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ASPECTS OF THE IMPLEMENTATION OF NON-UNIVERSITY TERTIARY EDUCATION IN ROMANIAN UNIVERSITY COLLEGES

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Abstract

Tertiary colleges in universities were introduced by specific legislation, with the main role as a bridge between high school and bachelor's degree but also for the purpose of efficient use of the human and material resources in university. At the same time, the adaptation of young people to an academic environment creates starting points for future professional success. University colleges have the role of preparing a quality post-secondary education by creating the educational premises necessary for a greater chance of future integration into the labor market. The existence of domains/accredited/authorized study programs at the license level for the correspondent from the College facilitates the credits transfer. The purpose of the study is to investigate the impact of implementing of colleges in the university system in terms of the management, regarding the need to adapt legislation to ensure the efficiency of this process. The main objective of this paper is to contribute to the efficiency of strategic planning at the university level, in terms of managing the tools through which colleges are implemented in Romania. We want a global, optimal, strategic approach of the education at this level, taking into account that it must become applicable at the level of a complex educational organization, such as a university. The method was based on a quantitative and qualitative analysis. Data collection was done through: online surveys, face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and group discussions. The results obtained represent a novelty and make a proven contribution to the improvement of colleges management in universities.

Keywords: High education, institutional autonomy, public management, tertiary college

1. Introduction

The organization of colleges within universities is still in the adaptation stage to the standards of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education (ARACIP). In higher education, quality is ensured and validated by Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS). University colleges shall be subject to the ARACIP regulations/decisions, but must also take into account those of ARACIS in order not to violate certain standards. However, the legislation is not very clear in this regard. In our experience, a number of problems have emerged that not only university autonomy can solve them. It is necessary a specific legislation and, why not, even the adaptation of the ARACIP quality platform to the specifics of a university tertiary college. The universities, through their colleges, upload reports, documents, the specific database on this platform.

The university colleges have the role of preparing a level 5 National Qualifications Framework (CNC) of superior quality, using mainly university teachers and the material base of the universities. At the same time, the educational premises for a future academic integration are created, limiting elements such as school dropout. These colleges should provide a better chance of future integration into the labor market for students, compared to pre-university high schools and colleges that organize post-secondary education.

2. Problem Statement

The creation of this structure in universities required a certain organization in order to function. A new structure also creates certain imbalances. The most visible was that of the management structure, with pedagogical-bureaucratic contradictions. The complexity of the issues and the new challenges call a different kind of management, says Calin (2021), promoting people-centred, competency-based management. We must take into account the evolution of modern society and school organisation.

However, it is worth mentioning the good progress from a functional point of view in terms of material structure through the perfect balance between supply and demand on the one hand and the quality of human resources on the other hand. However, a small imbalance was also noticed at the level of the internal structure of adaptation, because there were teachers who considered it a personal "decline" if they will teach at this educational level, and curriculum speaking the vast majority of training standards are old and outdated.

Bureaucratically speaking, the current legislation is not appropriate for academics. The university colleges have a solid administrative structure, but there are still many unresolved issues at the legal and especially economic level. Another example would be the non-acceptance of the general secretariat to manage the college secretariat, although the college is an integral part of a university, just as the faculty is an integral part of the same university. As presented by Langa (2015), we believe that all will focus on adaptation on the fly, an integral part of system-wide renewal and transformation. The Ministry of National Education (MEN, 2014) and the Ministry of Education and Scientific Research (MECS, 2015) broadcast two ministerial orders that underlie the organization and functioning of non-university tertiary colleges in universities. These ministerial orders are required to be updated with new data, found it from the development in practice of this level. The requirements of ARACIP and those of the Regulation-

framework for the organization and functioning of pre-university education units presented by the Ministry of Education and Research (MEC, 2020), require for example, the existence of an Administrative Board (AB) of the college. Some universities established such a council. Is this the right solution? We do not believe that, legally speaking, there could be an AB under another AB as long as the Colleges established by universities, whether state or private, will never have legal entity. It follows that, there is no need to set up a separate AB for the college, only the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance should be distinct. However, universities have treated the issue differently.

