

EXPLORATORY STUDY ON ROMANIAN EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN THE CONTEXT OF UE POSTINTEGRATION. THE NEEDS FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE STAFF OF THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICS AND BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION

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ABSTRACT: *The interest that triggered this paper came from the will to identify the most stringent needs for professional development that human resources (didactic staff) working in educational services in universities have to face, following the legal, institutional, and functional changes that took place in the recent years in the Romanian system of higher education.*

KEY WORDS: *educational services; needs for professional development; professional development*

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities give special attention to the training programs for their staff, in order to ensure both a high standard for the level of their educational services and that the new staff will adopt the values of the organization.

In the present stage of development of Romanian society, several changes and challenges have emerged in what concerns educational services, and staff management started to focus more and more on developing its resources - the didactic staff. "The consequences are clear: the training programs will not be aimed only at pedagogical, didactic or technical development.

Besides improving their didactic performance, teachers will have to become better colleagues, good team members and, if possible, even "happy workers", meaning employees that work for pleasure and professional satisfaction. The report sent to UNESCO by the International Education Commission in the 21st century stated in this respect that the piers of education in this new millennium will be "learning to know, learning to be, learning to act, and learning to live with the others".

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2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Scope and objectives of the study

In this exploratory study as a case study/ monograph, the analysis will focus on the university educational services provided by the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration (FEEA) of “Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași.

An important aspect that directly concerns and affects the didactic staff of FEEA is represented by the implementation of the Bologna system. This moment has already had and will still have a high impact on the activity of the didactic staff of FEEA. Like any implemented change, it brought several modifications in the activity plan and in the attributions of each teacher. One of the most important changes was aimed at re-organizing the chairs as functional units/ the two departments and reformulating the curricula by eliminating some disciplines that no longer create skills and habits useful for the labor market.

In order to meet its declared purpose, this research is directed at the following *specific objectives*:

- To identify the needs for professional development of the investigated population;
- To classify the needs according to the typologies presented in literature;
- To create and apply a questionnaire whose items allow the classification of the investigated population according to general criteria (e.g. age, gender) as well as to specific criteria (e.g. academic title of the subject, connected responsibilities fulfilled, didactic experience, department in which the subject activates etc.), and also to support the mentioned objectives.

The study has an exploratory nature and is aimed at analyzing the needs for professional development of the didactic staff of FEEA; the methodology used is *quantitative analysis*, with research techniques such as systematization, simple grouping (using a single characteristic), tabling, and graphic representation.

2.2. Presentation of the studied population

The subjects of this exploratory study have been selected randomly from the didactic staff of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of Iași. In order to obtain a representative sample, “*stratified sampling*” has been used; the research instrument (in this study – the questionnaire) has been applied to: 10 junior assistants, 10 university assistants, 10 readers, 10 lecturers and 10 professors; in total - 50 members of the didactic staff. The final sample was made up of 34 members of the didactic staff of FEEA, because of the difficulties encountered during the application of the questionnaires.

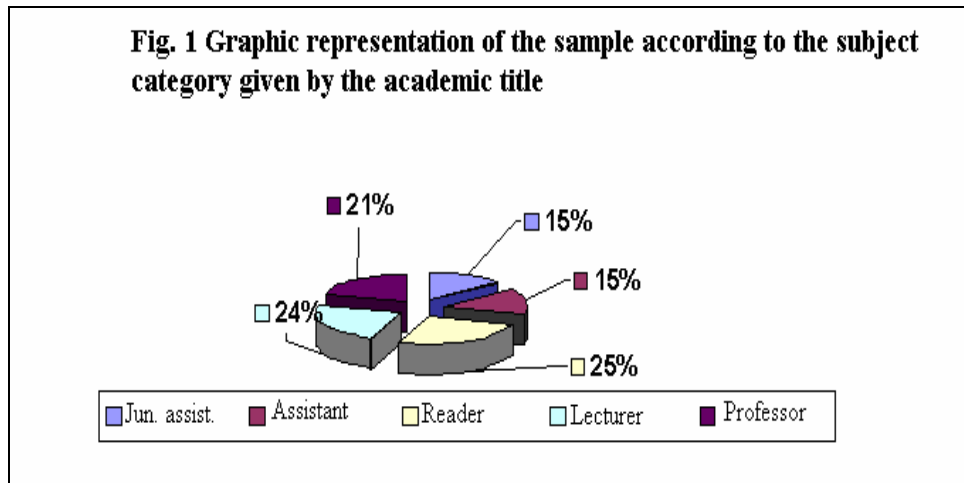


Figure 1. Graphic representation of the sample according to the subject category given by the academic title

