

## The Methods of Professional Development within the Higher Educational Institutions

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**Abstract:** The main purpose of this analytical research paper was to distinguish the importance/the contribution of development methods – formal/non-formal, the analysis of different programs framed on one of these, but also, the correlation of these development methods with the research population profile – the didactic personnel that activates in the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration<sup>1</sup> frame. Among the subjects approached through the implementation of the research methodology used (questionnaire ) on population, we mention: the personal policy promoted by FEAA, the delineation of the researched population profile, the presentation of professional development needs of the didactic personnel (formal, non-formal), the importance and contribution of faculty internal professional development programs on the didactic personnel.

**Keywords:** personnel policy, development needs, professional development programs, university management, formal methods, non-formal methods.

**Jel Classification:** M12, M53, M54.

### 1. The present stage of knowledge of the researched domain

*"To perfect means to change, to be perfect means to change often."*

*(Winston Churchill)*

This paper wants to be a thoroughgoing analyze of professional development in the context of the concept of "continuous formation" of human resources from educational services in Iasi city<sup>2</sup>. Often incorporated in the large concept of "continuous formation", professional development means much more than formation/obtaining knowledge and abilities, it means in fact to improve the existing knowledge and abilities, and to raise the level of professional preparation according with the institutional and/or functional changes existing in the context that human resources activates (in the case of educational services – "homo academicus", after

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<sup>1</sup> In the present paper it will be used the short form of the *Faculty of Economics and Business Administration, Iasi – FEAA*.

<sup>2</sup> This exploratory study is only a part of a more extended research on the "Analysis of the professional development of human resources in the higher education system", which was realized in may 2008; and the results were presented in the dissertation paper of the author (in June 2008).

the term used by A. Neculau, in „*Câmpul universitar și actorii săi*”). The professional development takes place on the whole professional life period under the form of programs organized inside and outside the organization/institution, and assures the improvement of knowledge/abilities, which will allow the persons to unfold their activities in an efficient manner and also to keep up with the institutional and/or functional changes that appear on the way.

Bolam (1982) distinguishes as purposes the following personal professional development activities:

- The improvement of performance of the entire personnel of the school (as a whole) or of the group;
- The improvement of the professional performance of each teacher;
- The extension of individual professional experience through the career development or promotion;
- The development of professional knowledge for each teacher;
- The extension of personal or general education of each teacher (example: lectures that don't have the content related to education or taught discipline).

Beside these purposes, the personnel professional development also has to include: (1) the attitude change regarding the involvement of the employees; (2) the growth of communication abilities; (3) the usage of the best judgements in innovative decisions (Rotaru, Prodan, 2005, p. 177).

But there isn't only one unanimous accepted definition for this concept. The human resource professional development pursues the growth of teachers' professional capacity for their continuous increase and promotion in institution. The purpose of human resource development is to increase the teachers' capacity to fulfil successfully bigger duties and responsibilities for upper level. For example, Hoyle (1982) defined „the professional development” as the process through which a professional develops his/ her knowledge and skills necessary for an effective professional practice” leads to the idea that “professionals need to have a certain degree of autonomy in deciding the type of developing activity they need (Gavrilovici, Iosifescu, Prodan, 2004, p. 189).

Therefore, the process of professional development establishes the connection between institutional and individual needs. In an educational context, this need is expressed as “a systematic effort to harmonize personal interests, wishes and needs, carefully evaluated, in the view of continuing a career, with the developing needs of the organization in which the person works”. The final purpose is the one of improving the education's quality in higher educational institutions. (Piper, Glatter, 1978, p. 58).

There are more methods to divide on categories the personnel professional development activities. One way is to distinguish between the activities or *the programs that are taking place in the interior of the institution and the ones organized in its exterior*. The activities that take place in the interior of the institution can divide also in two subcategories: *methods direct related to the function/job* (example meditation, committee association, job rotation, job assistance, professional preparation with the purpose of fulfilling the responsibilities, etc.) and *methods indirect related by function/job* (for example; senior lectures, psychological testing, the formation in the human resource area, case study, role playing, business games, etc.)

Also the improvement of necessary intellectual and emotional abilities can also be obtained through the formal and non-formal professional development methods<sup>1</sup>

The evolution of the university career is realized in rapport of scientific educational – didactic criteria, but also in rapport of reference elements for the candidates research activity and even in rapport of organizational variables (of involving in development organizational activities and tasks). The scientific criteria that were mentioned before can be fulfilled by the didactic personnel through the participation to various formal professional development methods, especially. Among the specific formal methods, the more used ones are: scientific conferences/conventions (national and international), the international mobility programs (the type “visiting professors”), the research projects, and the publishing activity.

