

**THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES**  
**THE FACULTY OF INTERNATIONAL BUSINESS AND ECONOMICS**  
**3rd International Conference: Synergies in Communication**  
*Future of Europe*  
**Bucharest, 14-15 November 2014**

**LEADERSHIP AND QUALITY ASSURANCE IN DEVELOPING NEW STUDY  
PROGRAMMES IN ENGLISH. LESSONS FROM A ROMANIAN PERSPECTIVE.**

**Mariana Nicolae**

Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication

Bucharest University of Economic Studies

Romania

[mariana.nicolae@rei.ase.ro](mailto:mariana.nicolae@rei.ase.ro)

*Abstract:* This paper looks at the varied implications of the process to develop new study programmes in today's higher education institutions with a focus on English language study programmes. Universities are challenged all over the world by important development issues. Study programmes in English seem to be an answer to some of those issues. The present paper will explore the leadership and quality challenges that are involved in the administrative processes that are required for such decisions. It will also look at some of the tensions that study programmes in English bring about at various decision-making levels of the stakeholders involved. The issues are connected both with specific university structures and also with the larger Romanian educational system in which interdisciplinarity is rather a rhetorical theme than a practical line of action. English as a lingua franca has been researched more in-depth lately with some less expected results that involve multilingualism as a policy. The paper will conclude by highlighting some of the impacts and challenges that the author perceives as critical for the awareness of decision makers in the educational field.

*Keywords:* Leadership, university management, developing study programmes, multilingualism, quality assessment

## INTRODUCTION

Higher education in the whole world almost is under continuous important pressures today and ready for changes. The types of pressure are varied and continually increasing starting from the pressure of university rankings with the Anglophone countries most significantly represented to the constraints of financial and public accountability. There have been lately numerous discussions about the end of the university system as we know it today. The higher education bubble is already a common place in the mainstream discourse of most researchers, practitioners or policy-makers [1]. Stakeholders in more advanced economies are increasingly concerned that higher education, with the university as its main representative, but also including other types of institutions, needs reinvention as an organizational form. This process has been called the democratization of higher education, massification, or educational markets, competitive advantages of universities, entrepreneurial universities, quality assurance, ranking of universities, teaching and research higher education institutions, and the list is still open. For the general public as well as for the policy makers those concepts build up a vision of an enlightened knowledge society in which innovation and creativity are key elements of social life. However, there is an increasing number of people from within the various systems of higher education who look at the darker connotations of those concepts - the battles for university expansion. Those battles may be less evident than those in the economic field, but they are as impactful. And since the profitability of higher education is no longer a term to be avoided, we look at the expansion of higher education in terms of number of students, geographical areas, social prestige of academics, materialized in income and influence. And by academics I understand teaching and, mainly, research staff. The emphasis on research staff and the devaluation of teaching, and by contagion of learning [2] is relevant for the present paper.

One of the important challenges is represented by the MOOCs (Massive Open Online Course) and their fast growing [3] although the real influence of MOOCs over education is still under scrutiny.

Another significant challenge to education worldwide is a less mainstream theme for academic discussions, rather than a more specialized theme for applied linguistics: English as lingua franca of academia. English has clearly become the lingua franca of academic publishing and academic exchange all over the world. Lectures are now more and more delivered in English. This is a consequence, among others, of the student and staff mobility which makes study programmes accommodate a highly diverse student audience. That type of student audience requires instruction through the medium of English. Therefore English as Medium of Instruction (EMI) has become an important benchmark in the process of university internationalization. An advertisement for a British Council new course in EMI claims that “in 2012, 4,646 higher education institutions offered English taught master’s courses across Europe. In 2013, that number has risen to 6,407.” This raises an issue of great concern to universities, lecturers but mainly to students: the quality of academic teaching and, consequently, learning that take place in this new context.

