

# **A Teacher-Centered University Education: Is the Core University Culture Different between Developed and Developing Countries?**

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Universities, microcosm of broader educational and social systems, have general aims in consonance with those of society. But in a global perspective, certain aims should not be set for one country or group of countries and other quite different aims for other countries. Of course, an analysis of the university situation throughout the world shows marked differences, not only from one continent and one country to another, but also between universities within the same country. However, this belongs to a different dimension on a lower level of operations. The *why* comes before the *how*. This last question should be geared to criteria which are consistent with the criteria intrinsic to the university as such.

It is not possible to set objectives in terms of the means. This is a mistaken, defeatist and discriminatory procedure. To do so would reinforce national and international imbalances and increase initial inequalities by curtailing the missions of universities in less favored areas. On the contrary, universities have aims which transcend the factors of space, time and resources and even geographical and social inequalities.

The current situation of the university has been and continues to be the subject of many studies. Practically all the bibliographical references used as a basis for this work, refer to a greater or lesser degree to the need to change the

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<sup>1</sup>Presented to the Comparative and International Education Society Annual Meeting, Boston, Massachusetts, March 29-April 2, 1995. This article is partially based on his book entitled *Changing the University*.

current university model.<sup>2</sup> Global and local diagnoses of the university system exist which fundamentally agree upon the need to modify the missions of the university as well as its strategies and practices. These studies also stress the fact that specific university problems exist in any given country or region. Universities in Africa are different from those in Latin America, for instance.

Nevertheless, various research works point out that certain common elements do exist in the university crisis in developing countries: (a) continuous pressure to extend university education and student overcrowding; (b) inadequate planning, management and institutional assessment systems; (c) continual erosion of the quality of teaching and research, and course contents which are not relevant to the needs of development and society; (d) continuing inequality of access to higher education; (e) great need for economic as well as material and technological resources; and (f) political manipulation of academic and research institutions. However, some of these factors are also to be found in many universities in developed countries, and it would be risky to define a single university model for each region and, in some cases, for each country.

In general terms, several studies provide proof of the existence of common elements. For instance, the works presented at the last three meetings of the UNESCO/ NGO Collective Consultation on Higher Education, organized by the Higher Education and Research Division of that international body, confirm certain common trends in universities in developing countries, even although

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<sup>2</sup> One of the most complete recent global views which subjects the university in different regions of the globe to wide-ranging scrutiny, is contained in the two volumes edited by Philip G. Altbach (1991) entitled *International Higher Education: An Encyclopedia*

differences and different degrees of evolution obviously exist. The main trends outlined at these UNESCO/NGO meetings and UNESCO recent policy paper<sup>3</sup> are classified as follows: quantitative expansion, unequal access, financial and material restrictions, new demands for higher education which are out of step with available material and financial resources, reform of the institutional structures and a re-examination of the missions, policies and functions of higher education, change in the relationship between the university and society and the internationalization of the university. At the same meetings the education sector of the World Bank underlined these trends, and estimated the need to diversify university systems, as well as sources of financing, to introduce management procedures and accountability and to substantially improve the quality of instruction and research.

Similar problems also exist in many universities in a world which is increasingly interdependent and interrelated through technology, trade, communications and political globalization. Apart from the differences<sup>4</sup> between universities in industrialized countries and countries in a state of transition (human or material resources, the brain drain, access to sources of knowledge, etc.) and in the absence of a single development model for universities, **certain**

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<sup>3</sup>See, UNESCO's Policy Paper for Change and Development in Higher Education, Paris, 1995.

<sup>4</sup>This article is not the place to reiterate the differences, diagnoses and trends of the university today, which are detailed in the recent wide-ranging post-1990 bibliography that is included at the end of a book in press by the same author of this presentation, entitled *Changing the University*. In order to facilitate the consultation process for this bibliographical study, an analytical table has been drawn up where references from the bibliography consulted are cross-referenced in terms of the most relevant aspects of the university and its geographical position. Special mention must be given to the work carried out by UNESCO: numbers 78 and 79 of the review *Prospects* and the two volume work edited by Altbach in 1992 *International Higher Education: An Encyclopedia* as well as the reports produced by a number of university associations, the World Bank and the OECD.