At the opposite pole, between the specific non-formal development methods, we mention: workshops, trainings (in domain/personnel development), summer school (national/international), etc.

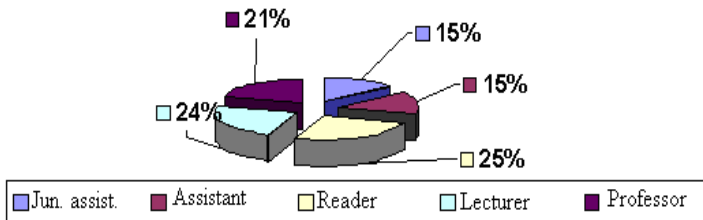
## **2. The presentation of hypothesis, of an possible solution or an systematize proposal**

*The subjects* of this exploratory study have been selected randomly from the didactic staff of the Faculty of Economics and Business Administration of Iasi. In order to obtain a representative sample, “*stratified sampling*” has been used; the research instrument (in this study – the questionnaire) has been applied to: 10 junior assistants, 10 university assistants, 10 readers, 10 lecturers and 10 professors; in total - 50 members of the didactic staff. The final sample was made up of 34 members of the didactic staff of FEEA, because of the difficulties encountered during the application of the questionnaires.

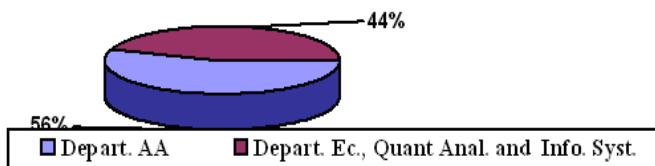
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<sup>1</sup> For the present research paper because of the specifics of analyzed services – educational ones, it is the best to fold the classification formal – non-formal.

**Fig. 1 Graphic representation of the sample according to the subject category given by the academic title**



**Fig. 2. Graphical representation of the studied population (criterion - belonging to a specific department)**



For this research, the used sample<sup>1</sup> has been random, stratified and simple, and the selected collectivity was structured in homogenous sub-groups according to a single characteristic – *the academic title of the subjects*. The technique used for collecting the data for this research was the questionnaire, applied through direct contact with the subjects classified in the investigated reality.

The purpose of this scientific paper is to correlate and to observe the manner and the proportion in which the formal and non-formal professional development influences the continuous formation of the researched population, formation that unfold in the entire professional life period.

For fulfilling the proposed objective were emitted the following hypothesis:

<sup>1</sup> For the current research it would have been interesting to use stratified multiple sampling, structured on two homogenous sub-groups/ “layers”, by introducing the trait of belonging to the department (in the Department of Business Administration or of the Department of Economics, Quantitative Analysis and Information Systems) of the subjects.

**General Hypothesis:**

The formal/non-formal professional development methods influences and have a big role in the continuous formation of didactic personnel framed in the university education system that unfolds on the entire professional career.

**Research Hypothesis:**

a) *The formal professional development methods* occupy a high percentage in the quantum of continuous formation of university didactic personnel.

- the subjects that obtained higher frequencies of the item “the number of participation in the last 12 months” are more predisposed to be influenced in a higher percentage in the continuous formation process by the formal professional development methods;

b) *The formal professional development methods* occupy a low percentage in the quantum of continuous formation of university didactic personnel.

- the subjects that obtained low frequencies of the item “the number of participation in the last 12 months” are less predisposed to be influenced in a higher percentage in the continuous formation process by the formal professional development methods;

c) *The non-formal professional development methods* occupy a high percentage in the quantum of continuous formation of university didactic personnel.

- the subjects that obtained higher frequencies of the item “the number of participation in the last 12 months” are more predisposed to be influenced in a higher percentage in the continuous formation process by the non-formal professional development methods;

d) *The non-formal professional development methods* occupy a low percentage in the quantum of continuous formation of university didactic personnel.

- the subjects that obtained low frequencies of the item “the number of participation in the last 12 months” are less predisposed to be influenced in a higher percentage in the continuous formation process by the non-formal professional development methods;

**3. Scope and objectives of the study**

The implementation of the Bologna system had and will have still a special impact on FEAA teacher’s activities. As any implemented change it brought many changes in the syllabus and in the each teacher’s duty. One of the most important changes aimed at the reorganization of departments in functional units/in the two existing departments and in abnegation of different disciplines that don’t have any more correspondents on the work market.

As a sequel to this reorganization, the present requests of the teachers grown in rapport with the student's expectations and with the assessed standards of European Union. Many professors were forced to give up to discipline that they lectured many years and to come up with new information, innovations, and recent discoveries in the areas that they represent. Also, the co-operation between different departments of the faculty will have to become more present as a sequel to the fact that the students will have the possibility to choose the lectures that are part in the education offer of other faculties.