Still another challenge on the way universities strategize their development is demographics. In 2010, a Standard & Poor report showed that “no other force is likely to shape the future of national economic health, public finances, and policymaking as the irreversible rate at which the world's population is aging” [4]. One answer to that challenge was the expansion of mainly western universities towards Asia and the emerging countries, with again the need for EMI. Another challenge is the realization of some regional or national universities that their pool of students is decreasing fast due to demographics, but also due to students’ mobility and to the convenience to choose international universities.

## **1. An overview of Romanian higher education**

Higher education in Romania has been changing rapidly and some stakeholders will say relatively chaotically as reactions to external political commands.

Romania was one of the first Central and Eastern European countries to set up in 1993, by law, a “quality assurance” institution, to sign the Bologna Declaration, to try to catch up with the best traditions of European higher education, with no proper sustainable institutional infrastructure [5]. This is relevant for the present paper because it explains the bureaucratic difficulties to develop new study programmes. At present, Romania has over one hundred institutions of higher education. These very diverse organizations of higher education are still given all the responsibility but not the authority or, as important, the financial resources to function. The Ministry of Education should allow and trust institutions to establish their strategic mission within the limits of the Law of National Education. It is difficult to imagine an attempt at standardization at all levels. Each university has different strengths and resources. The university governance and administration should collaborate to establish and develop its overall priorities and define its profile, its lines of accountability, and its own human resource policies within the framework established by appropriate bodies within the respective institution. The many and diverse aspects regarding curriculum development, allocation of resources, staff recruitment and promotion are best left in the care of the institution which knows them best. The Law of National Education (2011) provides an improved and healthy framework for the organization of universities. It provides important check points to maintain balance within the institution through Board of administration, University Senate and various faculty advisory groups. New study programmes, curriculum development, staff recruitment and promotions are internal to a university and need to be decided there.

Romanian higher education went through a lot of change that had clear positive effects in aligning the system to international expectations, even though mainly at a declarative level, but had also created a lot of confusion among its various stakeholders. I would attempt to state that all in all the present situation of the Romanian higher education allows hopes for a significant contribution of the individual higher education institutions to the development not only of the Romanian society but, given the mechanisms of globalization, also of the European society at large.

## **2. The challenge of developing new study programmes**

New study programmes in the curriculum of Romanian universities have been considered as an appropriate answer to the dynamics of the national labour market and to

the changes in the international higher education landscape. The former is self-evident while the latter is manifested through the requests of candidates who are nowadays more internationally mobile and, therefore experienced and knowledgeable, but still prefer to study in their home country. This process of setting up new study programmes has gone through multiple versions both in terms of getting approvals and also of quality assurance. The legal modifications after 1990 permitted the appearance of a large variety of private higher education institutions as well as the creation of campuses belonging to or associated with international providers of higher education. The university establishment answered to those market and political commands by introducing accreditation for the new higher education institutions, focusing heavily on capacity factors, especially staff and facilities.

The term university study programme has been introduced in the Romanian higher education discourse and defined as “a group of teaching, learning, research, practical applications and evaluation curriculum units, designed to lead to a university qualification certified through a diploma and a diploma supplement”[6]. A study programme can be, therefore, defined within the various education cycles. The present paper looks at an undergraduate study programme that has been designed and implemented by the Faculty of International Business and Economics of the Bucharest University of Economic Studies as an answer to the various signals coming towards the management of the faculty. The study programme is called Applied Modern Languages to International Business and Economics and was authorized in May 2013 by ARACIS (The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). It was offered to the public in the admission sessions of July and September 2013 and is running at present having 60 students enrolled in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year and 90 students enrolled in the first year 2014-2015.

The reasons for this programme have been various and have appeared and accumulated in time. Some were due to external factors such as a pressure for the internationalization of universities, including the need for attracting foreign students both for the benefits of diversity and for institutional financial benefits. In terms of financial benefits the interest of Romanian universities is to attract foreign students as compared to international students. Foreign students are students who come from non-EU countries and have higher tuition fees than Romanian students, while international students are students who come from EU countries and have the same financial obligations as Romanians. At present this situation is more relevant at graduate and post-graduate levels rather than at undergraduate level, but there are indications that even undergraduate programmes will attract international and foreign students if they are offered through the medium of English. Among the internal factors contributing to the setting up of the Applied Modern Languages (AML) study programme was mainly the realization that the language skills of the graduates of the Faculty of International Business and Economics have on the general deteriorated due to the reduction in the curriculum of the school of the language study from 6 hours per week to 4 and starting with Bologna only 2 hours per week per language [7].

