THE INTERNATIONALIZATION OF HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH INFORMATICS TECHNOLOGIES

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Abstract: In the present study we analyse an issue which is considered very interesting at international level and not only: the internationalization of higher education and its impact on the globalized environment. Our focus is on the contribution of e-learning to this process. We will approach issues such as: the necessity of creating a modern, interactive, flexible and transparent learning environment, of adapting the teaching methods to the current science and technology progress, of modernizing the higher education institutions imposed by the fast evolution of the society. This adaptation must meet the demands of the educational process beneficiaries and the standards of an advanced educational model and it represents the requirement of the highest international forums.
Key words: internationalization, higher education, e-learning

1. INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the internationalization of higher education represents an intensely debated issue, the new tendencies and the rapid and diverse changes that have appeared at both a global level, but also within the states being the challenges the higher education must face. The issue of higher education internalization was the object of research for many authors under different aspects (e.g. J. Knight, Van der Wende, Qiang Z., etc.) and was also repeatedly approached by us. In this paper we intend to analyze issues such as the way in which e-learning can contribute to the process of higher education internationalization, which is the connection between e-learning and the traditional forms of education and how the internationalization process contributes to the consolidation and standardization of e-learning. We will also present arguments in favor of the necessity of an IT infrastructure within every higher education institution.

2. ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNALIZATION

There is no doubt that all the actors and factors concerned with the future of higher education agree to the opinion according to which we cannot talk about sustainable development, i.e. the development which aims at meeting the present demands without compromising the possibility of future generations to satisfy their own needs (according to the Report of the World Commission of Environment and Development: Our Common Future) and about the knowledge-based society (concept that was imposed during the last decade of the 20th century in the USA due to the papers of sociologist Peter Drucker) without including the higher education in this topic. The necessity of cooperation between nations, as a fundamental rule of international relations between states, has generated numerous forms of academic collaboration, emphasized by the globalization process as well. From this point of view, the states' concerns have been materialized in conventional provisions establishing the right of every person to attend higher education. Thus, on December 16th 1966 the General

Assembly of the UN adopted The UN Convention of the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights, that stipulates in article 13 that "higher education must be made accessible for everyone according to their capacity, by all the possible means and especially by progressively introducing the free education". The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, fundamental document that was adopted on December 10th 1948 by the General Assembly of the UN also proclaimed the equality and accessibility of all higher education based on merit (article 26). The right to education is also laid down in the International Agreement regarding the Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (article 13), but also the Convention on children rights mentions the obligation of the states to ensure everyone's access to higher education by all adequate means (article 28). A series of prestigious institutions have shown a genuine interest and an intense activity in shaping the concept of "internationalization" of higher education: OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), UNESCO, UNESCO-CEPES, the European Council, etc. In the specialized literature it has been stated that the internationalization of higher education would represent "the process of integrating an international/ intercultural dimension into teaching, research and service functions of the institutions", (Knight, 1993, p.21) and what would motivate the integration of an international dimension into higher education would be political, economic, academic and socio- cultural reasons (Knight, 1997, pp. 9-11). The internationalization of higher education is accomplished at different levels: partnerships between higher education institutions regarding students' and teachers' mobility, conferences, symposia and workshops presenting the results of research in differerent fields, international training courses for teachers involved in higher education, creation and management of electronic libraries accessible to everyone due to the computer network etc. The intensification of the internationalization of higher education is imposed by the necessity to adapt the competencies and abilities acquired by graduates to the needs of labor market within different states, the free movement of labor force contributing to the development of programs through which the university curricula and educational resources are standardized so that the free access of graduates to jobs may be ensured and the beneficiaries of the educational process will easily adapt to social, economic and cultural requirements in the host country.

