

Quality criteria for curriculum developers

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Abstract:

This paper describes an evidence-based quality assurance system for curriculum developers, which takes as its starting point a well-researched theoretical and practical perspective on student learning needs in higher education, related with criteria, standards and performance indicators in education.

Keywords: curriculum developers, curriculum quality assurance, instrument for quality assurance of the curriculum

Curriculum Development can be defined as the systematic planning of what is taught and learned in educational institutions as reflected in programmes of study, curriculum framework and syllabuses. These curricula are embodied in official documents (typically curriculum “guides” for professors) and made mandatory by all the Faculties and Departments.

Curriculum developers are all specialists which contribute at the design of the curriculum.

Curriculum developers, makes a design of the curriculum under the guidance of the Methodology of The Romanian National Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS, 2006) which provide a set of guidelines for the improvement of quality of education. *In this methodology* there are *Criteria, Standards and Performance indices* on three basic domains: institutional capacity, educational efficiency and quality management for all the curriculum developers of study programmes from Higher Education Institutions.

Those criteria, standards and performance indices belongs of quality assurance, generally speaking, but in the mean time *gives an important input to the curriculum quality assurance* being very helpful for curriculum developers, specially in education efficiency domain.

Taking in consideration the importance of curriculum developers in the educational process, we can give some simple advices for them, as follow:

First: Pay attention to the entire landscape of the standards and performance indices. A developer should not head directly to the content area of interest and overlook the landscape of recommendations for good pedagogy in which the content section is embedded. In order to produce curriculum material aligned with the *standards of education*, the developer must look at aspects other than content (that is, subject matter, history and nature of science, inquiry, technology). The developer must devote equal attention to standards for assessment, teaching, and professional development.

Second: Capture the spirit of the standards of education. The standards document is a descriptive set of policies that present an orientation toward good science instruction and curriculum. Inclusion of a particular standard for the sole purpose of getting another check in a rubric for standards-alignment makes no sense. Such additions are trivial and transparent.

Third: A set of filters does exist. The *standards* are also prescriptive and can be seen as a filtration system in which only the best curricula will survive. The standards can provide operational definitions to help curriculum developers decide on the merits of a program. For instance, the standards address the need for a student to carry out a full investigation, including hypothesis formation, experimental design for hypothesis testing, data collection, and analysis. A developer must be aware of this recommendation as a non-negotiable item in the design of curriculum.

Fourth: The Educational Standards should not stifle creativity in curriculum design. This recommendation could come as a bit of a surprise, following the third admonition. However, an essential aspect of using the standards is that creativity on the part of the curriculum developer and the professors at work in the cours hall or seminar room must be supported rather than thwarted. Flexibility exists in the way a recommendation is carried out rather than in a choice between key aspects of the standards. Once again, a cohesive view of the

standards will be helpful. The standards provide a sense of what is good in science instruction, but a curriculum (and an individual professor's style) should not be limited by standards. The standards describe a fundamental approach to sound instruction and support excellence in design of curriculum and delivery of formation.

Fifth: Respect the educators who will use your standards-based curriculum. An excellent textbook that sits on a shelf, unused, or is given to students and misused, cannot achieve the goals of the standards. Educators are the crucial ingredient in the implementation of a new curriculum. The standards speak to professional development of educators, in addition to outlining effective pedagogy. Educators must be included in the process of curriculum development, regardless of the group of players who are primary in the process. Educators are the best source of information about what specifically will and will not work in an educational space. They bring a strong note of reality to the process, through their familiarity with university, communities, and the course, seminar or lab environment. Development of an innovative curriculum, however, requires the input of exemplary educators who can see beyond what has been done to what could be accomplished.

Sixth: Keep in mind that curriculum development is all about students. In the process of designing a new curriculum that is aligned with standards, a developer must not lose sight of the goals/aims/competences, which are good for all students. As the recommendations of standards are applied, the ultimate target, the students, must be in every consideration. One way to do this is to consult students and listen carefully to what they say. Their comments are not always sophisticated, but the views of students are a primary source of data to guide curriculum development. For this reason, field testing is an important component in the development process.

Seventh: All educators are different. The range of styles, experiences, and skills among different educators varies considerably. Some educators can use a simple outline of curriculum with success; others need extensive help with implementation of even a complete curriculum. A new curriculum aligned with the standards should take into account the teaching and training standards as they relate to the wide continuum of experience, style, and knowledge.

Eighth: All curriculum is not for all students. A strong curriculum must reflect the range of interests, prior knowledge, learning styles, and student abilities and attitudes. If the curriculum is to be used

by a general class, this range will be wide. If a curriculum is suitable for a narrow range of students, the target audience should be clearly specified.

Considering all these, mentioned above, we can present, further, some example of criteria for curriculum quality assurance at curriculum developers availability.

We have designed a tool for curriculum developers from three perspectives: *procedural, structural and products*, as part of the quality assurance of a study program and wants to contribute at the improvement of the “quality culture” for a curriculum. It was made for seeing/observing the links between the quality standards of the curriculum, at program level, with the standards of quality assurance at system level, in compliance with quality standards at European level. In the mean time which reflect the overall quality level of how the curriculum accomplish his mission.