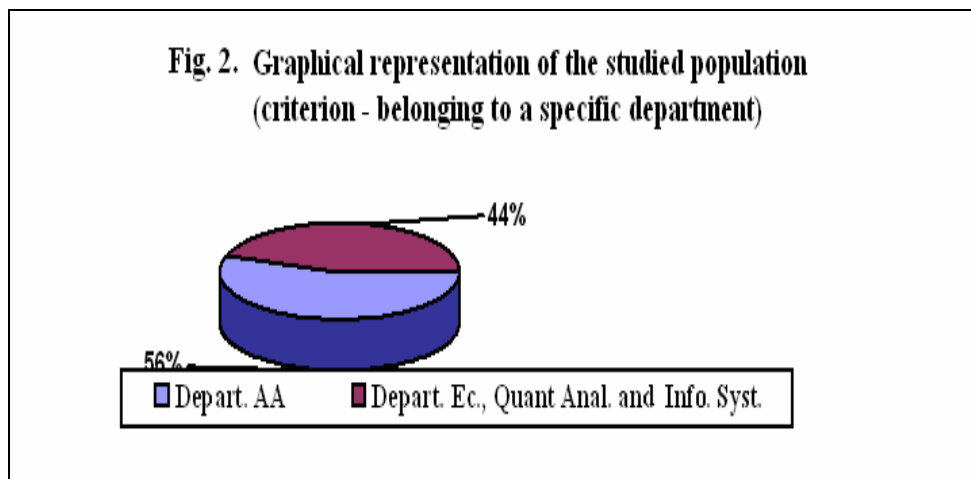


Figure 2. Graphical representation of the studied population (criterion - belonging to a specific department)

For this research, the sample used has been random, stratified and simple, and the selected collectivity was structured in homogenous sub-groups according to a single characteristic – *the academic title of the subjects*. The technique used for collecting the data for this research was the questionnaire, applied through direct contact with the subjects classified in the investigated reality.

2.3. The methodology for data collection

The current research is difficult to include in a single economic or business administration discipline, as it is an *interdisciplinary research*, between the

management of human resources (the monograph is based on the human resources of FEEA) and service management (the monograph is centred on higher educational services). *The analytic research* of the professional development of the didactic staff of FEEA is an applied management research, using a combined inductive – deductive approach.

The research strategy used by the exploratory study is *the casual quantitative analysis* (the monograph is based on a sample of members of the didactic staff of FEEA) in order to collect the data. *The stages* of this scientific approach are the following:

- Collecting the data by applying the research instrument – a questionnaire made up of 24 questions, applied to the 34 subjects in the final sample;
- Processing the data resulted from the quantitative analysis through systematization, tabling, graphical representations of the data obtained, etc.;
- The preliminary/final analysis (correlating the data obtained with the objectives set prior to the research) and generalizing the resulting data.

This analytical research method for data collection has been chosen because it allows a better measurement, quantification and systematization of the data obtained, and because of the population analyzed in this study, the time economy in implementing the research instrument has been an advantage.

The research instrument used in this explanatory analytical study has been complex, combining the *real data questionnaire* (the first part) and the *opinion questionnaire*, which had the role to investigate the subjects' opinion on the given topic - the needs for professional development, as well as the attitudes towards the Romanian educational system as a whole, the subjects' motivation and interest in taking part in professional development programs (in order to meet the needs for professional development), etc.

The research instrument applied – the questionnaire – can be included in the general category of the *opinion questionnaire, self-administered* (by the investigated subject) and includes both semi-open and semi-closed questions.

