

EXCELLENCE IN OBJECTIVE STRATEGIC EDUCATION IN THE MILITARY UNIVERSITY

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ABSTRACT

The evolution of the Romanian Army is marked and sustained by military schools, which, over time, regardless of form, structure or organizational level, were veritable pillars of its functionality. Higher military education system has the task of initial and ongoing training, advanced training of specialists and officers according to the needs of the Ministry of Defense through undergraduate studies, master's, doctorate and postgraduate education. Teaching quality has become an issue of importance to the training process in higher education facing continuous changes: increasing national and international competition, increasing social level, geographical diversity of the student body, increasing need of quality training, introduction of information technologies, and so on.

Keywords: military education, quality training, excellence, European integration

JEL Classification – M1; M10; M19

Introduction

The Army is, as shown in “The relations between the military and society in the process of European and Euro-Atlantic integration of Romania”[1], an important state institution, invested with complex missions for the defense of independence, sovereignty, integrity and territorial unity of the country and guarantee of constitutional democracy in the country. In addition, through Romania’s integration in NATO and its accession to the European Union, its responsibilities have increased in regional security and more. As a result, the army is able to fulfill both constitutional

internal tasks and diverse international assignments ranging from the humanitarian to the crisis management and combating international terrorism. In this context, it is clear that the army must be compatible with the requirements of the Romania's statute of being a member of NATO, but also with the mutations produced in all the sectors of Romanian society. In this way, it is able to better serve the objectives that our country sets, as a sovereign state and, at the same time, NATO member. The military must be leaders, trainers, educators, specialists and responsible for training and education of subordinates. Liability for subordinates is considered "the center of gravity of the army in peacetime" in the opinion of Ion Cojocaru in "Military Education Bulletin". The understanding of the vital importance that is represented by the quality of the command staff has generated constant concern to provide "the military a thorough, solid specialty training" as show by first Romanian military historian, Nicolae Bălcescu, stressing at the time the need for organizing a "well thought out and structured" military education system. Inevitably, the process of formation bears the imprint of socio-historical and military characteristics specific to different periods of the tumultuous existence of the Romanian people. The continuity of the education process records, in this way, developments that incorporate the full range of specific ways, from the simple transfer of experience between generations, to the modern systematic approach, in terms of curriculum and training.

1. Considerations regarding the higher military education system

Romanian military education, an area of strategic importance, is open and receptive to the European and euro-Atlantic novelty, and the units and military institutions have accepted the challenge of playing an important role in constructing the European area of education, along with all the other educational institutions in the country.

Integration into the European Union, as well as Romania's Army missions resulted from membership with full rights and obligations of NATO assumes rallying to the value system of these organizations, including in the field of military education. Compatibility with training, specialization and improvement of the professional military personnel from the NATO armies remains one of the vital factors in the transformation process.

Higher military education is done in four institutions under the authority of the General Staff (Military Technical Academy and three academies with categories of military forces) accredited by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (RAQAHE), one subordinated to the Medical Service (Medico –Military Institute) and two institutions subordinated to the Minister of National Defense, under the coordination of the State Secretary for relations with Parliament, public information and welfare (National Defense University "Carol I", accredited by the

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Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education and National Defense College).

Higher military education institutions are arranged in 4 garrisons and 6 locations and provide the training, improvement and specialization of officers according to the requirements of the Romanian Army. The educational proposal of higher military education institutions includes study programs for undergraduate, masters and doctorate, as well as postgraduate courses.

2. Excellence in the national and international education system

The European dimension of education is given by the Bologna Process, which is based on a programmatic document “An Europe of Knowledge is now widely recognized as an irreplaceable factor for social and human development and an indispensable component to consolidate and enrich the European citizenship, capable of providing its citizens with the necessary skills to face the challenges of the new millennium, together with an awareness of shared values and belonging to a social and common cultural space”[2](“Bologna Declaration”, 1999) adopted by all ministers responsible for higher education in the member countries, as well as communiqués signed by ministers responsible of education at the meetings in Prague (2001), Berlin (2003) and Bergen (2005). The strict application of the provisions laid down at a European level depends on national quality assurance agencies, and therefore RAQAHE, in the ENQA (European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). Also, by putting the universities in our country in the European Higher Education Area, the confidence in quality is ensured and through higher level the academic and/or, where appropriate, Romanian professional qualification recognition is obtained. The internal dimension of academic quality is carried out in existing legislation and depending on the specifics of each university, tradition and cultural heritage of higher education in our country. It is the full responsibility of each university and each provider of education programs. In this respect, quality assurance becomes a process according to the specific institutional framework and establishes itself as a mechanism by which the results or academic performance are always improved.

