception of new programs adaptable for the students' level of knowledge, expanding the business English programs and developing interactive courses would boost the performance of the degree cycles. We are living in a world where an all round information is needed mostly, therefore this knowledge comes from the material gathered from every specific sources literature and text books, but from a visual critical attitude we get findings by using audio presentation and e-learning techniques, this is the best way to be successful. Learning through technology defines the success of the university

Keywords: English, Bologna Process, European Higher Education Area, EHEA, Higher Education of Albania

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