

Epoka University  
Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement (AEQI) Board

“Teaching training for academic staff”  
6 March 2017, Epoka University

Training Report  
Tirana, 12 April 2017

*Overview*

The Academic Evaluation and Quality Improvement (AEQI) Board on 6 March 2017 organized a training titled “Teaching training for academic staff”. It was attended by all full-time academic staff members as well as by full-time administrative staff members and part-time academic staff members. All participants received certificated for their attendance.

*Rationale*

The teaching is one or probably the main output of daily jobs of the academics in a University. But teaching phenomenon has been challenged by changes in the: society and the world, technologies, research and other factors. Although academics have all been trained in their education for teaching, often they need to get back and understand better the fundamentals of teaching and new ways of delivering it. The fundamental and main question considered in the training was whether the teaching process that delivered at the University is helping the students to get the knowledge, skills and qualifications required for their levels of education. Lecturers or professors in today’s circumstances have no ability to claim that they are the only sources of learning. Students do not only learn from professors; they also learn from other sources. How the new ways of learning have challenged the teaching environment? Did the professors survive the challenge of technology? Is the research part of teaching? How the new ways of teaching or lecturing can be turned into process of saving and enhancing the teaching process? To consider these and other related issues, the training was organized.

*Methods used during the training*

The main format of the training was the academics to learn from each other. The speakers or trainers were all full-time academic staff members of Epoka University. The training included in the beginning an opening panel, and continued with four separate panel sessions. The training included presentations, remarks, discussions, and questions and answers. Each session had its speakers, chair and discussant/rapporteur.

*Topics covered*

The training covered many important topics that relate to teaching. It started with the issues of “Philosophies of teaching” and here there were separate presentations on “coherency in students’ abilities and learning outcomes”, “Hierarchy of concepts”, “Promoting critical thinking skills in higher education”, “Systems thinking in Education - from subject-based teaching to phenomenon-based learning”.

Following the introduction session, there were four separate technical issues tackled in teaching process, including “Methods for teaching and new/best practices”, “Preparation of learning

outcomes/Syllabi and measuring them/assessments”, “Best practices in integrating ICT in the lecturing”, and “Best practices in integrating research into teaching activities”.

*Results according to the sessions of the training*

#### Opening Panel

Betim Cico presented the philosophies of teaching and learning in coherence with students and learning outcomes, enhancing the following key points:

- Studying the class (size, level, etc.);
- Being prepared to address all levels of students (low, medium and average level);
- Continuously encourage students to do more;
- Asking questions from previous lecture, to get the students' feedback;
- Encourage students to work individually and to think in a creative way;
- Updating the course outcomes.

Arban Uka presented the hierarchy of concepts used to organize a study program and to find the best approach to prepare our students. He enhanced the importance of being able to formulate short questions, such as: ‘What does your program teach?’, as well as provide short answers with main keywords. Different hierarchy of concepts used in various field were presented, highlighting the difference between the ‘Classical approach’ (based on history, past experiences and statistics) and the new approaches so called ‘Hollywood approach’.

Arjan Shahini promoted the critical thinking skills in higher education. First, he defined the critical thinking as composed of action and belief, identifying as well its main components (creativity, criticism, judgment, skills, etc.). The importance of thinking about thinking was highlighted. Several studies were reviewed (study in US, and PISA study) summarizing their results: Low scores obtained in assessing critical thinking skills; More than 45% agreed that critical thinking skills were more important than a major degree, etc. Last, the BAFAL syllabuses were examined for critical thinking in the learning outcomes.

Xhimi Hysa addressed the topic of systems thinking in education: from subject-based teaching to phenomenon-based learning, presenting various ways of thinking and perceptions, such as: Ludwig von Bertalanffy, Noam Chomsky, Edgar Morin. In his presentation he also addressed topics such as: 2<sup>nd</sup> order cybernetics; Intelligence vs commitments; Using double bind and paradoxes in classroom; Establishing a research approach; The Finland’s case- the phenomenon based learning.

Questions and discussions: Applying critical thinking in engineering disciplines and social sciences; Top-down approach or bottom-up approach.

#### Panel - Preparation of learning outcomes/Syllabi and measuring them/assessments

First word was to the Chair of the Panel, Arban Uka, who gave the welcome words and emphasized the importance of the “Preparation of Learning Outcomes and Syllabus” regarding each Lecturer and the positive affect its accurate following has to the success of the class. Professors’ talk shared also his last experience in the training visits in Salzburg, on which the best practices were shared regarding the evaluation of the students toward the professors and the outcomes of each subject.