Reference principles underlying the quality of higher military education can be stated as follows[3]:

European reference ensures the affiliation of the system and higher education institutions in the European Higher Education Area and ensure quality levels in line with the requirements of this area and competitive on an European and international level.

Institutional responsibility believes that responsibility and managing the quality assurance are of accredited universities competence, conforming to the university autonomy.

Institutional diversity provides diversity of institutions, their mission and objectives which is respected and supported by external quality assessment.

Cooperation with all the components of the educational system considers addressing, applied practices and forms of technical assistance offered by RAQAHE leaning on relations of cooperation and mutual trust in relations with higher education institutions and other partners.

The focus on learning outcomes causes the results in education and the performance in university research to occupy the central position of reference in quality assurance and evaluation.

Institutional Identity believes that the results and performances in education and research can be achieved through a variety of practices, methods or structures, designed and implemented individually by each institution according to its own choices. Because of this the most important weight in RAQAHE evaluations is given especially to the results and performances, without neglecting the influence of good practices and successful structures in academic quality.

Internal, institutional self-evaluation of quality deems that each self-evaluation document must show the specific quality culture in higher education institutions and ensure continuity of performance improvements.

The external evaluation should be based on the demonstration of higher education institution results and performances in teaching and research and the verification of their relationship with the true reality of the institution, including the verification of student activity in relation to the standards acquired.

Continuous improvement of quality and institutional management are considered as the main objectives of the external evaluation.

Defining excellence in higher education is not a simple task, even if there are several definitions, selecting an universal sense is complicated, because it depends on the social and cultural environment (values and principles, for example) as well as political and economic contexts. Expectations and priorities of different groups is influencing the perceptions about excellence in higher education. Therefore, excellence in higher education depends on the definition of the term and the motivation of the people participating in getting it.

Excellence can be a concrete reality, a permanent move, or only a horizon. In other words, excellence can be some combination of inputs and outputs (even measured in quantities), a culture in the use of inputs and progress in order to obtain better outputs or the fulfillment of the proposed objectives. When excellence is seen as a concrete reality, focuses on the problem of defining the limits of excellence. In many areas, the term excellence is traditionally linked to quality, namely the achievement of objectives over the normal standards and normal threshold limits. Exceeding these

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limits can define excellence as an exclusive state. Another approach to the definition of excellence refers to its compatibility with many global definitions within the global company's activity and its prospects in obtaining them.

A classic definition of excellence refers to achieving a certain standard, a measure of performance in accordance with a predefined set of standards. A different interpretation of excellence, based on innovation, can lead to a peculiar situation by obtaining unexpected results, above those expected.

Also, the definition of excellence should consider the use of quantitative and qualitative parameters or the use of objective and subjective indicators.

Taking into account all these points will facilitate the identification of an adequate definition of what is excellence in higher education.

Educating a large number of people to a high standard through assimilation of knowledge can be considered as one of the main objectives of today's higher education sector. Given that stakeholders (students, administrators, faculties and various public entities) are from various sectors of society, making the higher education sector, very complex, difficult and competitive. In the higher education sector to be excellent can be interpreted as "very good" or "exceptional".

Excellence is part of a process where competence is the starting point. For this reason, it cannot be defined as a simple result. Excellency, which permanently appears in the missions of several universities, is not yet well defined in academic publications, making the assessment of excellence to be achieved less objective and often unwieldy. Unclearness of the term excellence in standardized form makes questions like "What is excellence?", "Excellence for what?" and "Excellence in what?" to have answers that vary. Excellence can be defined in general terms as having features that are exceptional. Specifically, excellence is closely linked to quality and according to the traditional view, links quality with the term exceptional. Thus quality can be considered as a special situation, not always or in terms fulfilled. Quality refers to something special and, in terms of education is linked to concepts of excellence, standards that must be met and to which many institutions or scientists aspire. If excellence can be interpreted as a concept closely linked to an individual virtue or quality, global changes have transformed it into an organization characteristic, a result of the high level of quality that distinguishes the best universities from the others. Therefore, there is a growing focus on vertical stratification, which promotes an "aura of exceptionality". Thus, the evaluation systems of higher education, excellence is equated with the term "being the best" which could mean, the fulfillment by education institutions of standards for more features, as listed by Altbach[4]:

- Excellence in research;
- High quality teachers;
- Favorable working conditions;

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- Job security, benefits and a good salary;
- Adequate facilities;
- Adequate funding, including predictability each year;
- Academic autonomy.