3. HIGHER EDUCATION FROM E-LEARNING TO INTERNATIONALIZATION

3.1 *E*-learning & *e*-education

A modern university system entails the use of a complex educational policy and the training provided through the medium of the computer – ICT (Information and Communication Technology) as a didactic method is able to contribute to the increase of quality of the educational process. In the specialized literature, it has been stated that: *"Students, teachers and instructors are more and more concerned with*

learning how to use the ICT means to the full capacity [...] in order to adapt to the new forms of teaching and the new requirements of the labor market. Thus, an essential role is the ability to interact and collaborate within a teaching environment based on Internet technologies" (Brut, 2006, p.9). The combination between the informational technologies and the teaching - learning process has lead to the rise of a new concept: *e-learning*. This term was introduced in 1998 by Jay Cross, the founder of Internet Time Group. The abbreviation *"e-"* is used as a prefix for terms expressing that the action designed by the resulted word implies using electronic devices. The profile of the contemporary student has changed, both the motivation of the study as well as the conditions, life and learning style, even the age when the university study begins, to which the social and sometimes the professional experience are added. Today the students have the quality of active partners in the interactive didactic-educational process and, together with the introduction of new informatics technologies, the two factors, student- teacher, are equally influenced and have the role of essential parameters (Gaf- Deac). The educational system has to evolve and keep the pace with the technological discoveries and innovations (electronic mail, chat, virtual libraries, the possibility to complete the scientific content of classes with information obtained from accessing links on other web sites on the Internet etc.). Adapting the teaching activity using tools offered by technology, the corresponding integration of these resources in the educational process creates the conditions that would favor the learning autonomy, freedom in education (Hudson & Morris, 2003, pp. 65-74). Besides, for the students, knowing how to use the computer has become axiomatic, as the computer is already a familiar instrument used to communicate, learn, work and the use of Internet is not something unknown anymore, as they have acquired this type of skills since childhood. Quoting a famous expression, it has been said that the 21st century will be high-tech or it will not be at all. Today we can even talk about creating virtual universities "without walls" (for example the Virtual European Music School (http://www.vemus.org). It has been even stated that the future belongs to *"the universities without seats, connected to people (first) and ideas"* (Istrate, 2000, p.22), many teaching higher education institutions having study programs exclusively on the Internet included in their educational offer.

3.2 *E*-university

The need for change in the context of informational technologies evolution has generated in the higher education as well a series of transformations connected to the adaptation of educational programs to the requirements of the educational "scene". The introduction of distance learning programs using the new informatics technologies has a series of advantages that are cost reducing: the study materials are in electronic format (thus the costs of paper will be significantly reduced), that will be sent to students using the electronic mail or will be accessed by them using the university platform (thus the dispatch costs are reduced). Other advantages are represented by the variety of forms of other teaching materials: text, image (static or animated), film etc. that make them more attractive and whose combination leads to the increase of the learning capacity; at the same time, the possibility to have access to countless sources of information, such as bibliography sources, that complete the basic information indicated by the teacher, cannot be neglected. All these materials are actually re-usable. The electronic sources of information can refer to reference papers in some fields, encyclopedias and electronic dictionaries, maps, representing another aspect of the internationalization of education. The flexibility of these training programs is given by the reduced geographic and temporal distances which make them accessible to students who, because of the physical distances or because of their program, cannot attend daily classes necessitating regular attendance. E-learning ensures the transparency of the teaching process, generating the adaptation of the universities to the educational models offered by others, the compilation of proposals existent at a certain moment aiming at creating a superior quality model, actually producing a unification of the concepts, ideas, visions in this field.

3.3 *E*-teacher

It is a false impression that the teacher is "replaced" or "will be replaced" by the computer; the teacher has the important role of valuing the enormous potential of the virtual learning environment, of creating and coordinating a much more subtle informational support and a more productive system of teaching- learning- evaluation and, at the same time, of solving the socio-emotional problems (states of conflict, social inequalities etc.) that a computer is not able to sence. It is a new task of the teacher, a new place and a new role that the teacher assumes. The teacher should not refuse what seems to be new and curious (Mialaret, 1981, p.100). In order to be able to operate in the virtual space, to efficiently value the possibilities and advantages offered by the virtual teaching platforms, the teachers have to assume a series of knowledge and abilities that will allow them to use the computer, they have to know the work instruments offered by the on-line environment, complete the scope of the teaching methods with the use of computers, not only in what concerns teaching but also individual study. E-learning does not exclude the traditional learning methods, but can facilitate and lead to a more efficient learning process and can motivate the student.

4. CONCLUSIONS

To conclude, we can state that e-learning has a more and more important role in the higher education. Implementing and using the modern technologies in education and research, adapting the educational system to the new requirements and challenges imposed by building the society of knowledge will ensure, on one hand, achieving the objectives of the higher education internalization and, on the other hand, the frredom to learn without limits, promoting a system based on education without frontiers.

5. REFERENCES

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