The Impact of Quality Assessment Systems on Teaching, Learning and Curriculum: A Case Study of a Non-Profit Private Higher Education Institution in Greece

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ABSTRACT

This case study describes the dispute on private higher education in Greece which is not seen favorably at all under the Greek legal environment. It also provides with contrast between quality assurance systems in Greek higher education institutions and DEREE – The American College of Greece, a private, non-profit tertiary educational institution located in Athens, Greece. It also aims at exploring quality systems in higher education institutions in the EU and in Greece and investigates why and how these influence the quality system, assessment policy and practices at DEREE. Additionally, it contributes with a valued proposition on the development of a hybrid quality system which will affect teaching, learning and assessment processes and eventually lead to curricular enhancement and probably reforms. The subsequent step deriving from this study is knowledge sharing with policy makers and practitioners for the advancement of the education delivered to students in higher education.

Keywords: Assessment, Case Study, Curriculum, Higher Education, Learning, Non-profit, Quality Assurance, Teaching

INTRODUCTION

Without doubt, the University is no longer a quiet place to teach and do scholarly work at a measured pace and contemplate the universe as in centuries past. It is a big, complex, demanding, competitive business requiring large-scale ongoing investment (Skilbeck, 2001). Furthermore, it constitutes a dynamic ecosystem with numerous cross-functional components interacting with each other and at the same time being directly or indirectly affected by external factors like demographics, cultural diversity, competition, global economy, standards and regulations and last but not least international developments in higher education institutions.

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A thorough focus on the role of agencies and funding councils and the contested approaches to quality assurance will be given. The objective of this study is to shed light to the not universally defined underpinnings of quality assurance systems in higher education. Furthermore, it will demonstrate that the implementation of quality assessment process is the cornerstone for teaching, learning, assessment and curricular enhancement.

**Context of the Study**

University education is evolving and as McLean (2006) points out “individuals and institutions can be transformed for better and worse whether or not we are seeking radical change” (p.15). Drawing on McLean’s point, the academic ‘transformation’ encompasses innovative teaching methods and pedagogies, more technology-infused curricula and improved assessment policy and practices.

In this context and since evolution in educational systems and in universities is inevitable, it is the responsibility of academic leaders towards university stakeholders to develop strategic plans to ensure financial and academic sustainability of their institution. These plans should be comprehensive in their nature incorporating areas like enrolment management, accreditation plans, faculty development, and the academic infrastructure with emphasis on assessment of learning outcomes. As Cullen and Harris (2009) state “assessment is both the single most important gauge of learning that drives the educational process and the most effective means of implementing institutional change” (p.116). Drawing on Ruben’s (2007) view on higher education assessment, it would have been hard to pick a person from the academia who would disagree with the assertion that assessment it is essential to determine, document, and ensure the quality of the work within colleges and universities. He also comments on assessment that “indeed, this is a core value within the academy. Issues related to the review of the contributions of students, faculty, staff, programs, and institutions have always been a central concern within colleges and universities (pp. 62-63). Commonly, in the UK context assessment would mean the examination of student work towards completing a course/module. However, with assessment educators refer to the systematic review and assessment of academic programs and courses/modules. And this is exactly what academic leaders need to highly in their agendas if they want to see the institutions they lead to evolve strategically. A similar voice is coming from Kouzes and Posner (2002) who point out that “leaders can influence outcomes by providing tools for measuring progress” (p.82). Britain for example has a standards-based quality assurance regime, which primarily consists of government agencies, like the QAA, and regulates the educational system. Morley (2003) defines quality assurance as “a socially constructed domain of power. As a discourse, it wields the power to form and regulate through the imposition of its own terms” (p.164). She also states that educators and administrators in the academia have to ‘incorporate and internalise’ quality assurance for their professional and organisational survival (p.165). According to Morley’s (2003) view, “quality assessment imposes a fiction of coherence and unity on an otherwise fragmented set of academic functions and services” (p.41).

**Unique Nature of the Study**

It is a challenge to perform case study research at DEREE because of the institution’s uniqueness from many perspectives. First, it is the oldest and largest, comprehensive, independent, American-sponsored school in Europe. Second, it is among the two oversees American accredited private non-profit higher education institutions, operating in an EU member country, namely Greece, where the constitution paradoxically does not allow the operation and establishment of private colleges/universities and additionally it does not recognize the academic degrees and the professional rights of the college graduates. Due to this unfortunate fact, DEREE has been pursuing
Extending Sociotechnical Design to Project Conception: Knowledge Communication Processes for Situating Technology
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A Deeply Embedded Sociotechnical Strategy for Designing ICT for Development
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