The quality of teaching is a permanent key issue in higher education faced with constant change. Learners have diversified both socially and geographically. Thus emerged the need for new teaching methods and technologies, changing the nature of interactions between students and teachers. Specialty state institutions, students and their families, employers, fund providers increasingly require add value to their investments and want greater efficiency through teaching. Teaching can not be unitary defined and to some extent, can not be disconnected from the debate on quality or culture quality in higher education which remain permanent terms in current times. Studies conducted primarily consider quality as a result, others as a property and in terms of teaching an endless process to reduce defects.

In this sense it can be said that "good teachers" have empathy for students, are expressive, being experienced teachers, with organizing capacity. Instead the "excellent teachers" are those that have passions: passion for learning, their field, teaching and their students. Quality teaching is student-centered, the aim being to adapt it to the needs of education. Thus, we should pay attention not only to the pedagogical skills of the teacher, but as well to the learning environment that needs to respond to students' personal needs. Financial, social, support including minority students and the existence of advisory services lead to improved learning outcomes. Learning through intellectual interaction between community groups - groups of students and/or teachers who give birth to necessary knowledge to improve the learning process by increasing student preparation and teacher satisfaction. Teaching can be enhanced with the help of teachers and on institutional or national departmental level.

Improvement of quality in this effect can be achieved by improving teaching methods and by adapting to the needs of the learning environment. The exchange of experience, teamwork, setting goals, studies, collecting information provide a better quality of teaching. Measuring the effectiveness of the teaching is done by analyzing indicators for measuring the quality of teaching in order to determine the value of graduates' satisfaction with teachers, the retention rates, etc. The use of pupil satisfaction surveys are another method of measurement, but with the perception by teachers that they are subjective, students give biased answers blaming teachers for everything that is not as expected, without taking into account the role of government.

The educational process conducted in the military education system follows a model of excellence in teaching and learning that is characterized by[5]:

- student-centered teaching, adapted to their needs to the detriment of formal teaching;

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- tailor the curriculum to the needs of the beneficiaries of the educational process, while adapting the work environment to deliver results within terms of excellence;
- use of satisfaction surveys applicable on students to achieve feedback on the work of the teacher, in order to evaluate him or to adapt teaching to the needs of learners by developing personal knowledge and by using a proper working environment;
- continued involvement of all teachers in the development and innovation of teaching and the use of effective educational leadership;
- stimulation, through various methods, of all participants in the educational process, with the purpose of influencing its position;
- excellence is used in a performance system, with the objective of increasing the efficiency of human resource in teaching and learning needed to fulfill the economic objectives set at national level.

The future of higher education could bring new and high considerations regarding the quality of teaching. One of the developments in the foreseeable future higher education is in the process of globalization. This rapid process has many consequences on higher education around the world, consisting in conducting international mobility, global comparisons, making benchmarking and rankings as well as internationalization of institutions and systems, those becoming major issues for the political system. The division between teaching and research as well as the increasing technological features may have an indirect impact in the teaching comprehensive. Permanent orientation of universities towards total quality in educational processes, creates an open space for carrying out joint projects, initiated both by them and by the stakeholders and carried out in evolutionary partnerships. Creating valuation and attracting resources will be the potential development result of adapting to the requirements of stakeholders, with reference in research and training. In the training programs proposal rapid responses to the needs of employers will be created, students and former graduates, causing a "hard point" in the management of universities. Training initiatives undertaken in relation to the stakeholders will permanently include a research component or applied knowledge transfer.[6]

Conclusions

It is not enough to accept that excellence is a reflection of the reputation of institutions and academic departments in order to obtain a representative position of their evaluation process. Reputation is gained over a long period of time and is strengthened by research experience, knowledge gained, social interaction and the formation of a vibrant and productive academic community. Education is seen as a

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socialization process where students are influenced by the values, the culture and ethos of education institutions. This, however, does not guarantee an excellent learning experience for students and does not guarantee their determination in achieving their objectives. Elite institutions often attract the most able students, but can not guarantee the sure success of learners, being influenced by their attitude.

Excellence can be measured against accepted and applicable standards across the range of academic disciplines and all educational institutions, being a relative concept that can reflect variables between them and the characteristics of learners.

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