Another reason was the successful existence on the mature educational markets of interdisciplinary programmes called *International Business and Modern Languages* or *BSc in international business administration and modern Languages* or *International Business Communication with a Modern Foreign Language*. These programmes are offered, somehow expectedly, in the UK and/or the US, which use the advantage of using English as a first language, and have always had a more flexible educational offer in which students can choose their tracks of specialization, but also, and this comes as an interesting

development, in non-Anglophone countries, which do not have the advantage of native English lecturers, like Denmark, Germany or Latvia.

An important reason was identifying a gap in the market which was the increasing demand for AML at other Romanian higher education institutions and the decision of those institutions to accept only a very small number of the applicants. We decided to address that gap. Still another reason, this time from the perspective of the teaching staff, was the need to balance the drop in applications for higher education caused by demographic changes and to create new offers.

All of the above and some more led to the decision of the dean's office and the management of the Department of Modern Languages and Business Communication (DMLBC) in the Bucharest University of Economic Studies to start the internal process to get the approvals to ask for the authorization of such a programme. The Dean asked the DMLBC to provide an offer for such a programme. A task force was put together by the DMLBC, coordinated by a senior person, a reader in applied linguistics with a doctorate in the UK in applied linguistics, who had worked for a long period of time for the British Council Romania. The group worked under the direct supervision of the head of department and of the dean while consulting with a large number of experts. The result of their work was presented and approved at the various levels within the faculty (department and faculty councils) and then university (Board of Administration and university Senate). The following is an abstract and a discussion of the group's opportunity report on such a development.

The report states that “such an interdisciplinary programme offers students a competitive set of abilities which combine the knowledge and use of English and other foreign languages in international business and entrepreneurship while understanding and applying business principles in corporations. The programme offers integrated education in the theory and practice of applied linguistics combined with the theory of business, particularly international business administration. Advanced language skills will allow students to communicate effectively in a variety of professional situations – customer care, marketing and advertising, media and public relations.”

The arguments were organized in two sets: **academic** and **practical** ones. The **academic** arguments are important and relevant for the present Romanian higher education system because of focusing the discussion on the presence and the status of applied linguistics in the Romanian academic landscape. Applied linguistics is a discipline that has been fully recognized in the large majority of the European educational contexts. Nevertheless the situation is different in Romania where the discipline is at best neglected or worse overlooked in the faculties of languages or linguistics in the country. This means that wherever it is acknowledged and exists, AML is a second-hand division in a larger administrative unit. There are still few undergraduate studies organized in the field, though the situation has improved lately, and those study programmes are not continued with master and doctoral studies. This is a major handicap both for students and academics. There are only relatively few master programmes in Romania in the field. One of the portals that offers students information on what is new on the Romanian higher education market lists 15 master programmes under the title AML master (<http://www.studentie.ro/Master/Master-limbi-moderne-aplicate-d3-s14> ). However, only some of them are clearly addressing their marketing title, while others have obviously another mission (Master in Comparative and World Literatures). For students who want to

continue their specialization in relevant, pragmatic and industry oriented master programmes it is a real challenge. The main challenge here is, however, the academics' own professional development which clearly starts from a philological background with a certain type of research interests which are not connected to what the field of AML considers as relevant research. Therefore academics in the field that is still called in Romania with the umbrella term of philology, though the international research community considers that "philology" remains largely synonymous with "historical linguistics" or, more generally, with the study of language grammar, history and literary tradition [8], have an understandable reluctance to shift their life-long research focus to another area. This, however, reflects on the larger higher education management and administration policies as it is important to find a balanced way between personal research interests and the complexity and dynamics of the international field and is generally settled through the emergence of interdisciplinarity. The issue of interdisciplinarity is however a difficult one from an administrative point of view in Romania and has been addressed in-depth by Cojanu [7]. For the present paper what is important is the faculty decision to apply for the authorization of the AML programme in the field of philology as there was no procedure to evaluate interdisciplinary programmes by ARACIS (The Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education).