Idaver Sherifi presentation was based on its own experience and he pointed out the basic problem realized, which was the contradiction between the preparation of the learning outcomes on a subject from the lecturers and their real self expectations. He promoted the preparation of the Syllabus starting from the learning outcomes. Each professor should know what to expect from the subject and the students which will attend. His remarks: Who is checking this process?!; Is the evaluation manner proper?! .

Abdulmenaf Sejdini addressed the topic to the self regulation of the subjects and their syllabuses from the respective lecturers. Based on his valuable experience he pointed out that there cannot be a strict way of preparation of learning outcomes, syllabuses and evaluation manner without the study of the class and its students. Everything should be depended to the student needs. His remarks: Check the manner of the syllabi preparation and assessment; Teaching method should be linear to the learning outcomes; Flexibility to get the maximum of the expectations.

Endri Stoja as well based his presentation on his teaching experience and pointed out the approach to the students and their study needs. Stoja emphasized that it's very important for a lecturer to stick clear and correct on the grading system and policy of the university. Further he remarked that every lecturer should correct their behavior by pointing out what is expected in the subject and from the student's results.

Discussion: Exams should be related to the learning outcomes of the subject; Student Questioners should be more scientific; The interactivity and communications with the students on the lectures should get a balance.

#### Panel - Best practices in integrating ICT in the lecturing

At the beginning of the panel, chair Niuton Mulleti made a brief introduction of the speakers and raised some issues related with challenges in adapting to the rapid changes and innovations in the field of Information and Communication Technologies.

The focus of the Nihat Cengiz's discussion was on using new technological devices such as portable screen touch computer and tablet in different ways for lecturing and course management issues. He made a real demonstration by connecting a surface device to the projector and showing how we can use it in lecturing for freehand writing, drawing, presentations etc. Cengiz emphasized the benefits of using these new devices with multi-purpose function in lecturing. They are cost-effective, can increase the efficiency of teaching and learning, and can be used very easily in the management of different course materials.

Armando Demaj pointed out three main issues in integrating ICT in lecturing. Firstly, he highlighted the fact that beside infrastructure, the use of ICT in an efficient way is very crucial. Otherwise the infrastructure - no matter how developed it is - would be useless. The second issue raised by Demaj was the need for training the staff on how they can use technology. Trainings would improve our ICT knowledge and contribute in the increase of efficiency in using technology. Finally, the integration of the technology in the courses that are not directly related to it was considered as an important issue too.

Enea Mustafaraj explained his experience in using ICT in courses of different typologies and also he talked about the benefits and challenges he has faced. A very significant topic elaborated in by Mustafaraj was the issue of encouraging students to understand the logic behind software functions and not just to use it as a tool.

Mirjana Sej dini firstly emphasized the fact that the awareness in using technology is continuously increasing. Still, we are not using efficiently due to different reasons. Beside this, the lack of massive use of ICT in lecturing and learning decreases its efficiency. Although we are using ICT as a supporting tool in different ways, still we do not have a sufficient integration of technology in lecturing.

Ali Osman Topal talked mainly about the infrastructure - both physical and software- provided to the staff and the students of the university. An important discussion focused on the new Education Information System (EIS) which is recently developed by IT office and is continuously improved based on feedbacks of the staff and the students. Also, the discussion was enriched with different questions or suggestions from the staff related to the usage of some technologies in lecturing and course management.

#### Panel - Best practices in integrating research into teaching activities

Dituri je Ismaili talked about the principles widely accepted in the academic world as regards the integrating research into teaching activities. She also highlighted on the need to appropriately balance research and teaching workload of academic staff. She underlined that the research should not be a separate process from teaching. She also suggested that the University should establish a practice of networks of professionals able to interact and disseminate research.

According to Miriam Ndini, good research is necessary for good teaching. This is a two-way link: research improves quality of university teaching while students' understanding and work can contribute to lecturer's research. However, the transfer should be appropriately designed depending on whether a study program teaching-biased or research-based. Departments should focus towards developing a research profile by doing research through teaching. The knowledge should flow from teaching to research and vice-versa. Integrating research into teaching enables students to experience and enjoy one of the primary attractions of being a scientist.

#### Evaluation of the training

At the end of the training, the evaluation forms were handed over to the participants in order to evaluate the training. The participants evaluated very positively overall content of the training and its organization. They suggest for repetition of similar trainings in future. They were critical on the time allocated for the speakers and trainers. Their suggestions included the following: to have parallel working sessions where issues are discussed in more detail; to tackle issues separately under different faculties or departments; to have trainers from outside; to have trainings with longer duration and other suggestions as regards the organization and delivery methods of training.