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***Strategy for Support and
Constant Improvement of
the Quality of Teaching
and Learning at Higher
Education Institutions***

2023-2028

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“Learning results from what the student does and thinks and only from what the student does and thinks. The teacher can advance learning only by influencing what the student does to learn.”

Herbert A. Simon

CONTENTS

Part I: INTRODUCTION	3
Why is the Teaching and Learning Strategy necessary?	3
The basis for setting the strategy	4
Part II: STRATEGY	7
Vision	7
Objectives	7
Part III: IMPLEMENTATION	10
Activities	10
Indicators – progress indicators	10
Action plan	11
SOURCES	11
Documents	11
Publications	11
APPENDICES	13
A: Seven principles of smart teaching	13
B: The schematic representation of the objectives	13
C: Form for the action plan	14

Part I: INTRODUCTION

Why is the Teaching and Learning Strategy necessary¹?

The changes in the education system that includes higher education as well, must keep pace with the changing times. This means that education has to follow constant changes at the job market from the industrial model of production towards the fast-transforming technology-guided and mutually connected globalized economy of knowledge. It is necessary to optimize the learning process, including the use of technological innovations for enhancing and transforming learning, and thus develop competencies for lifelong learning. Moreover, one should not neglect the change in the learners' expectations, who demand the education system that is more connected and relevant for their everyday life and professional progress.

Higher education is the last and the highest level of education in education systems, therefore it should offer the highest quality of teaching and scientific research. The question is how to assess and provide the quality in these two main areas of activities.

Competencies for scientific research are, to a large extent, defined by the relevant regulations that provide measurability, primarily through publishing scientific articles at the relevant lists, the participation in scientific research projects, invited lectures, journal editing, peer reviewing of scientific articles, etc. On the other hand, competencies for teaching are hardly even mentioned in the documents and most often are measured by the results obtained by student polls, which is often the only way of measurement. Such an approach is prone to criticism, primarily because of the lack or insufficient validity and relevance of the used instruments, mostly questionnaires.

Henard and Roseveare (2012) state that there are many factors that have brought quality teaching to the forefront of higher education policies. Almost every education system has experienced substantial increase of the number of students in recent decades and the student profile has become more diverse. Henard and Roseveare very concisely define quality teaching as the use of pedagogical techniques to produce learning outcomes for students. Higher education institutions should enable that the education they provide fulfills the students' expectations and employers' demand, both for the present and for the future. Moreover, Henard and Roseveare (2012) define new teaching and learning paradigms in higher education, which mean:

- Re-designing of curricula,
- More intense connecting of teaching and research,
- New relationships regarding access to teachers, and a wider range of communication and collaborative working through learning platforms,
- Re-thinking of student workload and teaching load,
- Continuous upgrading in pedagogy, use of technologies, assessment models aligned with student-centered learning,
- Creating of innovative learning platforms,
- Providing guidance and tutoring to students with new means and methods,
- Assessing impacts and documenting effectiveness of the teaching delivered.

Therefore, the task of the university and the faculties, i.e. the higher education teaching staff, is not only to transmit knowledge but also to support and prepare students to become qualified

¹ The Strategy for Support and Constant Improvement of the Quality of Teaching and Learning at Higher Education Institutions, short form the **Teaching and Learning Strategy**.

professionals able to become part of the job market and contribute to the development of the society as a whole. Teachers' competencies influence the competencies of their students. Thus, a planned approach to this task is necessary, and the first step in planning is to set up strategic goals.

The basis for setting the strategy

There are two general documents that define the framework of higher education in the Republic of Serbia – the Law on Higher Education² and the Education Development Strategy³. Main objectives of higher education are specified in the article 3 of the Law on Higher Education:

The objectives of higher education are:

- 1) transfer of scientific, artistic and professional knowledge and skills;
- 2) development of science and enhancement of artistic creativity;
- 3) provision of scientific, artistic and professional young staff;
- 4) formation of a creative population that continuously adopt and create new knowledge;
- 5) provision of equal conditions for acquisition of higher education to individuals and life-long education;
- 6) substantial increase in the number of citizens with higher education
- 7) enhancement of international openness of the higher education system.

Law on Higher Education, article 3

All the aforementioned objectives of higher education should be detailed through various documents of higher education institutions, which would provide for their realization. Among the given seven objectives, we single out the first and the fourth one, whose realization requires top level teaching performed by highly prepared and motivated teaching staff. The Teaching and learning strategy at each higher education institution should be one of the key documents whose function is, starting from the objectives defined by the Law and the Education Development Strategy, to define the detailed objectives, procedures and activities for their realization and the corresponding indicators for monitoring the realization of the specified objectives.

Apart from the objectives of higher education, the Law also defines two academic freedoms.