The author of the present paper together with the team leader were advised to choose one of the already existing fields – either international business and economics or philology. Examples were provided underlining that what most similar international programmes (presented earlier as examples in this paper) have in common is the open acknowledgement of their interdisciplinary characteristic which is perceived and marketed as a plus. For example the Latvian programme says on its website: “The programme is interdisciplinary and is designed to prepare graduates for international careers in enterprises and organizations where knowledge of several languages and business is required. The programme offers three language modules (...) as well as general and business aspects of the module language. The programme provides cultural studies (...), business studies through the basic management courses such as Marketing, Management Theory, Accounting Theory, Entrepreneurship in the EU, as well as the EU and international market specific study courses. Upon graduation, students are able to continue education in Master degree programmes and second level professional study programmes.”

After careful consideration and analysis the institutional choice was to ask for the authorization of the AML programme in the field of philology - for a number of reasons that are outside the scope of the present paper.

Another important argument for the setting up of the programme was the lack of capacity to coordinate doctoral research in applied linguistics in Romania. This has a serious direct effect on the career path of teaching staff in non-philological university departments, like the one in our own university. In practical terms this means that young academics have to pursue doctoral research in areas with little if any relevance to their daily professional activity and, not less important, to their evaluation and promotion chances. The relevance of this issue for the setting up of an undergraduate programme maybe not easily seen, but it exists. Romanian legislation and regulations require for granting institutional permission to organize doctoral studies in a certain field to have all also undergraduate study programmes in that specialization. This provision is, therefore,

relevant both for the teaching staff and for the students who can continue their studies in their chosen field.

The Faculty of International Business and Economics seems to have the largest and most diverse department of modern languages and business communication in Romania. With 65 full-time teaching staff, 20 part-time teaching staff and 9 admin and support staff, the DMLBC has the professional capacity to develop study programmes for applied linguistics in accordance with the present international best-practices [10].

The **practical** arguments start from acknowledging a clear and growing interest of university prospective candidates for applied studies of modern languages. The existence of a study programme that combines language study and business studies fills a gap in the Romanian higher education market. The Bucharest University of Economic Studies has the obvious advantage of having academics from both areas and the institutional capacity to provide and promote such a programme.

The distinction between academic and practical arguments that the author has borrowed from the opportunity report of the task group is purely theoretical and was used for the sake of argumentation. The two sets of arguments overlap being difficult to discuss in a paper of this length the complexity of the mix of history developments, personal mentalities and organizational cultures against the Romanian legislation.

### **3. Study programmes in English vs. the need for multilingualism and multiculturalism**

Establishing English language study programmes is clearly on the rise and visible across Europe and beyond as already shown in the introduction to this paper. However, the attitudes of individual academics from non-Anglophone countries towards this trend are diverse and belong as pointed out by Mureşan & Llantada [11] to various realities. While Mureşan & Llantada focus on the attitudes and challenges of publishing internationally, Mureşan & Nicolae [12]) look closer at the Romanian context underlining new angles and some tensions that may arise between the various stakeholders in the process: the individual academic, the higher education institution and the larger research needs of the Romanian society.

The international literature documenting the issues related to English as a medium for instruction is rich and growing. Starting with Krishnamurti, B. [13] discussing the Indian dilemma of regional language vs English as the medium of instruction in higher education and up to the present moment there is a constantly growing body of research and articles as presented in the February 2013 reference list of TIRF, the International Research Foundation for English Language Education. From their mission statement one particular item is relevant for the present paper - the concerns the professional communities worldwide have towards EMI [14].