**fundamental global trends and universal principles do distinguish universities.** This is the view expressed by Altbach (1991) when he says that «universities worldwide share a common culture and reality. In many basic ways there is a convergence of institutional models and norms.» Therefore, factors such as autonomy and operating methods, the structure of the curriculum, cutbacks and student over-crowding, diversification and stratification, the generation and imparting of knowledge, research and development, education and employment all affect universities in developed countries as well as in countries where development is unequal or third world countries. Is, therefore, the core university culture different between developed and developing countries?

### **A Learner-Centered Education vs. A Teacher-Centered Education**

Throughout its history the university has been in a constant state of crisis, in response to which successive reforms and counter-reforms have taken place. However, the evolution of the university has been limited to its structures, systems of government and administration and greater diversity of fields of learning, teaching methods and course contents: the «academic ethos» has changed little since the Middle Ages.<sup>5</sup> However, there is a significant difference between the early university as a social institution and the university of today. At the beginning its structures were more informal and, contrary to what is generally

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<sup>5</sup> For detailed information see the works by Tünnermann and Borrero referred at the end of the article. Also the excellent work of synthesis by Harold Perkin (1991), *History of Universities*, in the first volume by Altbach, *op.cit.*; Helene Wieruszowski (1966), *The Medieval University* (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand); A. Cobban (1975), *The Medieval Universities* (London: Methuen); and the classic works by H. Rashdall (1895), *The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages* (Oxford: Oxford University Press) and Charles H. Haskins (1965), *The Rise of Universities* (Ithaca, N.Y. :Cornell University Press).

believed, more flexible. It was the students who sought out their professors on the basis of their epistemological and de-ontological authority. The university structure revolved around the *studium generale o particulare* which was managed or governed by a student rector who, as in Bologna, was drawn from the societies of scholars - *universitates* - or student body. This is to say that teaching was based on the ***learning person: a learned-centered education***. The institution was basically organized around that person, namely the student.

Subsequent modifications evolved towards the *facultas* or body of individuals who had the «faculty» of teaching and the «faculty» of administering teaching on the basis of their own epistemological authority. Later, increasingly rigid models grew up around three approaches: the English model or Oxford residential university system, the French model of the «grandes écoles» or the so-called «Napoleonic system», and the German model based on research derived from the Humboldt University. A later development was the appearance of mixed models, a foremost example of which is the University of Chicago where the English system is stressed but the orientation is towards the liberal arts.

The universities of today resemble one or a combination of these models to a greater or lesser degree. In all of them the *facultas* or faculty - the professors - are the corner stone of the university structure. The colleges, schools, departments, institutes and academic areas are basically organized around the professors and the course contents which they themselves design, frequently in an individual and isolated manner. This means that the modern university, independently of its geographical location, is centered around the ***teaching***

**person: a teacher-centered education.** In large measure this dichotomy lies at the heart of university crises: the crisis in the relationship between the professor and the student, between members of the «academic ethos» and members of the «social ethos» - the crisis between the university and society. Is a change from the «academic ethos» to a «learning ethos» not necessary? If any member of society requires an ongoing or permanent learning process that is teachers, whose teaching should be subordinate to their constant process of learning and renewal.

A society for learning is based on the idea that all its members are constantly learning, each being helped by the other. The traditional, contemporary university from developed or developing countries has organized education on the «*teaching person*». Two cultures have been created: that of the «learning person» (the student) and that of the «teaching person» (the professor). It is recognized that without students the university would not exist, but the learning environment is organized in such a way that, perhaps even unwittingly, greater value is put upon the person who *teaches* than on the person who is *learning*. The concept of academic freedom has been applied exclusively to the job of the professor without including the student, when it ought preferably to be used for the free flow of knowledge. These two cultures ought to give way to a single culture, **a learner-centered education**, that of the «learning person»: a university all of whose members are a part of a community dedicated to lifelong learning, where both professors and students are learning; where the focus of the administration and management is specifically to facilitate the learning and

creative process; where the curriculum is designed, modified and transmitted on a day-to-day basis taking into account the innovations, new concepts and new technologies for teaching and learning.