Academic freedoms are:

- 1) *freedom of scientific-research and artistic work, including freedom to publish and present to the public the outcomes of the scientific-research and artistic achievements thereof, while observing the rights of intellectual property;*
- 2) *freedom to make a choice of the method of interpretation of the teaching contents.*

Law on Higher Education, article 5

The Education Development Strategy in the Republic of Serbia until 2030 is the general strategic document for the whole education system that specifies the vision and mission of education and two general objectives.

² THE LAW ON HIGHER EDUCATION ("Sl. glasnik RS", number 88/2017, 73/2018, 27/2018 - law, 67/2019, 6/2020 - laws, 11/2021 – authentic interpretation, 67/2021 and 67/2021 - law)

³ THE EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA UNTIL 2030, ("Službeni glasnik RS", number 63/2021)

The vision of education development is to provide high quality education for the achievement of the full potential of the population and in particular of every child and young person in the Republic of Serbia.

The mission of education is to provide high quality education that serves the development of the society as a whole.

General objective 1: Increased quality of teaching and learning, fairness and availability of pre-university education and the strengthened pedagogic function of education institutions.

General objective 2: Increased quality and enhanced relevance and fairness of higher education.

General objective 2 is elaborated through four specific objectives:

Specific objective 2.1: Enhanced the quality of offer, human resources and outcomes of higher education

Specific objective 2.2: Enhanced relevance of higher education at the national and international level

Specific objective 2.3: Enhanced scope and fairness of higher education

Specific objective 2.4: Digitalization of higher education

EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY IN THE REPUBLIC OF SERBIA UNTIL 2030

The Strategy further elaborates the ways of achieving specific goals, so for the specific goal 2.1 it states “When it comes to human resources in HE, the first step will be to define quantitative and qualitative indicators for assessment of teaching competencies at HEIs that should become part of the Framework of teaching competencies in HE. After that, the process will start to create a new concept of the system of continuous professional training of teaching, administrative and technical staff at HEIs, to define quantitative and qualitative indicators for assessment of professional training and to define new criteria and procedures for the election and promotion of teaching staff at HEIs.” However, these activities have not started yet, that is there is still no general document that further specifies teaching competencies, as well as other segments of the teaching and learning process. The lack of a general document to a certain degree complicates the process of setting up the teaching and learning strategies at higher education institutions.

Regardless of the clearly and strongly recognized teaching aspect in the general documents, and then through the accreditation standards, there is no sufficiently valid mechanism that will enable the correct and full implementation of the abovementioned objectives and the complete achievement of the adequate standards. For example, if the teacher has the freedom to choose the method of interpretation of the teaching content, it would be very desirable for every teacher or teaching assistant to be obliged to master various methods. At most of the higher education institutions, the acquisition and improvement of teaching competencies is, as a rule, the matter of the free choice of a particular teacher or assistant. Also, the monitoring of the teaching and learning process boils down to the insufficiently relevant data, i.e. the indicators that do not indicate all the necessary aspects.

The objectives and activities whose purpose is the improvement of the teaching process at a higher education institution should be recognized at all three levels. The first level is the institutional one and it means the establishing of policies and quality strategies that clearly define the objectives,

activities and indicators in the teaching process. The second level is the level of the study program that comprises the activities for monitoring and improvement of the design, content and outcomes of the program, aimed at providing all the necessary competencies required by the qualification that is provided by a particular study program. Finally, the third level is the teaching staff who have to be trained to provide, through the teaching process, for every student to achieve the outcomes of each particular course, and, through them, acquire all the necessary competencies for the successful completion of the studies and entering the job market.

The passing of this document should be based on the analysis of the current teaching process at a higher education institution, but also on the experience of leading European universities and relevant research on the teaching in higher education.

Part II: STRATEGY

Vision

To provide quality and efficient higher education, primarily through the teaching process, for the increasingly diverse student population, which will bring them to the profitable employment and which will equip them with knowledge and develop the skills necessary for the professional development in their lives.

Objectives

The most important objective of study programs that is already indicated in the vision is to provide employability of graduated students at demanding positions, as well as to train the students for the process of life-long learning. Since this objective is placed at the end of the education process, it is necessary to enable its realization through other objectives. The first objective is certainly the transition of the students from high school to university education, where it is necessary that a student enters a learning- inspiring environment and the teaching staff with exceptional professional and pedagogical competencies, in order to provide for the adequate progress of the students. From all that was mentioned above, there follow five strategic objectives:

Objective 1: TRANSITION (entering higher education) - Provided support system for the students to enter higher education



Description: Students enter higher education with different levels of previous knowledge, working habits and learning styles, which often leads to lower achievements. Therefore it is necessary to develop a support system for students who do not have all the necessary knowledge and skills to successfully get involved in the teaching and learning process.

