

### 3 TIPS OF FACTORS ENHANCING THE QUALITY OF ADULT LEARNING IN HIGER EDUCATION

(ROMANIAN CASE STUDY)

*The West University of Timisoara* was established in September 1962, it is a state-owned University and now it has 11 Faculties. Our University is a classic type of higher education establishment providing education and training both in science and humanities.

The West University of Timisoara aims to promote learning, research and training through partnerships between staff, students and local community. It works to improve the quality of services, to respond to the diversity of individual needs and to equip students with the needed skills for lifelong learning and for an effective contribution to the development of the society in the process of continuing education.

The University offers short undergraduate, undergraduate, postgraduate and doctoral studies. All faculties offer compulsory training in at least one major foreign language and computer skills courses in order that all the students gain access to foreign literature, information and new technologies.

Our University has 11 Faculties and several departments and centres among which relevant for our study are the Teacher Training Department, the Centre for Continuous Education and Open Distance Learning and the Department of Educational Sciences.

*The Teacher Training Department* is a didactic and scientific research structure specialized in providing teachers with basic and continuous formation and training for secondary and high school; it offers courses, seminars and practical activities.

It is obvious that the teacher's professional training cannot be reduced at the initial formation. A teacher has to learn all along his professional career, to enlarge his experience and knowledge with new trends and orientations (from his field of specialty but, also, from pedagogy and psychology).

Our mission is to offer professional training for teachers – initial formation, continuous training and specialisation courses – for teachers from secondary and high school.

The main activities of our Department are: to coordinate all the activities involved in teacher training, to develop and organise the psycho-pedagogical, socio-pedagogical, didactical, methodological and managerial specialisation and continuous training of teachers, to realise the initial training of future teachers, to elaborate scientific researches, both fundamental and practical

in the field of psychology, pedagogy, sociology, educational management and to promote the results, conclusions and recommendations of these researches through publications, research contracts, projects, guides and other materials.

The students represent the target group of the Teacher Training Department, but the beneficiaries of our programs are, in the same measure, the graduates of higher education who want to become teachers and the teachers from secondary and high school, who must attend at each five years improvement and specialization trainings. This is in the benefit of pupils, of teachers, of parents and, by extension, of the whole society.

***The Centre for Continuous Education and Open Distance Learning*** is a postgraduate specialisation department school and training addressed to human resources in organisations from various fields. The study programs are opened, offering client and quality specialisation fields, using also E-learning.

Both the Centre for Continuous Education and Open Distance Learning and the Teacher Training Department intend to develop and to extend and, also, to establish a collaboration for open distance learning, in which the Teacher Training Department will offer the programs, the curricula, the didactic methods and strategies for the training of teachers and the Centre for Continuous Education and Open Distance Learning will offer the logistic and material support.

When we refer to the quality of education we have to make, in the first place the distinction between the quality of products and the quality of services. It is now clear that education and training are services, delivered through teaching. In this case we can define two quality perspectives: the traditional approach - to consider the quality of teaching from the perspective of conformity with the design - and the total quality management approach – the quality of education and training is seen as the effectiveness of the service towards the students. We consider that in our days the real challenge for teachers and trainers is to develop didactic approaches that can meet both quality requirements at the same time.

We can define the teaching quality dimensions by analogy with the services quality dimensions:

Competence →	Subject competence, expertise, experience
Communication →	Clarity of objectives and of the information
Responsiveness →	Rapid feedback

Reliability	→	Consistent performance
Credibility	→	Honesty, trustworthiness
Timeliness	→	Respect of timetables
Security	→	Non-threatening behavior
Access	→	Approachability
Courtesy	→	Professional ethics
Understanding	→	Individualized attention
Tangibles	→	Teaching environment

Education and training are service processes realized with the participation of more factors. In order to deliver the required quality of both processes, we have to assure the quality of every involved factor. Thus, there are teacher-related factors, content-related factors and non-formal factors.

### 1. TEACHER-RELATED FACTORS

- *the teacher's scientific competence* - in higher education, where adult students are more knowledgeable and more critical, competence expectations for the teacher are such as: be experienced and knowledgeable in the area, be able to back up assertions with facts or research findings, have something new to offer, new ideas and new ways of approaching problems, be credible to students.
- *the teacher's didactic and pedagogical competence* is maybe the most important factor in the enhancement of the learning quality in individual pathways. It includes the ability: to transmit knowledge and skills by translating them into ideas and concepts that are understandable by audience, to stimulate students' interest in the subject area, to prepare students for learning throughout their lifetime.
- *the teacher's style characteristics* considered to facilitate the learning process include: good communication, motivation, enthusiasm and commitment to the ideas, interest, sense of humor.
- *the teacher's commitment and motivation* is probably the determining factor for educational effectiveness closely interwoven with the professional attitude of teachers (ethical behavior, desire for continuous improvement, openness to feed-back).

## 2. CONTENT-RELATED FACTORS

- the relevance and appropriateness of the course content - in adult higher education the courses that are found to be of high quality are typically referred as relevant, practical, inspirational, dynamic, informative and solution centered.
- several practical aspects are considered to contribute at the course perceived quality: the respect for the nature and volume of subject matter, the transparency of the logic of the course, the clarity of the expectations from the students.
- other quality characteristics of the course include : interactivity, group dynamics, use of practical applications, education support material, enjoyability, the particular teaching style

## 3. NON-FORMAL FACTORS

- the learning environment – includes the development and maintenance of service such as: access to libraries, provision of self study materials, study guidance, tutoring, use of particular software and other opportunities for individual learning, the encouragement and facilitation of personal involvement in school-related activities
- the transfer of knowledge, skills and attitudes in the learning process – is, in big part the responsibility of the student himself; in this case the learning process is to some extent beyond the control of the teacher and the University
- the extra-curricular functions and services of the university – research, guidance services (placement services, first employment, further studies), consultancy, advice, development of values and attitudes (moral values, citizenship, social behavior), personal and cultural development of students (sport, gatherings)

The importance of quality issues is obvious in university continuing education and we think it is possible to develop quality systems no matter what external conditions are (economical, political, legal). We believe that the best option to implement quality is the Total Quality Management philosophy because it places all the elements and values suitable for this purpose. In order to develop quality in individualized learning pathways in education it is necessary to have a functional quality management system, motivation, desire and wish to do the things as best as possible and to be convinced that a higher quality of the educational services will bring benefits for the whole society.