Regarding the holders of the faculties who are in fact holders of a university. The rule of tenure in universities presupposes the possession of the doctor scientific title. However, it is not compulsory at the College level, more precisely at the post-secondary level. What rules should be the basis for tenure in tertiary colleges in universities? The County School Inspectorates (CSIs) use for colleges in universities a non-academic term but full of meaning. We will not popularize it, although it has been found in at least three centers in the country, but we will say that this term leads to the idea of using two parallel directions.

Since the establishment of these colleges, a number of unanswered legislative questions have emerged. Another example is related to the fact that ARACIS limits the places to the license, but the transfer of credits is allowed to the bachelor degree program for students with a baccalaureate degree, through a transfer methodology validated by the University Senate. What are the chances of college graduates getting a bachelor's degree if no place above those approved by ARACIS becomes available? There are fields and qualifications such as Nurse resposable for general care (health field and pedagogical assistance) where the students pass 100% every year and we are not talking about the dropping out of school. In addition, you can't limit the access from other post-secondary schools because we will talk about discrimination.

In most countries, university colleges are different structures, in which only students with a baccalaureate degree have access. We tried collaborations with other colleges in European countries, but they could not materialize because our colleges were not legally compatible, as Rudolph (2021) points out. The exchange of practical experience, from which the students could have developed, could not be achieved at this level.

A number of state universities have developed tertiary colleges only since 2019 when the European Human Capital Operational Program projects dedicated to this level appeared. The funded activities aimed the developing of a new non-university tertiary study programs within the university colleges. There were even direct financial incentives for students who participated at the study programs organized by university colleges. At the same time, professional training programs were organized for university teachers who were to manage the non-university tertiary level courses.

However, at the end of these projects, many of those universities dropped out the colleges. The reason was that of a simple, minimalist educational offer, but also the unsatisfactory result of the admissions where, according to Law 1 of national education, given by the Parlamentul Romaniei (2011, updated 2020), a class cannot function under a number of 15 students. In this respect, the university autonomy has no word to say. However, an example of good practice is that of the University of Pitesti (UPIT). Authorized in 2018, the College of UPIT had the largest educational offer: 13 qualifications. This was followed by the authorization of a new field and 2 other qualifications by accessing European funds

in 2019. Albu et al. (2017) and The Local Committee for the Development of the Social Partnership in Arges County (2020) emphasizes that Regional Action Plan for Education (PRAI) and Local Action Plan for Education (PLAI) studies are the basis for strategic planning in vocational and technical education. PRAI and PLAI aim to make a supply-demand correlation at regional and local level. Although the PRAI and PLAI studies on which the real educational offer was based, they did not perfectly coincide with the demand on the labor market. However, the places subsidized by the Ministry of Education starting with the 2021-2022 academic year led to a revival of this level.

3.   Research Questions

The study responds to a number of questions related to:
  i.   The existence of differences in teaching at a university level compared to a pre-university level;
  ii.   The need or not for the training of university professors in order to adapt at pre-university level;
 iii.   The need to adapt the aracip requirements to a university framework;
 iv.   Re-evaluating the legislation on methodologies and procedures that would cross the threshold of university autonomy;
  v.   The need of the existence of places for colleges to recognize the credits for bachelor level;
 vi.   The accuracy of the legislation for enrolling the titulars in university colleges;
 vii.   Clarification of the relationship of csi-university-university autonomy;
viii.   Updating the curriculum and professional standards;
 ix.   The need of a separate section of the college within the university library;
  x.   Assessing the level of professional integration of the graduates of non-university tertiary education programs and the characteristics of the transition process from school to work;
 xi.   The management perspective on the implementation of colleges in university education.