Objective 2: STUDENT ADVANCEMENT - The application of a number of innovative approaches and methods in teaching and assessment that will require greater and deeper student engagement

Description: Insufficiently harmonized demands through individual courses in the study program can hinder the student advancement or leave the students without some key knowledge and skills. Better harmonization of individual courses in terms of content, work methods and assessment would provide for the student advancement to be quicker and of higher quality. A study program should not be a mere sum of individual courses, but each course should contribute to the objectives and outcomes of the study program that are defined first. Certainly, students would have to be designed well and in great detail, so that they provide students' sensible activity in class and during the teaching and learning process, and at the same time enhance their awareness raising and responsibility towards work and their own progress. Moreover, it is necessary to place special emphasis on offering support for the students who show above the average results and motivation.

Objective 3: EMPLOYABILITY (exiting the higher education) – A student is prepared for the professional career and has the necessary competencies related to the specific discipline or disciplines s/he studied, but also all the necessary general competencies (technical competencies for the 21st century, critical thinking, readiness to cooperate) and has developed discipline-specific, transferable and critical thinking skills

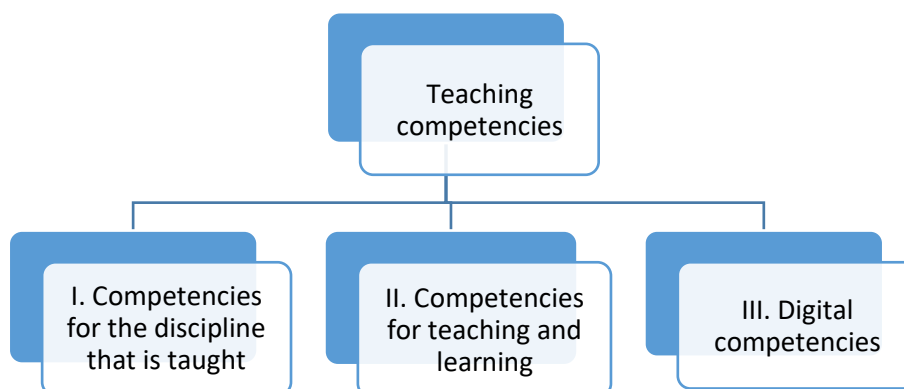


Description: The job market changes rapidly and places increasing demands that include a wide range of competencies. Along with the technical competencies that are developed through the curriculum, it is necessary to include more activities and topics to develop additional competencies necessary for the successful entering the job market and professional development, such as: critical thinking, creativity, cooperation, communication, digital literacy, media literacy, technological literacy, flexibility, leadership, initiative, productivity, social skills.

Objective 4: TEACHING COMPETENCIES – Developed system of assessment, support and development of teaching staff for achievement of quality and efficient teaching and assessment

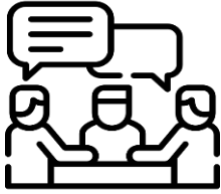


Description: Teaching competencies include a broad spectrum of knowledge, skills and attitudes necessary for the realization of efficient and quality student-oriented teaching. Clearly defined competencies and the models how to acquire them should be the first step in achieving this objective. The second stage means the use of adequate indicator of the quality of teaching competencies, which have to be much more reliable and valid than the currently most frequent student polls. Teaching competencies include a number of specific competencies shown in Picture 1. It is necessary to have a mechanism that will first enable all the teachers to perform the self-evaluation of the necessary competencies and then provide for their acquisition or improvement.



Picture 1: Teaching competencies

Objective 5: LEARNING ENVIRONMENT – Provided learning environment necessary for performing high-quality higher education in the 21st century



Description: The learning process itself has to include various situations and options. Classroom teaching should not remain the dominant environment. Turning to the experiential learning through practice, research-based application of education, as well as the use of great options offered by digital platforms will enable new, dynamic and efficient learning environments.

Part III: IMPLEMENTATION

To implement the strategy, it is necessary, on the one hand, to define the measures and activities that will enable the defined objectives to be achieved, and on the other hand to choose an adequate set of indicator that will enable monitoring of the realization of the planned activities and measure the fulfillment of each of the objectives. Activities and indicators together with time benchmarks, necessary finances and responsible bodies comprise the action plan.

Activities

Planned activities that should lead to the realization of strategic goals differ in duration and intention. According to duration they can be long-term (example – teacher trainings) and short-term (example – purchase of equipment), while according to intention they could be directed at students, teaching staff or the institution.

Together with other things aimed at achieving strategic objectives, the following activities can be planned:

- Enhancing the criteria for employment and promotion,
- Support for students (e.g. counseling, career guidance, mentoring...),
- Forming bodies for development of teaching and learning,
- Increased professional training of teaching staff in the field of teaching competencies,
- Awards for teaching excellence,
- Support for innovative pedagogy,
- Organization and management of teaching and learning,
- Evaluation of teaching (i.e. program evaluations, evaluation of learning experience).

