Certification of Academic Teaching in South Africa

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Author(s):Vassilios Makrakis (Frederick University), Nelly Kostoulas (University of Crete) with the participation of key staff from partners' universities. Ongoing discussion toward an Action Plan.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report deals with the certification of academic teaching, and more specifically with the justification of its setting, the impact it could have on modernizing the Higher Education Area in South Africa, the possible impact on students' learning and employability, the impact on the implementation of SDGs. In the first part of this report, we are discussing the reasons for certifying academic teaching. In the second part, we follow-up with examples of certification in various countries. In the third part, we are linking standards and competences with academic teaching certification bringing in the discussion the South African framework of teaching standards, competences and performance indicators we have developed (D3.1) as well as the UK Professional Standards Framework (PSF). In the fourth and last part, based on the above, we are moving towards a South African teaching certification program supplemented with a proposed example of core modules. This will be further discussed with internal and external stakeholders in order to come up with an Action Plan.

1. Why Academic Teaching Be Certified?

There are some trends worldwide for a policy that all tertiary education institutions staff must possess a kind of professional development that leads towards a teaching certification. This might become a must for new academic staff in order to be eligible to teach. The argument behind such a policy is that having a mastery of research does not necessarily imply a competence in teaching. Career advancement, in most cases, is determined by research publications, not inspired teaching.

It is true that all academic staff in higher education are facing tremendous challenges both internally and externally, such as the need for blended learning, especially in cases of disrupted education (e.g. Covid-19), the increased demand for transversal and high-order-thinking skills, the digitalisation of everyday life, the emergence of learning technologies enabled by ICTs, the increased demand for flexible teaching and lifelong learning.

Various studies show that teacher-centered methodologies still persist in higher education and academic staff use ad hoc teaching methods for carrying out their teaching duties. There is increasing empirical evidence that the prevailing teaching practices in higher education do not encourage the sort of learning that society demands. Teaching remains largely instructor-led, assessment of student work is often trivial and curricula are more likely to emphasise decontextualised content than the acquisition of lifelong and real-life knowledge and skills.

At the same time, there is an increasing body of knowledge on how teaching methods and curriculum design affect deep, autonomous and reflective teaching and learning. However, most academic staff beyond those coming from Education Faculties are largely ignorant of this scholarship, perpetuating teaching practices that are dominated by behaviorist traditions and surface learning.

The fact that an increasing number of universities, especially in South Africa have institutionalised continuing professional development through Centers of Teaching and Learning, relying on such voluntary professional development does not have any significant impact on teaching quality. Added to the fact that only a small fraction of academic undergo such kind of professional development.

2. Experiences with Academic Teaching Certification

Our review shows that many universities worldwide have taken initiatives to integrate academic teaching certification in their institutions. The policies vary, some institutions demand from all fresh recruited academic staff to show such a kind of competence and/or undergo a foundation course on that before getting their position. Others, have developed special postgraduate programs that provide teaching certification which in many cases can be transferable to other institutions. For example, in UK an academic teaching postgraduate certificate is compulsory for full-time lecturers by including it as a requirement of getting a post, or for getting upgraded to a higher-ranking academic position. Such a certification is accredited by either SEDA or the Higher Education Academy (ICED, 2014). In Scandinavian countries, it has been mandatory for all assistant professors to follow a teacher training course. In Switzerland the national framework requires academic staff in the field of applied sciences to be trained on teaching methodologies (Ibid.).

In Germany the 'Framework Law for Universities' requires that pedagogical ability should be assessed in the appointment process of professors. Each federal state interprets the Framework law which results in differential implementation (ICED, 2014). In Australia policy varies from university to university ranging from mandatory completion of a Graduate Certificate in Tertiary Teaching (or some similar program) to Foundations of University Teaching programs (some of which would be equivalent to one unit in a Graduate Certificate) to short induction programs (Ibid.).

In South Africa, whilst teacher training for university lecturers is not compulsory across the sector, some institutions have attached it to staff induction and probation. The South African Council for Higher Education encourages and have to provide evidence on staff development policies and strategies which promote the professional competence of academic staff and pay particular attention to the development needs of new personnel. In South Africa a HELTASA is focusing on Foundation Courses and another on Professional Development. In South Africa there is little engagement of other agencies beyond HELTASA, although every Higher Education Institution has a Center for Continuing Professional Development.

Although academic teaching certification is not mandatory in most of the countries, in many universities across the world students' opinion of academic teaching performance is taken into consideration, especially in case of academic promotion and/or recruitment. However, this is more judged more in terms of satisfaction rather than on specific standards and competences.

3. **Linking Standards and Competences with Academic Teaching Certification**

In the context of PUAT, the South African Academic Teaching/Standards Framework for SDGs (D3.1) including 20 standards based on the three curriculum criteria, 60 competences and 180 competences' performance indicators, was developed and discussed during the Durban Train-the-Trainer workshop in January 2020. The PUAT standards, competences, performance indicators and resources framework can be a valuable resource in developing teaching certification policies and practices.