Some of those tensions include, but are not limited to, the following: a) multilingualism and multiculturalism as important values of the European Union are threatened by the use of only one language; b) the optimism of using English as a lingua franca in the global village or merely in the single market of the European Union has various effects on both individuals and businesses; c) communication is difficult and even distorted when those involved use another language than their own; d) creativity and innovation as main drivers of progress are best functioning when people use their own language.

#### 4. Conclusions

This paper considered the challenges and opportunities of developing new university study programmes in Romania. This is not a simple process requiring both good university governance, wise faculty management and personal leadership.

This is a process in line with the newest and increasing European trends to develop English language study programmes as an answer to the general decrease in the number of potential students that universities can attract. It is a trend powerfully backed by the rapid pace of international economic development that requires new language skills constantly. Some tensions between offering study programmes in English and the need for multilingual and multicultural graduates of society have been explored.

As a general conclusion the changes that the Romanian higher education went through in the last two decades had clear positive effects in aligning the system to international expectations, even though mainly at a declarative level. The same changes created a lot of confusion and affected in severe ways the academics themselves. However, wise, responsible and entrepreneurial individual academics, who make up the management of institutions have demonstrated that things can be done even in an unpredictable system.

#### 5. REFERENCES:

- [1] Leach, M., 2012 *Bursting bubbles in higher education* in: L. Coiffat (ed.) BLUE SKIES: New Thinking about the Future of Higher Education. A Collection of short articles by leading commentators, UK 2012 edition. London: Pearson. Chapter 14. P 58 – 60.
- [2] Popenici, S., 2013 *Devaluation of Teaching and Learning*, The Popenici blog, <http://popenici.com/2013/10/10/teaching/>, accessed on 21 March 2014.
- [3] *The Attack of the MOOCS*, The Economist, 20 July, 2013, online at <http://www.economist.com/news/business/21582001-army-new-online-courses-scaring-wits-out-traditional-universities-can-they>
- [4] Standard & Poor's, *Global Ageing Report*, 2010. <http://www.cfr.org/aging/standard-poors-global-aging-2010-irreversible-truth/p23299>
- [5] Seitz, V., Nicolae, M., 2014, *The Role of Academic Values in Higher Education Convergence in Romania: A New Approach*, in *Handbook of Research Trends in European Higher Education Convergence*, IGI Global, <http://www.igi-global.com/book/handbook-research-trends-european-higher/97340>
- [6] *Law of National Education*, 2011, article 137, par 1, online at <http://www.edu.ro/index.php/legaldocs/14847>
- [7] Nicolae, M., Maftai, M.M., (editors), (2013) *Istoria limbilor moderne în ASE. O perspectivă centenară*, Editura ASE, pp. 136-137.
- [8] Morpurgo Davies, A., 1998 *Nineteenth-Century Linguistics*, vol. IV, G. Lepschy (ed.) History of Linguistics. London: Longman.
- [9] Cojanu, V., 2014, *Interdisciplinaritatea în științele sociale ca problemă de management/ Interdisciplinarity in social sciences as a management problem*, Revista de Politica Științei și Scientometrie, Serie Noua, Vol. 3, No. 1, p. 30 – 35, available online at [rps.inoe.ro/articles/124/file](http://rps.inoe.ro/articles/124/file)
- [10] Nicolae, M., Maftai, M.M., (editors), (2013) *Istoria limbilor moderne în ASE. O perspectivă centenară*, Editura ASE, pp. 60/169 - 170.
- [11] Muresan, L.-M., & Pérez-Llantada, C., 2013 *English for research publication and dissemination in bi-/multiliterate environments: The case of Romanian academics*, Journal of English for Academic Purposes, p. 2. <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.jeap.2013.10.009>



- [12] Mureşan, L.M., Nicolae, M., 2014 *The challenge of publishing internationally in a non-Anglophone academic context. Romania – a case in point*. In print.
- [13] Krishnamurti, B., 1990 *The regional language vis-à-vis English as the medium of instruction in higher education: The Indian dilemma*. Multilingualism in India, 61, 15-24; apud <http://www.tirfonline.org>
- [14] TIRF's Mission Statement, accessed in July 2014, <http://www.tirfonline.org/about-us/>