Questionnaires have been applied and filled in individually by the didactic staff of the university. The subjects have been told about the scientific and anonymous nature of the research; participation in the study has had a voluntary basis. After the subjects agreed to participate, they have been informed about the need to fill in the blanks in the questionnaire in a personal manner. Questionnaires have been applied between June 2-9, 2008, in two ways: the questionnaire was filled in either instantly, or left with the subject and taken back the following day.

The body of the questionnaire regarding the analysis of the needs for professional training of the didactic staff involved in educational services included, for complexity purposes, the following question categories: introductory questions; intermediary questions; filter questions; open questions; factual (identification) questions: items referring to general criteria such as gender and age; ordering scales (quantitative; qualitative; on intervals: the item referring to the age criterion).

When drawing the questionnaire, which included 24 items, the objectives set prior to the research have been taken into account, which can be expanded directionally as follows:

*I. The built profile of the investigated population:**- Tracing the profile of the investigated population:*

- According to *general criteria* such as gender and age;
- According to *specific criteria* such as: academic title of the subject, responsibilities connected to the didactic activity, didactic experience (measured in number of years of didactic activity), the department in which the subject activates, and the importance of the job for each subject;

*II. The needs for professional development of the didactic staff:**- Tracing the needs for professional development inclusion in the typology:*

- Needs for professional development at an organizational level;
- Needs for professional development required by the job: multiple choice;
- Needs for professional development at an individual level: multiple choice.

2.4. Presentation of the results

In order to identify and present the requirements/ needs that determine the application of methods of professional development, items 6 and 7 (Item 6: Which of the following competences are the most useful to you in your teaching activity?; Item 7: In what field have been included the development programs in which you participated?) of the corpus of the research instrument have been used. In completing this stage of the exploratory study, the typology mentioned in the specialized literature will be used (Bogáthy, 2004: 117 – 119), as follows:

- *Needs for professional development at an organizational level:* general competences such as professional ethics and the ability to work in an interdisciplinary team;
- *Needs for professional development required by the job:* basic knowledge in the taught field, pedagogical/ didactic methodology and the ability to evaluate students;
- *Needs for professional development at an individual level:* the ability to apply the theoretical knowledge and to adapt it to various contexts.

The fast rhythm of the changes – due to the implementation, in 2005, of the Bologna system, and to the attempt of the educational offer to align to the standards of the European Union or to the transformations that take place on the present labour market, to the appearance of new teaching methods, procedures and techniques, imposes more and more the concept of professional training.

Another way of looking at the needs for professional training of the teaching staff of FEEA refers to the object of the report: individual, organizational, or related to the job/ function.

From the graphical representation above it results that the subjects questioned (the didactic staff of FEEA) feel, while performing their job, the need to develop at an individual level in a proportion of 39%, 37% of the subjects face needs related to their job and only 24% face organizational needs.

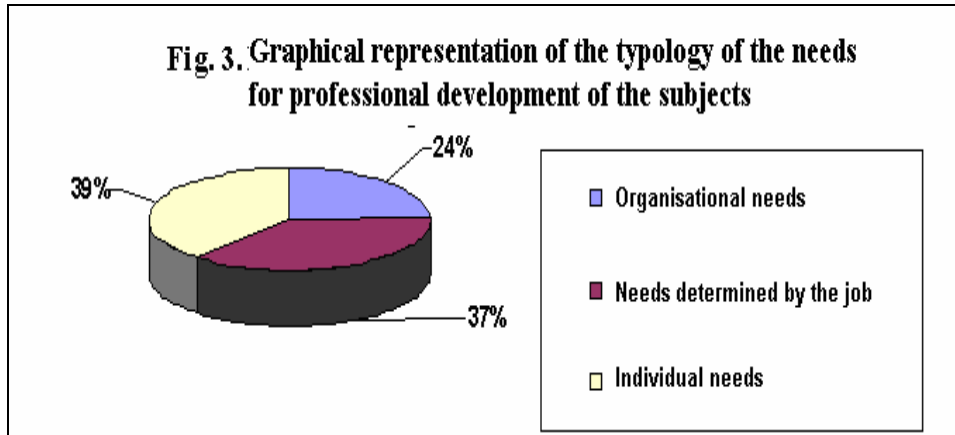


Figure 3. Graphical representation of the typology of the needs for professional development of the subjects