4.   Purpose of the Study

Colleges are characteristic of the pre-university education, and the legislation and implicitly the management are not yet adapted to an entity that is an integral part of a university.

The aim of the study is to investigate the implementation of tertiary colleges in universities, regarding the management of these structures, in terms of adjusting the legal framework to the specific needs and problems of a university, management and other issues arising from practice.

5.   Research Methods

The research methodology was based on a quantitative but also a qualitative analysis. The research was conducted between January 2021 and March 2022 and was mainly based on the online survey. Face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews and group discussions were added. Braun et al. (2021) highlights the importance of online surveys as a tool for qualitative research, and demonstrates that qualitative surveys are an interesting, flexible method with many applications and benefits for both researchers and

participants. The processing and interpretation of the collected data was done by organizing them, synthesizing, visualizing and transforming into information. Graphs and diagrams provided a way to view and communicate the obtained information. The qualitative approach included interpretation, explanation, comprehension. "Contrary to stereotypes, qualitative methods and results are critical to external generalization, for which quantitative research provides few useful tools" (Maxwell, 2021, p. 111).

From a quantitative point of view, the approach was based on online survey with the application of questionnaire type tools applied to a group of 40 professors that included titular professors but also associate professors and auxiliary staff of the UPIT.

The questionnaire was also adapted to the students - group of 40 (table 1), with questions related to: the teaching differences between a pre-university and a university teacher, the library section, the insertion on the labor market and the characteristics of the transition process from school to the work.

At the same time, the questionnaire was applied to the directors of tertiary colleges from 4 universities (Pitesti, Bucharest, Petrosani, Cluj) with emphasis on: the need to adapt ARACIP requirements in universities through non-university tertiary colleges, re-evaluation of current legislation, how to transfer the credits to bachelor level, the placement of tenured members in colleges and the connection with the CSI (including the financial side), the limit on university autonomy. To this last questionnaire were added questions related to the management perspective on the implementation of colleges in university education.

The group discussions were mainly addressed to students who responded more difficultly. Face-to-face or telephone interviews were added to the quantitative method in questioning managers.

Table 1. Respondent variables according to status in the University of Pitești

No. Titular professors UPIT	No. Associate professors at UPIT College	Auxiliary staff	Students
21	12	7	40

6. Findings

In order to observe if there are differences in the teaching and understanding way of the students, they answered, according to the results obtained (table 2), that there are no significant differences in the teaching and the understanding, differentiated by teacher. However, one full-time university professor out of 21 could not adapt to the level of the students, although the students also fall into the same age range (over 18 years old). The teacher generally used the lecture and not the interactivity which is much more appreciated by the students. The practical part was also highly appreciated.

Table 2. Students evaluation regarding the teaching of the professors

Scale 1-10	How to understand teaching	Titular professors at UPIT College	Associate professors at UPIT College
6-7 Satisfying	1	1	-
8-9 Good	4	2	2
10 Very good	35	18	10

Observation! No evaluation was found on the scale: Very weak (1-3) and Poor (4-5)

In order to verify the second question related to the need or not to carry out the training of university teachers in order to adapt at the pre-university level, significant differences resulted from the teachers answers. According to the results obtained (table 3), there are significant differences between titular university professors and associate professors in terms of perceptions on the continuous training of teaching staff at the College.

Table 3. Results of the test for comparing the variable of continuous training of teaching staff at the Tertiary College

Variable	Percentage% of total teaching staff	Titular professors at UPIT College	Associate professors at UPIT College
Very important	27.27	-	9
Important	9.09	-	3
Less important	51.52	17	-
Very unimportant	3.03	1	-
Not significant	9.09	3	-