Just as important as the above is the development of programs with contents which cover, both in breadth and in depth, what the *learning person* «should know» and which are not based on what the *teaching person* «knows». This would force «professors», educators or facilitators of learning, to constantly renew theories, techniques or methodologies and applications and, at the same time, to keep in touch with the generation of knowledge occurring both inside and outside the university. It involves, of necessity, a dose of humility on the part of people who, on account of their experience and capacity, recognize their limitations, share their knowledge and continue until the end of their days to learn the many things which they do not know. At the same time, this change in the current role of the teacher introduces a totally different relationship with the student, since a new educational philosophy is created, according to which learning is a shared, fascinating, intriguing and necessary adventure, instead of being authoritarian, tiring and boring. In this way the university would respond to what its origins were: a community of scholars, of «learners», a large family of knowledge working with and for the world community.

However the realities of university life show that, save very few exceptions, the faculty constitutes a «university tribe» cocooned around itself, corporate in outlook and displaying an attitude of infallibility. The university today revolves, first and foremost, around the academic body. The design of the

physical space, the systems of remuneration and promotion, the evaluation of merits, study programs, the academic-administrative structures, timetabling and other aspects of university life respond principally to the needs of the teachers, but not necessarily to those of teaching. This system of priorities is applicable to universities in developing and developed countries alike. In some of the latter it is a well known fact that, for instance, many professors use their post-graduate students in the preparation of research papers, books and articles, where the names of these helpers do not appear, or are not given the predominance in the publication which their work merits, or they are simply thanked in small print in the relative obscurity of the introduction. Where are learning and research going? This kind of behavior is immoral and punishable as an infringement of intellectual property, and reveals the kind of covert authoritarian system reinforced by education centered on the «teaching person». On the other hand, this kind of behavior runs counter to the very essence of a teaching-learning situation, where the first rule is ethics, honesty and respect for others.

### **Formative Education: Integral part of the Core University Culture**

The most relevant and controversial issue facing the university, however, is one of its *raison d'être*: formation, the teaching-learning process. The English word 'formation' - among other meanings - indicates 'the act or process of forming' or 'the shaping or developing of something'. The word 'formative' means 'having influence in forming or developing'. Similarly, I use the term 'formation or



formative education'<sup>6</sup> to describe a kind of education which forms or develops a person's character, values and morals as well as merely making him/her knowledgeable or giving him/her skills. A distinction between teaching, training or instructing and formation or formative education should be made. To instruct is a process whereby teaching in the sense of training remains on an intellectual or cognitive low level and formation is a process of academic socialization which inserts itself into the personality and the emotional domain, manifesting itself in the subject's behavior. Therefore, formation and instruction are indivisible and interactive elements in the process of education.

The challenge posed by the diversity of knowledge, the plurality of science, the multiplication of branches of knowledge and the speed of change has underscored a problem of academic and curricular effectiveness. On the one hand, in so far as knowledge has become more complex, varied and impossible to embrace in its entirety, it has become correspondingly more difficult to impart. On the other hand, the segmentation of fields of knowledge has led to the fragmentation of language, producing a generation of professional people incapable of communicating between one branch of knowledge and another and, increasingly, between the cultures of science and the humanities. The controversy between general formative education and specialized formative education, between professionalization and the liberal study of the arts and

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<sup>6</sup> A psychological and educational analysis of such terms are presented in Miguel A. Escotet (1992), "Information and Formation: The change of paradigm in university distance learning". In Ortner, G., Graff, K. and Wilmersdoerfer, H. (Eds.) *Distance Education as Two-way Communication*. Frankfurt:Verlag Peter Lang, 88-101.

sciences, between once-and-for-all learning and an lifelong learning process are subjects for debate within the university community and society.<sup>7</sup>

