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**Diploma Supplement - Instrument of the Quality Assurance Process in the
Romanian Higher Education?**

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Abstract: The quality of education, graduate's performances and the level of abilities and skills acquired during their studies are reflected in the Diploma Supplement, crucial tool in ensuring quality in higher education and in university's activity centering on the student. The Diploma Supplement is a response to challenges, aiding mobility and access to lifelong learning opportunities. It promotes transparency in higher education and fair and informed judgements about qualifications. National higher education institutions produce the supplement according to a template jointly developed by the European Commission, the Council of Europe and UNESCO. The purposes of this paper are to analyze the importance of universities' classification realized for the first time in Romania and the impact that it has on student, because I consider that the student is very important for developing universities' structure and activities.

Keywords: education; quality assurance; classification of universities; diploma supplement

1. Introduction

The need for institutionalizing quality in higher education in Romania was generated by the period of expansion of the university educational offers, the number of higher education organizations multiplying from 46 in 1989 to 63 in 1993 and then to 126 in 2000. In year 2011, the number of universities accredited in the national education system is of 90 state and private universities.

Quality assurance and quality management in education represent an intervention field which requires both the development and the implementation of internal assessment, management and activity quality assurance systems and procedures, and the professionalization of the managerial activities at the level of the higher education institutions. Still, we must not forget the fact that the entire activity of a university should be focused on the students.

In Romania, quality assurance is a process regulated by law. Law no. 87/2006 for the approval of Government Expedite Ordinance no. 75/2005 *institutes* quality assurance as compulsory process for all suppliers of education, process which consists of an ensemble of actions, performed at the level of the organization providing the educational services or at the level of a study program, meant to increase the trust of the beneficiaries that the services offered fulfill certain standards stipulated by law.

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2. The Relationship between the Classification of Universities and the Quality Assessment of the Educational Process

The quality of education in the Romanian higher education targets finalities anchored in European context, opening the way to the opportunities offered by the European knowledge society.

The hierarchization of the study programs and the classification of the universities represent a very good instrument for the dimensioning of the higher education institutions. According to the provisions of art.193, para. 4 of Law no. 1/2011, the universities in Romania are classified into 3 categories:

- a) universities focused on education;
- b) universities of education and scientific research or universities of education and artistic creation;
- c) universities of advanced research and education.

The hierarchization of the Romanian universities, performed by the Association of the European Universities in year 2011 on the basis of the self-evaluations of the rectors' offices help in the differentiated financing of the educational units, according to performance criteria, and to the setting of the schooling number.

Thus, only 12 universities are focused on education, 30 universities of education and scientific research or universities of education and artistic creation and 48 universities of advanced research and education.

As can be seen, more than half of the universities were unable to classify within the first two categories, being, in fact, in the target area of the merger indicated by the law of national education.

In fact, the universities focused on research received during the university year 2011-2012 a number of places in the master and doctorate programs higher by 20%, the universities of education and research have a schooling figure equal to that of last year, in what concerns the master program and diminished, in what concerns the doctorate, while the universities of education have assigned a diminished number of places for the master program, at the same time having a doctorate schooling number reduced to the minimum. More exactly, only 1.6% of the doctorate places financed this year by the state are assigned to universities from the third group.

In what concerns the hierarchization of the study programs, only a fifth of the programs offered on the educational market are part of category A, in category B there are 22.1% of the total of 1075 programs, while category C comprises approximately one quarter of the study programs. The lowest number of programs is found in group D – 12%, while group E comprises 20% of the programs.

In this period of economic crisis and of continuous transformation of the legislative framework regulating higher education, there is a serious external constraint, namely the chronic under-financing of the universities, which makes them rather careful regarding their own survival, dependant, first of all, on the students' entry flows, and less on the academic "quality" of students throughout their studies.

From the analysis of the indicators which are at the basis of the classification of the universities and of the hierarchization of the study programs, it is derived the fact that universities are self-focused, being concerned with their own financial survival, students being important to the highest extent from the quantitative viewpoint, as bearers of financial resources (whether they pay tuition or they benefit of state scholarships).

In the evaluation of the universities and in granting grades, such as accreditation and/or recognition as university with high degree of trust, the focus is placed on research, and not on the didactic process or on the students' performances. This is one of the reasons why universities are thus constrained to give higher importance to the research indicators, to the detriment of the students' current needs and concerns.

The promoters of the conception of the educational quality based on research performance claim that a solid performance in research is a necessary condition for good teaching. Still, the considerable volume of research performed on the relationship between the research performance of the teaching staff and the efficiency of teaching failed to indicate a positive correlation between these two spheres of the academic activity (Skolnik, 2010).

81% of the teaching staff interviewed considers that the main purpose of the university is teaching.

The external quality assessment methodology used by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)¹, comprises a number of 42 indicators, out of which 12 measure the *inputs* into the system (human, financial, material resources etc.), 20 measure the process of using the resources, and only 5 measure the actual results of the activity of a university.

3. The Role and Importance of the Diploma Supplement on the Labour Force Market

The representations on the quality of the higher education derive from the overall perception on its ability to prepare the graduates for the labour market. The students, the teaching staff and the employers appreciate not only the diploma obtained upon the graduation of the faculty, but also the competences the students gained during their university studies. Thus, the regulation and use of the Diploma Supplement is what supplies information on the competences gained by the graduate and the level of his/her knowledge.