In this context, the professors are induced to present new proposals of attractive lectures, having practical practicability and correspondence on the work market. This aspect will only imply a sustainable effort from their part with the purpose to face the societal requests, to gather and to organize suitable information into an lecture material that will respond to the quality university standards as well as to student's needs.

Once we have shown the professional development needs – the continuous development of the FEAA didactic personnel and the analysis of professional development that is realized in the present, the mission/*purpose of the present paper* is to observe the percentage of formal/non-formal professional development methods in the continuous formation process of the examined population.

In order to meet its declared purpose, this research is directed at the following *specific objectives*:

- *To identify the needs for professional development of the investigated population and to classify the needs according to the typologies presented in literature;*
- *To explore the FEAA didactic personnel professional development in general and in function of the professional development methods classification (formal, non-formal);*
- *To explore/to distinguish the importance and the contribution of internal professional development programs;*
- *To create and apply a questionnaire whose items allow the classification of the investigated population according to general criteria (e.g. age, gender) as well as to specific criteria (e.g. academic title of the subject, connected responsibilities fulfilled, didactic experience, department in which the subject activates etc.), and also to support the mentioned objectives.*

The study has an exploratory nature and is aimed at analyzing the needs for professional development of the didactic staff of FEEA; the methodology used is *quantitative analysis*, with research techniques such as systematization, simple grouping (using a single characteristic), tabling, and graphic representation.

#### 4. The research design

This *mixt research step* was realized into a first part of the research through the presentation of professional development methods and illustrating the specific programs of these methods, so that in the pure monograph part/casuistry part through the built research instrument - the questionnaire, to analyze after the importance/contribution criterion the formal/non-formal development programs and to explore the specific methods of each program; in the conclusion part was realized the interpretation and the systematization of obtained data as a sequel of implementation of the study.

The built and used questionnaire, although isn't an exhaustive one and it cannot cover all the situational aspects of the present study, it did explore some main directions:

- the delineation of a general profile of the researched population through some general characteristics prism, as : gender, age, owned academic title, the professional experience (measured through the number of years of didactic activity), etc.;
- the importance or the existing percentage in the professional development design frame of the subjects of the formal professional development, respective of non-formal (measured in the apparition frequency);
- the comparison of the importance of the formal professional development programs, respective non-formal through the subject's gathered data;
- the correlation of the researched population designed profile with the result analysis regarding the FEAA didactic personnel professional development (e.g. : for an university preparatory prevails as apparition frequency the formal methods or the non-formal ones?, but for an un university professor?, etc.).

#### 5. Research strategy

In the construction of the questionnaire, that had 24 items, was taking into consideration the objectives elaborated before the beginning of the research (the point 3), and that can be directional expanded as the fallowing:

##### *I. The built profile of the investigated population:*

- *Tracing the profile of the investigated population:*
- According to *general criteria* such as gender and age;

- According to *specific criteria* such as: academic title of the subject, responsibilities connected to the didactic activity, didactic experience (measured in number of years of didactic activity), the department in which the subject activates, and the importance of the job for each subject;

II. *The needs for professional development of the didactic staff:*

- *Tracing the needs for professional development inclusion in the typology;*
- *Needs for professional development at an organizational level;*
- *Needs for professional development required by the job: multiple choice;*
- *Needs for professional development at an individual level: multiple choices.*

III. *The analysis of the FEAA professional development didactic personnel :*

1. *The didactic personnel formal professional development methods:*

- the quantitative measurement (annual participation number), through the frequency of apparition of answer variants;
- formal professional development specific methods;
- the demotivation of the didactic personnel in participation of these kind of programs;
- the contribution/the importance of formal professional development programs felt by the subjects (in general);
- the contribution/the importance of formal professional development programs felt by the subjects, according of the institution that organize these.

2. *The didactic personnel non-formal professional development methods:*

- the quantitative measurement (annual participation member), through the frequency of apparition of answer variants;
- non-formal professional development specific methods;
- the demotivation of the didactic personnel in participation of these kind of programs;
- the contribution/the importance of non-formal professional development programs felt by the subjects (in general);
- the contribution/the importance of non-formal professional development programs felt by the subjects, according of the institution that organize these.

3. *The hierarchy/the priority in the frame of formal and non-formal professional development programs of specific methods;*

IV. *The existence/the importance and the contribution of didactic personnel internal professional development programs of the faculty.*



The subjects were chosen in the randomly manner from the two existing FEAA departments: 19 teachers from Business Administration Department and 15 teachers from Economics, Quantities Analysis and Informational Systems.