To the third proposed question, 4 directors of non-university Tertiary Colleges answered. The issue was related to the need or not to adapt the requirements of ARACIP to the specifics of a university. According to the results (figure 1), there are no significant differences between the answers.
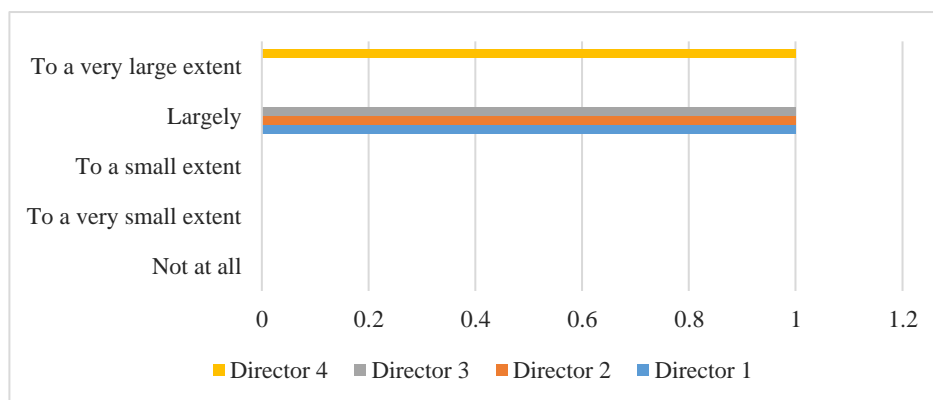

Figure 1. The extent to which an adaptation of ARACIP requirements to the specifics of a university is necessary

The fourth question was addressed to the directors and auxiliary staff and was related to the need or not to re-evaluate the legislation in order to create methodologies/procedures that would clarify the threshold of university autonomy. The result was exceptional, in the sense that all 11 respondents considered this 100% necessary.

The directors and teaching staff answered to the fifth question on the need to clarify the existence of places dedicated to colleges, for the recognition of undergraduate credits. Out of the total of 37 people interviewed, there were 4 answers with "absolutely necessary", 3 answers with "inappropriate placement in the legislation" and another 30 answers with "necessary" which also had attached comments in which various aspects regarding to taxes, strategies, market demand were mentioned.

Questions 6 and 7 were addressed only to the directors of tertiary colleges, giving them the opportunity to express their problems they encountered in recruiting new titulars. The CSI-university relationship was unanimously accepted as very good.

The 33 teachers responded to the need to update curricula and training standards, with revision/updating proposals. It turned out that only in the class of Nurse resposable for general care, the content is updated and adapted to the professional training at the level of economic and social development. However, there are old curricular documents, even older than 2004, for most qualifications.

The 9th question resulted from the ARACIP certification visit. Is there a special section in the university library for this level or not? This question was answered by all 80 respondents, consisting of: teachers, auxiliary staff and students (table 4).

Table 4. The extent to which a separate section of the college is required within the university library

Variable	Percentage % of total teachers, auxiliary staff and students	Teachers and auxiliary staff	Students
Very important	46.25	18	19
Important	48.75	20	19
Less important	1.25	1	0
Very unimportant	0	0	0
Not significant	1.25	1	2

The professional integration of the graduates of non-university tertiary education programs and the characteristics of the transition process from school to work was described by a number of 10 graduates of the tertiary college from UPIT. The purpose of this question was to identify and propose solutions to the main problems that appear during the process of the integration of graduates into the labor market. Analyzing the answers received, it was noted that 6 students found that the skills and knowledge acquired match very well to the needs of skills and abilities related to jobs in labor market organizations, and the remaining 4 students indicated a match in to a large extent of the skills and knowledge acquired to the needs of the labor market, as can be seen from the distribution shown in figure 2.
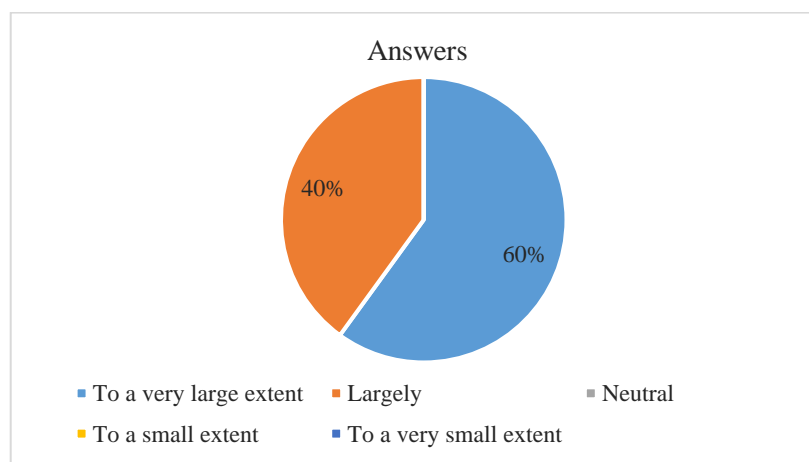