To our knowledge, the UK Professional Standards Framework (PSF) is one has been publicized and used in various context (https://www.advance-he.ac.uk/guidance/teaching-and-learning/ukpsf). The UK Professional Standards Framework (PSF), is a globally-recognised framework for benchmarking success within HE teaching and learning support. It is said to be essential to enabling enhancement, and raising the profile, of teaching and learning in Higher Education. As of December 2019, over 125 institutions across the world have accredited teaching development programmes in against the PSF. Over 125,000 staff in 90 different countries have had their individual teaching practice recognised through the Fellowship scheme, underpinned by the UK PSF. A comprehensive set of professional standards and guidelines for everyone involved in teaching and supporting learning in HE, the PSF can be applied to personal development programmes at an individual, institutional or national level to improve teaching quality and celebrate success. As a globally-recognised framework for benchmarking success within HE teaching and learning support, the PSF is used by institutions to:

- enhance the quality and prominence of teaching and learning activities
- inform the professional development programmes for staff
- provide an environment in which staff are encouraged and supported to develop their practice
- provide an externally benchmarked and accredited mechanism of peer-review to demonstrate quality

Generally speaking, what is lacking are policy and credentials for institutionalizing academic teaching certification. The role of academic leadership and relevant governmental authorities is of paramount importance.

4. **Towards a South African Teaching Certification Program**

Based on the above analysis, it is of paramount importance to make all efforts for creating an Action Plan for a South African Teaching Certification Program, which can be provided as a model. PUAT in close cooperation with relevant governmental authorities should start discussing such an initiative. Higher Education Institutions should also demand new appointed staff to have certification in teaching. Thus, without some form of government intervention these changes just won't happen. However, it is not unreasonable for government to insist on professional standards for teaching, given the cost of higher education.

Good teaching is a skill in itself and in order to guarantee the quality of education it should be compulsory for all academic staff. It should consist of a series of modules,

allowing academic staff to assess and develop all facets of teaching. Completing this foundation course will lead to award of an academic teaching certificate, which can be valid for all higher education institutions. Many universities worldwide use awards and incentives (e.g. University Teaching Fellowships and nomination for National Teaching fellowships; salary increase, financial allowances) in a way to motivate academic staff for getting teaching methodology qualifications.

A professional development program leading to an academic teaching certification should be modular, flexible and blended (combining online and face-to-face training). It can also utilize techniques and methodologies such as mobile mentorship and peer coaching. Some preliminary suggestions for thinking, reflecting and negotiating with various stakeholders in the context of South Africa could include the following.

Suggested Core Modules

- **Module 1 – Who Am I? Critical reflections-** Participants will be asked to reflect about their teaching practice and write a **brief teaching philosophy statement** (400 words). In addition to these reflective pieces and your teaching philosophy, participants will participate in online discussion forums which will allow to extend their conversations and complement what is discussed face-to-face in class.

- **Module 2 – What are the roles and functions of a Higher Education in the Changing World?** Discuss the roles and functions of Higher Education, starting from the more traditional one that is the socialization and replication function moving towards vocationalisation, liberalisation and transformation. Connect these roles with the educational philosophies and paradigms in light of the quest for SDGs.

- **Module 3 – What makes a competent academic instructor?** – Explores the core dimensions of professionalism and quality in teaching and learning for a sustainable future. Participants will be asked to compare their educational philosophies as revealed in module 1 with the new demands for an academic instructor in light of the UN Agenda 2030 and the role of Higher Education.

- **Module 4- Teaching strategies for embedding transversal skills (e.g. 10Cs), sustainability justice, ICT-enabled PBL and SDGs in course curricula.** – Explores the pedagogies and teaching suitable for embedding these to multiple academic disciplines.

- **Module 5 – Developing student-drive learning activities.** –Explores how we can develop learning activities that place the students as agents of change and co-constructors of course curricula, using the CARE Methodology.

- **Module 6 - Course curriculum revision and design** – Addresses principles of course design using the DeCoRe+ methodology. The Deconstruction-Construction-Reconstruction methodology (DeCoRe) is underpinned by transformative learning pedagogies. Looks at the drivers of curriculum design and explores different models of curriculum that can increase student engagement.

- **Module 7 - Assessment to inform instruction and promote learning** – Delves into ideas and methods of assessment for learning using the DREAM Methodology.

- **Module 8 – Lessons learned: Your teaching philosophy** – Participants are invited to consolidate their learning from the previous modules and consider what has been changed in light of their previous educational philosophy explicated in Module 1.

In the context of an evolving transformative paradigm in pedagogy enabled by ICTs, teachers have to see themselves functioning as facilitators and mentors, as resources and as curriculum developers (Makrakis, 2017) as well as transformative intellectuals (Giroux & McLaren, 1996). Each of these roles is associated with specific activities. Academic staff as "facilitators and mentors" will guide and facilitate learners' critical and creative thinking in a collaborative learning environment enabled by new technology. Teachers as "resources" will have to develop learners' capacities for active citizenship and to contribute to their fellow teachers' professional development enabled by new technology. As "curriculum developers", academic staff critically assess school knowledge, reorder and enrich curriculum according to the principles of new pedagogy enabled by new technology. Academic staff as "transformative intellectuals" are involved in developing a discourse that unites the language of critique with the language of possibility (Giroux, 1988). Teachers functioning as "transformative intellectuals" are giving students an active voice, making the political more pedagogical and the latter more political (Giroux, n.d.). In other words, academic instructors are able and committed to function as change agents of reorienting what they teach and how they teach for promoting a key goal for 21st Century education that is, learning to transform oneself and society.

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