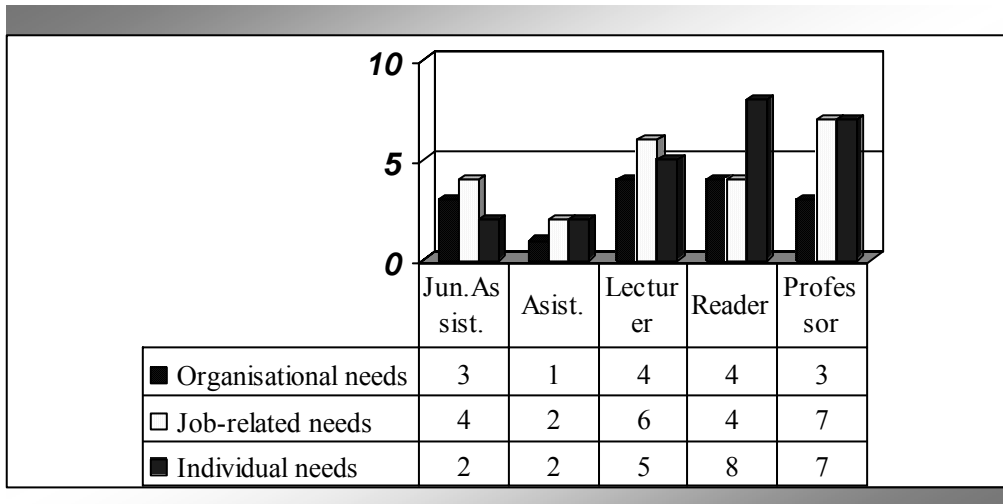


Figure 4. Graphical representation of the needs for professional training of the subjects, according to their academic title

The percentages reported by the didactic staff according to the criterion of the academic title reveals mostly the same situation:

- *Organizational needs* have the lowest frequency of occurrence with the respondents, irrespective of their academic title, but more predominant with university assistants;
- *Job-related needs* have the highest frequency in the total of 39% in the case of university professors;
- *Individual needs* have the highest frequency in the total of 37% in the case of lecturers.

3. CONCLUSIONS AND LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

“Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University of Iași, as a promoter of socio-cultural values, has been subject to a series of transformations (the Bologna system, the reform system inspired by the educational policy of the governments in the last 19 years, etc.), and FEEA has followed closely the steps towards ensuring and improving the quality of the entire educational process.

In this context of institutional/ functional transformations, the necessities/ needs for professional training of the didactic staff of FEBA come from three directions:

- *Needs for professional development at an organizational level* (general competences such as professional ethics and the ability to work in an interdisciplinary team): felt by 24% of the subjects questioned during the research, especially by the *readers and lecturers*;
- *Needs for professional development required by the job* (basic knowledge in the taught field, pedagogical/ didactic methodology and the ability to evaluate students): felt by 37% of the subjects questioned during the research, especially by the *university professors*;
- *Needs for professional development at an individual level* (the ability to apply the theoretical knowledge and to adapt it to various contexts): felt by 39% of the subjects questioned during the research, especially by the *lecturers*.

This study also faced a series of *limitations* that we will present in what follows. First of all, *limited access to the subjects* (especially to assistants and junior assistants) because of their busy schedule, of the large amount of work per subject (because the academic year 2007 – 2008 has combined the graduation of two generations of students), and of the refuse to collaborate, which has lead to applying the content analysis on a smaller number of teachers than the one initially established (the sample initially established was made up of 50 staff members, while the final one included only 39 members).

The limitations of the research were also determined by the *methodology* used, as follows:

- The exclusive use of quantitative analysis methods (a more efficient presentation of this exploratory study would have meant using more qualitative methods – e.g. applying an interview guide on the analyzed population);
- The research instrument used – the questionnaire (limited in length), used because of the limited access in time to the subjects.

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