Figure 2. The extent to which students appreciate that the skills and knowledge acquired match to the needs of skills and abilities in the labor market

Regarding the situation on the labor market after 6 months from graduation (figure 3), 75% of the respondents answered: 38.00% of the graduates have a job, 13.00% of the respondents are self-employed and 49.00% they mentioned another situation.
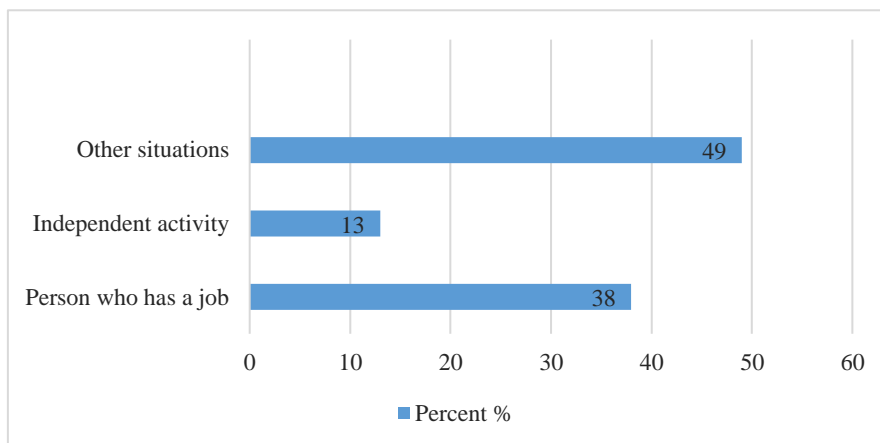

Figure 3. The situation on the labor market after 6 months from graduation

The four directors answered to the questions about the management perspective on the implementation of colleges in university education. This time there were a series of short questions related to management, if the implementation of colleges would continue or if they consider that they should be liquidated, if the management of such a college is similar to that of a faculty or department, what other proposals do they have for future development. The answers led to a clear, unanimous conclusion.

7. Conclusions

It is necessary to adapt the requirements of ARACIP within a university because the criteria do not correspond perfectly and do not highlight the real needs of the education system at this level.

It is necessary to re-evaluate the legislation in order to create methodologies/procedures that clarify the threshold of university autonomy both in terms of organizational methodology, but also the financial transfer between CSI and a university.

Clear credit transfer methodologies are needed before validating in the senate of each university in order to discuss these places with ARACIS to grant a number of places dedicated to graduates certified in tertiary colleges, the main condition being certainly to pass the baccalaureate exam. It seems that at this time it is not possible to make a real transfer of credits before updating the credits related to the professional training standards. In addition, for the Nurse resposable for general care classes, where the demand is higher, these credits are completely missing from the standards, even if they were updated in 2018.