We can offer bellow an example of an instrument for assessment of curriculum based on criteria related to mentioned three perspectives:

CURRICULUM QUALITY CRITERIA

1. From *process* perspective / in terms of procedural (standing).

| PROCEDURE | Responsible | Comments (self reflection /evaluation) | Actions for developments |
|---|--------------------|---|-------------------------------------|
| Establishing the target group | | | |
| Applying the questionnaire for needs analysis applied to the target group chosen. | | | |
| Setting up the general learning outcomes of the curriculum, based on conclusions of needs analysis and in accordance to the NQF and EQF | | | |

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|--|--|--|--|
| Designing the Curriculum Framework having in attention the general learning outcomes | | | |
| Designing the Syllabus for the module/unit/theme. | | | |
| Creating teaching and learning tools/materials | | | |
| Applying the curriculum and the learning tools on the pilot / experimental groups | | | |
| Evaluating the effects of curriculum and learning tools, applied | | | |
| Adjusting whole curriculum, based on evaluation's results | | | |
| Retesting the new curriculum and the learning tools on the pilot / experimental groups | | | |
| Acreditation / validation of the curriculum | | | |
| Spreading the curriculum, through the potential users | | | |
| Offering assistance in applying the curriculum and the learning tools, for the users | | | |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| Gathering feedbacks concerning the curriculum and its learning tools, from the users | | | |
|--|--|--|--|

2. From *structure* perspective / the structural perspective (tick, in one of the columns; 1 poor, 5 excellent).

| ITEM | STATUS | | | | |
|--|--------|---|---|---|---|
| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| To what extent are the learning outcomes correctly formulated, and related with the needs of students, NQF and with EQF? | | | | | |
| To what extent does the curriculum contain an Curriculum Framework, Syllabuses, Learning Materials, Assessment instruments etc. | | | | | |
| To what extent does the Curriculum Framework, based on the general learning outcomes, contain: a. Compulsory subjects, speciality subjects and elective b. Number of hours / subject c. Number of | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|--|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p>credits for each subject d. Type of assessment (written examination, portfolio etc)</p> | | | | | |
| <p>To what extent there is an internal logic between compulsory subjects, speciality subjects and elective subjects</p> | | | | | |
| <p>To what extent does the Syllabuses for each subject, based on the general learning outcomes, contain:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. specific learning outcomes – knowledge, skills and attitudes; ii. contents and indicative learning activities, related to the specific learning outcomes; iii. approaches to teaching and learning (educational strategies - interactive, specific to the students); iv. teaching and learning resources / tools / materials; v. assessment's activities and criteria. | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| To what extent do the learning resources / tools / materials, based on the Syllabus, meet and cover the specific learning outcomes and topics? | | | | | |
| To what extent are relevant proposed assessment instruments? | | | | | |
| To what extent are relevant proposed assessment criteria? | | | | | |
| To what extent does the curriculum meets identified students' needs | | | | | |
| To what extent the curriculum is oriented towards the real world/labor market | | | | | |
| To what extent the curriculum take into consideration the learning principles, as: <i>experiential, self-directed, reflective and transformative</i> | | | | | |
| To what extent is the content <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Relevant ▪ Pertinent ▪ Coherent ▪ Applicable ▪ Effective internal <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Feasible | | | | | |

| | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| <p>To what extent the content</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Provides a holistic, integrated approach on the key concepts and relevant for developing the competences designed, ▪ Assure the learning flexibility by evaluating the formal, non formal and informal aspects of education, ▪ Is relevant for the labor market / work-life situations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assure interdisciplinary approaches of the topics ▪ Assure not only information acquisition (knowledge), but also the development of skills and attitudes of the students. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Assure the correspondence between designed learning outcomes and student's profile | | | | | |
| <p>To what extent the curriculum assures the coherence and correspondence between educational</p> | | | | | |

| strategy and scientific approach | | | | | |
|---|--|--|--|--|--|
| To what extent the curriculum assures different teaching/learning methods: traditional methods, individual active learning methods, group active learning methods, alternative methods etc. | | | | | |
| To what extent the curriculum uses new instruments of assessment | | | | | |
| To what extent the curriculum uses the instruments for self-evaluation | | | | | |
| To what extent the curriculum offers to the students access to different resources | | | | | |
| To what extent does the curriculum provide opportunities for transfer and sustainability of the learning outcomes in “future real life meetings” | | | | | |

3. From *product* perspective / in terms of product

| PRODUCT | STATUS | |
|--|--------|----|
| | Yes | No |
| Is there a needs analysis? | | |
| Is there a Curriculum framework? | | |
| Are there Syllabuses? | | |
| Are there Learning resources / materials / tools? | | |
| Are there Assessment instruments for the curriculum? | | |

Curriculum quality assurance and his criteria is a learning exercise for all the curriculum developers being in the same time an open stage for other contributors!

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