The criterion for choosing these subjects took in consideration the moment of application of the questionnaire. From the 34 of participants, 7 subjects are university professors, 8 are university readers, 9 are university lectures, 5 are university assistants and 5 university preparatory (as in Figure 2). The numerical superiority of the university lecturers in the frame of sampled population is due to their accessibility of the moment of questionnaire application.

## 6. The validation of results procedure

This present research paper is difficult to frame into an economic or business administration unique discipline, being an interdisciplinary research, at the human resource (the monograph is realized upon FEAA human resource) border with service management (the monograph is centred upon educational services of university level).

The present research paper doesn't represent only a pure analytical research, but also *an explicative research*, in the way that it propose to fulfil the objectives established before, but also to discover the possible causative relations between the concept of didactic personnel professional development, on one side, and the two methods theoretical analyzed – formal/non-formal, and the importance of each method in professional perfecting achievement.

Also, the paper had an explorative character and propose itself to develop professional the FEAA teachers, using as its methodology the *quantitative analysis*, with research techniques as – the systematize, the simple grouping (using one characteristic), tabling and graphic representation.

Regarding the part of data interpretation, we will refer to an analysis of didactic personnel professional development in general, to the weight and to the apparition frequency of formal and non-formal development methods, with its specific programs, and to the correlations that emerge as a sequel to the obtained data.

The estimated results are the ones that acknowledge the research hypothesis. Exists the possibility that the hypothesis will not be confirmed as a sequel to some variables that weren't taken in consideration or couldn't be controlled (e.g. the subject's personality features, the socio – professional background, etc.).

## 7. Conclusions

For a better exemplification of the weight of the formal professional development methods we will analyze the obtained data under the two aspects:

- the total annual number of participation of the subjects;
- the annual number of participation of the subjects, according to the hold academic title.

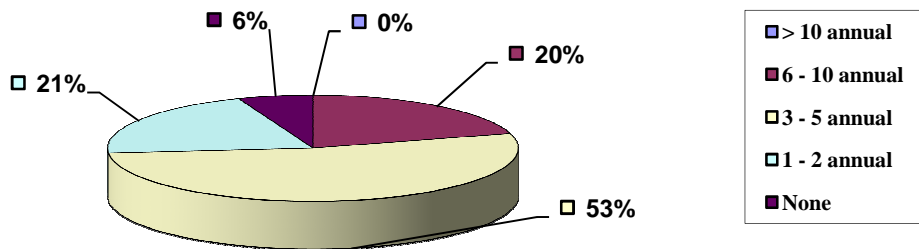


Fig. 3. The graphic representation of the subject's participation weight at the formal professional development programs

In general (as in Fig. 3 ), during the current university year, the FEAA didactic personnel attended between 3 – 5 formal programs with 52% percentage, an 6% percentage of subjects declared that didn't attend to such a program in the current year and none of the subjects didn't attend to more than 10 programs.

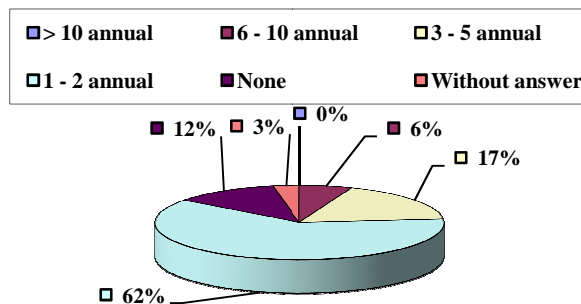


Fig. 4. The graphic representation of the subject's participation weight at the nonformal professional development programs

Under the aspect of *annual number of participation* at non-formal professional development programs, 61% of the subjects attended in the current year at 1 – 2 such programs, from witch approximately 15% are represented by university assistants and by university readers; at the opposite pole a percentage under 5% was registered by university preparatory. *The higher rate of participation* expressed in number of participation (6 – 10 annually) was registered by the subjects – *university professors* with a percentage of 100% from the percentage 6% registered totally. At

the opposite pole – with no participation in the current year at any non-formal development program – is it situated the subjects’ university preparatory, they registered 100% of the percentage obtained by these variant of answer – 12% from the total.

To observe which of the two types of professional development programs registered the higher rate of participation from the researched population we will compare the figures 3 and 4, the extract findings are presented diagrammatic as following:

1 -2 annual participation		3- 5 annual participation		6 – 10 annual participation	
F	N	F	N	F	N
21%	61%	52%	18%	21%	6%

Accrue that the general hypothesis that is confirmed is the one that : *The formal professional development methods* occupies a *high* percentage in the quantum of continuous formation of university didactic personnel (an 73% percentage of the subjects have a participation number in the last 12 months of 3 – 1o formal development programs).

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