There are problems with recruiting new titulars to non-university Tertiary Colleges. It turned out that the college is presented as a faculty, so the tenure should be done through its own methodology, without the involvement of the CSI, the condition that differs from the pre-university system is that of having a doctor degree. It is a problem that currently limits the development of colleges because there are

university professors who exceed the norm of teaching hours if they add the hours from the College. An inter-departmental request is even proposed, as there are currently between faculties the so-called "orders/professor/hours". Also, the good connection between CSIs and universities has emerged, highlighting the lack of methodologies to clarify certain situations related to student certification, the involvement of CSIs in the tenure of the College on the threshold of that university autonomy.

The proposals for revision/updating of school curricula must be in line with the revision/updating of vocational training standards. The process of developing standards means the participation of education experts together with companies and sectoral committees. Each university that provides tertiary colleges is interested in creating curricular documents that meets of the labor market requirements. The universities together with economic operators interested in reviewing/updating curricular documents, can send requests in this regard to National Center for the Development of Vocational and Technical Education. Vocational and Technical Education (VET):

> Has an important role in the sustainable socioeconomic development of countries. However, requests on skills of human source which is needed to actualize the development on both social and economic dimensions are changing due to the labor market. At the present time, expectations from VET are evolving to develop a human source who have more cognitive skills and practical vocational skills. (Mahmut & Suna, 2019, p. 168)

The analyzed answers also showed that a special section for the students of the college inside the university library is needed. The library must purchase, at the request of the colleges management, a book fund for the areas and level of education of the students and also facilitate online access to the database. Through their encyclopedic book collection, the university libraries cover the bibliography of the disciplines from the curricula of all qualifications, especially, legislatively speaking, a college can be authorized/accredited only in a field that is authorized accredited at the bachelor level.

Regarding the transition from school to the labor market, UPIT students received support in planning professional and academic development in the context of lifelong learning. They had career guidance activities, academic counseling activities and specialized internships. The respondents positively appreciate the professional training acquired by completing the curriculum specific to the study program, but also the relevance of the informative (thematic) content of the studied disciplines for their personal and professional training and development.

The sample used for the insertion on the labor market is quite small. It is to be enlarged after several generations of graduates, in order to become quantifiable.

The difference between college and university is complicated. It is one of the most discussed topics today. However, the management of the college has become a reality in academic life which now approaches vaguely, for example, the specifics of the budget funding. The college management, like that of a university, is closely linked to that of the administration and cannot exist without each other. They complement each other from the perspective of achieving the strategic and tactical objectives of a university. The academic management, through the establishment of colleges, aimed to maintain a stability and functioning state in a certain structure, identifying this new, optimal structure. But, in the conditions of the appearance of internal and external changing factors, the administrative management

reflects a strategic approach to the fulfillment of the activities and the good financial-accounting functioning of an entire university in which the non-university tertiary college is integrated. A continuous staff training program is required. Previous studies has shown the importance of VET cooperation with the economic environment for increasing cognitive capacity through the continuous training of teachers and supporting the VET infrastructure (Flake et al., 2017; Mahmut & Suna, 2019; Nielsen, 2010; Okolie & Yasin, 2017; Stratton et al., 2017).

A training program for the directors of tertiary colleges is needed, including the related secretariat and an economic directorate that integrates various and special issues. "Although it is hard for a leadership style to achieve perfection, it may tend to crystallize and generalize such a style" (Zlate, 2004, p. 203).

Another aspect would be the one proposed by the responding directors, to organize meetings/discussions between universities in order to analyze their problems, and will send them to the ministry in order to find solutions. The non-university tertiary colleges in the universities are in full development, an example of good practices being the UPIT college. In this regard, it is even proposed to develop a guide of good practice. The colleges are developing like a faculty, but harder because there are still many issues that are not based on a legislative response.

There are two specific and fundamental goals, in the existence of a college: the acquisition, by graduates, of learning outcomes that are useful now and, in the future, adapted to the requirements of the labor market that is constantly and rapidly changing; the acquisition, by graduates, of those transferable results in areas of key competence necessary for rapid social, and successful integration into the labor market.

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