Indicators – progress indicators

A set of indicators whose aim is to monitor the realization of activities and achievement of objectives should contain clearly defined indicators, the procedure of collection and processing of the relevant data. On the basis of the analysis of the current state it is important to define the intended values for each indicator, as well as the dynamics when these values are to be achieved.

Examples of possible indicators are:

- The percentage of teaching staff encompassed by the training,
- The percentage of students involved in additional courses,
- The number of developed and completed surveys related to the quality of the teaching process,
- A developed instrument for self-evaluation of teachers' competencies,
- The number of innovated courses in terms of teaching methods and/or assessment.

Action plan

On the basis of the detailed analysis of the current state and potentials of the institution, the action plan is established for the entire duration of the Strategy. A provisional action plan is given in Appendix C.

The action plan is the basis for reporting on the progress in the realization of the Strategy.

SOURCES

Documents

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APPENDICES

A: Seven principles of smart teaching

Title: How Learning Works: Seven Research-Based Principles for Smart Teaching

Author(s): Susan A. Ambrose, Michael W. Bridges, Michele DiPietro, Marsha C. Lovett, Marie K. Norman, Richard E. Mayer

Publisher: Jossey-Bass

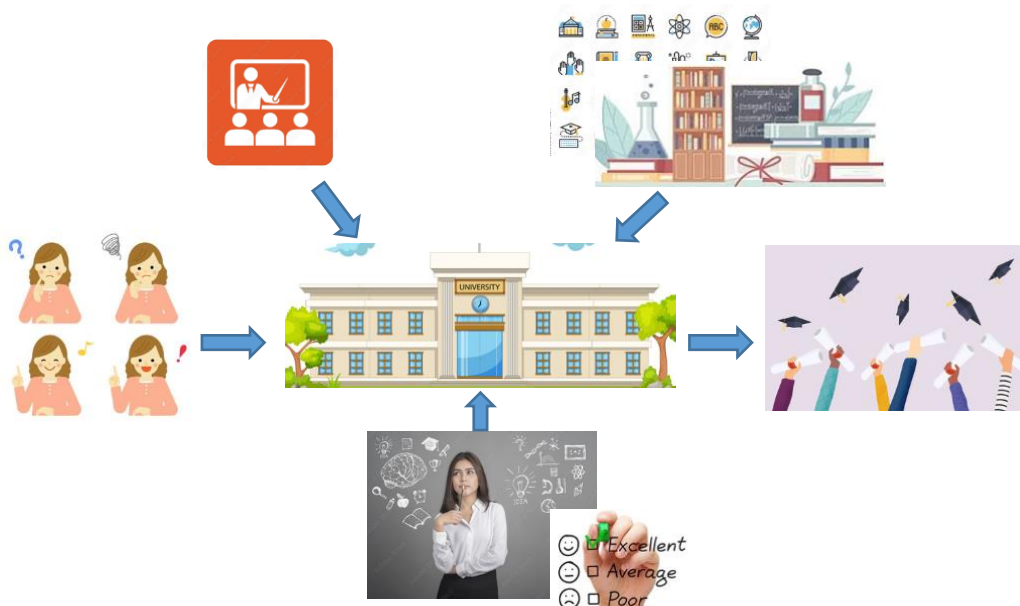
Year: 2010

ISBN: 0470484101; 9780470484104

The seven principles are:

- Students' **prior knowledge** can help or hinder learning.
- How students **organize knowledge** influences how they learn and apply what they know.
- Students' **motivation** determines, directs, and sustains what they do to learn.
- To develop **mastery**, students must acquire component skills, practice integrating them, and know when to apply what they have learned.
- Goal-directed **practice** coupled with targeted **feedback** enhances the quality of students' learning.
- Students' current level of **development** interacts with the social, emotional, and intellectual **climate** of the course to impact learning.
- To become **self-directed learners**, students must learn to monitor and adjust their approaches to learning.

B: The schematic representation of the objectives



C: Form for the action plan

Objective 1: TRANSITION (entrance into the higher education)

	Activity	Progress indicators	Intended value	Responsible body	Time span	Preconditions
A1.1	Summer school for the newly enrolled students	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● Percentage of involved freshmen students● Number of realized courses/classes	<ul style="list-style-type: none">● 30% freshmen● 60 classes	Heads of study programs	10. 08 – 15. 09. 2023	<u>technical</u> : provided space and/or electronic platform <u>human</u> : junior teaching staff and senior students <u>financial</u> : 350.000,00 rsd
A1.2						