Starting with the graduates of the university year 2005-2006, all higher education institutions accredited or authorized to function temporarily issue, free of charge, together with the diploma of bachelor degree, the Diploma Supplement².

Also, according to the Order of the Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sports no. 4151/2010, is instituted the supplement to the master diploma. The supplement accompanies, compulsory, the master diploma and is issued free of charge by the accredited higher education institutions where the finalization exam of the master university studies took place.

The existence of a Diploma Supplement does not guarantee the status of an institution, its awards, or whether it is recognized as part of a national higher education system. However, it should contain information on these aspects.

The 48 European countries taking part in the Bologna Process have agreed that each graduate in their respective country should receive the Diploma Supplement automatically.

The Diploma Supplement is intended to facilitate the implementation of the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications Concerning Higher Education in the European Region, Lisbon 1997.

The Diploma Supplement model was developed by the European Commission, Council of Europe and UNESCO/CEPES and was adopted in 1999.

The Diploma Supplement is based on the following important founding principles that respect national and international academic autonomy:

1. Flexibility and adaptability to local needs;
2. National and international applicability;
3. Objectivity of information provided;
4. Recognition for academic and professional purposes.

¹ ARACIS is member with full rights in the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and is registered in the European Register for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (EQAR)

² Order of the Minister of Education, Research, Youth and Sports no. 5289/2008

The bachelor degree diploma supplement is issued only after the passing of the study finalization exam and is a document attached to the bachelor degree diploma, which offers a standardized description of the type and level of the qualification, of the content, the institutional framework and of the study program graduated, as well as of the results obtained throughout the studies.

The Diploma Supplement must, thus, be drafted as to ensure the highest possible transparency for the knowledge and competences gained by the graduate of a university study cycle and to increase the chances of the graduates to insert of the national and international labour market. The Diploma Supplement comes both to the aid of the employer, and of the graduate.

The advantages offered by the Diploma Supplement for students are the following:

- Facilitates the comparison of the academic results and of the competences developed;
- Offers a description of the academic career and of the competences gained during the studies;
- Offers an objective description of the achievements and competences gained;
- Facilitates access to work or study opportunities abroad.

For higher education institutions, the benefits are:

- It facilitates academic and professional recognition, thus increasing the transparency of qualifications;
- It protects national/institutional autonomy while offering a common frame which is accepted all over Europe;
- It promotes informed judgements about qualifications that can be understood in another educational context;
- It raises the visibility of the institution abroad;
- It promotes the employability of their graduates at national and international level;
- It helps to save time since it provides the answers to a lot of recurrent questions put to administrative services in institutions about the content and portability of diplomas.

The supplement is designed as an aid to help recognition – it is not a CV or a substitute for the original qualification, and it does not guarantee recognition.

The Diploma Supplement is drafted bilingual (in the Romanian language and in a language of wide circulation), in order to ensure the transparence of the university training system in Romania and to facilitate the comparison of the titles, diplomas and certificates which can be obtained in the Romanian higher education.

Diploma Supplement comprises eight sections, all compulsory, the content being not allowed to be modified, and which must be filled out correctly, with the observance of the language indications especially mentioned in certain columns:

1. Information identifying the holder of the qualification.
2. Information regarding the defining of the qualification. This column comprises the name of the academic qualification obtained and, where the case, the title awarded, the study field and, respectively, the specialization / specializations graduated.
3. Information regarding the level of the academic qualification. This section presents those information which allow the correct classification of the qualification for bachelor degree or master degree, the official duration of the program (3 years or, as the case may be, 4 years for the bachelor degree; 5 or 6 years for the integrated bachelor and master degrees; 1 - 2 years for master programs etc.), as well as the criterion/criteria for being admitted to the study cycle.
4. Information regarding the study program and the results obtained. This section refers to the teaching form graduated, as well as to the requirements of the program, respectively the conditions for passing

the subjects, the minimum number of transferable credits necessary for graduation, conditions for enrollment to the final exam and any other details contributing to the better understanding of the diploma issued.

5. Information regarding the rights conferred by the qualification – indicate the value of the title obtained from the viewpoint of access to the continuation of the studies, and, where the case, the professional status of the graduate.

6. Additional information. This column comprises that information necessary when the holder performed part of his/her studies in another higher education institutions, in the country or abroad.

7. Certification of the Diploma Supplement.

8. Information regarding the national educational system – comprises a standardized description of the university studies, as well as a diagram, in order to facilitate the rapid understanding of the system structure, executed by the national information center ENIC-NARIC and agreed by the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sports and by the National Conference of Rectors in Romania.

From the comparative study of the Diploma Supplement within the same specialization belonging to different universities one can achieve a very objective and realistic correlation between the abilities, competences and number of credits awarded for each study subject.

4. Conclusions

By means of performing the classification of the universities and the hierarchization of the study programs, the students and candidates for faculty know how high-performance is the study program they are attending.

The periodical assessment of the study programs has a s purpose both the awarding of grades, and, what should be more important, the adjustment and self-adjustment of the mechanisms, processes and instruments used at the level of the universities for the supply of quality services.

Also, both the candidate for a certain faculty and the employers can know, from studying the content of the Diploma Supplement, the type of skills and competences gained, which leads to a better integration on the labour force market.

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