However, the interdisciplinary approach, general basic formation and training, flexibility of the curriculum permitting adaptation to change, the extension of the university mission to cover permanent formative education are all trends which have been gaining prevalence in recent years and which run counter to the other view which favors professionalization as direct training in a single discipline. The risk of specialized professionalization is very great. After all, this model has been very much in vogue since the incorporation of industrial production systems and the development oriented political and economic systems of the fifties and sixties. The result is not particularly edifying. Never before in contemporary history have there been more unemployed university graduates and professional people than there are today. Unemployment among university graduates is not only the responsibility of the social-economical system, it is the result of the interaction of that system in evolution with a university which produces rigid, passive professionals educated on a once-and-for-all basis.

A more adequate balance between generalization and specialization would reduce the under-exploitation of professionals in the short-term labor market on the one hand, whilst, at the same time, promoting the updating of professional qualifications in keeping with the new demands of society in the medium term. The false dichotomy between formative education in the sciences

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<sup>7</sup> Miguel Ángel Escotet (1992), *Aprender para el Futuro* (Chapters 2, 3, 6 and 9)

and the arts requires a radical change in teaching and learning strategies. The university will have to strike the right balance of aesthetics, science and ethics in the education of men and women, so that they will emerge knowing a lot about their own field but also enough about other disciplines: in other words, the university as a center of aesthetics, science and basic human values. But even if the extremes of educational models were drawn towards the center, this would not resolve the whole problem. To do this, the core university culture would have to become oriented towards permanent education and lifelong learning, which, in turn, would require course contents, teaching methods, practices, means and the duration of courses to be kept under constant review,<sup>8</sup> but primarily to modify the present teacher-centered education system.

The realities underpinning the change from the traditional university to an institution oriented towards lifelong education could be summed up as follows:

- Scientific and technological advances cannot be included in the formal university curriculum as fast as they occur. Even social knowledge is far ahead of the anticipatory analysis to which higher education ought to aspire. Some response must therefore be found for new employment requirements, professional retraining at every age and research into new fields of science.
- Knowledge about man and his world has been carved up into ever smaller and more specialized segments, but a deeper knowledge of matter and its characteristics leads to an inter- and transdisciplinary view and a unifying

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<sup>8</sup> See the relationship between university and lifelong education: Miguel Ángel Escotet (1992), *ibid.* (Chapters 2 & 6).

concept of the world, both in the field of science and in the humanities. The new trends have once again broken down the artificial barriers which had been erected between the different individual sciences.

○ The application of the scientific method in its widest sense identifies the sciences with the arts, leading us closer to a scientific-technical humanism, where pure reason must be in harmony with the aesthetic and ethical sense and the sense of the transcendence of humanity.

○ The concept of lifelong university education is essentially holistic, implying an attitude of constant research and the permanent search for new knowledge. It therefore breaks the trend toward fragmented education and the sole pursuit of diplomas which stress the characteristics of the once-and-for-all university education which exists today.

○ The expansion of university objectives to include permanent formative education and training is closely linked with the modernizing concept of education. There is no one period for studying and another for acting. Learning and acting are a part of the existential process of the human being.

○ Permanent or lifelong university education is consistent with the dynamics of change and uncertainty of a society which requires not only that people should possess the necessary knowledge and techniques to function in the modern world but, fundamentally, that they should be trained to permanently learn, re-learn and un-learn as the only solution to adapt to the future.

Lifelong education requires universities to organize formative education towards a learner-centered education, to deformatize their structures and

services to accommodate new teaching-learning methods, to set up two-way systems of cooperation with business, industry and community enterprises, to create educational networks with the non-formal systems in society, to recognize experience and knowledge acquired in ways other than the conventional lecture room and academic laboratory, to incorporate communication and information technology in the teaching-learning process, and even to de-formalize classroom attendance. This also means setting up multiple inter-university and inter-educational networks to break down the false barriers within scholarship and the transmission and generation of knowledge.

At the same time, university reforms all over the world have been characterized by partial changes to the system. The university institution has rarely set out to achieve a global reform. This has been identified with legislative changes in the system of academic and administrative organization. A tendency to confuse reforms with legal changes is apparent. Paradoxically, the frequency and number of legal changes undergone by universities has been one of the major obstacles to their development. Existing legislation acts as a kind of corset, and is one of the factors strangling the creative and innovative capacity of the university. The university legislative system reinforces institutional rigidity and that of the programs which it administers. Any attempt at change which confronts the legal framework is generally condemned to failure, but if it is allowed to proceed, the time lag between the original request and its eventual approval is so long and bureaucratized that it no longer constitutes a change or lags behind the change in society itself. The more radical opinion is that the best university law is

one whose only clauses are those dealing with the missions entrusted to the university and its obligation to fulfill them.<sup>9</sup>

This brief review of some qualitative trends on the contemporary university scene set against the challenges of the future development of the university indicates the need to simultaneously reaffirm, eliminate and create new missions for the university institution in the twenty-first century. It could certainly be submitted that many other trends and circumstances exist which dictate that university development will, of necessity, be slow and often precarious. This averment might carry greater weight if a comparison is made of universities from different countries with high or low budgets or limited human resources to confront a challenge of this magnitude (See Table I and Figure 1).

However, three conditions must be met if the gulf separating some universities from others is to be bridged: the definition of objectives centered on the learner person, the determination to achieve those objectives, and cooperation. The first two concern all universities (from developed or developing countries), while the last condition concerns those with more resources and a higher level of development. It is an act of cultural and scientific solidarity through cooperation programs, which can also be highly beneficial in academic and human terms for the institutions taking part. But in no event will this gulf be bridged or optimum progress made if new, clearly defined, ambitious core

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<sup>9</sup> M. A. Escotet (1992), *A look at the 21st Century universities: dialectic of the mission of universities in an Era of Change*. See also Altbach (1991), *University Reform*; Torsten Husén (1991), *The idea of the University: Changing roles, current crisis and future challenges*; Tünnermann (1992), *Universidad: historia y reforma*; UNESCO (1992), *L'enseignement supérieur en Afrique: tendances et enjeux pour le XXIe siècle*; UNESCO (1991), *Trends and Issues facing Higher Education in Asia and the Pacific*.

university culture and missions are not set out, accompanied by the determination and courage to achieve them.

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**Table I**  
**PROFESSORS, STUDENTS AND ESTIMATED GROSS HIGHER EDUCATION ENROLLMENT FIGURES BY GROUPS OF COUNTRIES FOR 1980 & 1990**

Groups of Countries	PROFESSORS		(thousands)		STUDENTS		GROSS ENROLMENT RATIO	
	1980	1990	% 80-90	1980	1990	% 80-90	1980	1990
<b>World Total</b>	<b>3408</b>	<b>4733</b>	<b>3,3</b>	<b>45703</b>	<b>63820</b>	<b>3,4</b>	<b>11</b>	<b>12,7</b>
<b>Developed</b>	2102	2623	2,2	29448	35678	1,9	30,2	38,8
<b>Developing</b>	1306	2110	4,9	16255	28142	5,6	5,1	6,9
Africa (a)	41	78	6,6	528	1088	7,5	1,6	2,5
Asia (a)	1012	1545	4,3	11590	19903	5,6	4,8	6,4
Arab States	81	134	5,2	1468	2433	5,2	9,4	11,8
Lat.Am.-Car.	386	644	5,3	4893	7539	4,4	13,5	17,1
North Ame.	757	914	1,9	13069	15335	1,6	54,2	77,3
Europe (b)	1100	1377	2,3	13739	16877	2,1	22	28,6
Oceania	31	41	2,8	416	645	4,5	21,8	29,8

Source: Based on the Statistical Yearbook 1994 of UNESCO (The classification of countries follows its norms.  
a) Excluding Arab States      b) Including former Soviet Union  
Note: % 80-90 columns indicate the average annual increase as percentage

**Figure 1**  
**Public expenditure per student of Higher Education and its relation to GNP per capita between developed and developing countries**

