The EQF model and teacher’s competences

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Abstract

The 'Bologna Declaration' has highlighted the importance of skills in Higher Education as well as primary and secondary education. The purpose of this paper is to show the most relevant aspects of the EQF model, and the aim of the powers in the EQF model. The compromise of each of the member states of the EU is to assume the EQF model. The final objective is to obtain a common education principally based on a focus of learning outcomes and with a lifelong learning perspective. We conclude by noting that the pretension of the EQF model for lifelong learning falls short. As noted by Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics' "ethical actions are not forgotten". This observation leads us to ask a question that we will try to answer in another paper: Is it appropriate consideration of ethics in the model EQF according to the make through the learning outcomes?

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1. Introduction

The creation of a common European space of higher education began in 1998 with the so called ‘Declaration of the Sorbonne’, in which education ministers from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom participated. A year later, in the ‘Bologna Declaration’ (1999), twenty nine countries, members of the European Union (EU), and others of proximate adhesion, proposed the objective of promoting a shared European system of higher education (Bologna Declaration, 1999). The process of creating this new common framework would have to be functioning in 2010. The aim of this European project is to attain greater international competitiveness and total mobility, both academic and professional. The development of the EQF model arose as part of this process.

2. The competences in the teacher

The impact in the competences that the teacher has to develop, in the diverse educational levels is a question widely treated. It is not, on the other hand, the educational ethos that gives place to these competences. As McLaughlin affirms (2005, 306), “ethos is relatively underexplored as a form of educative influence by educational
researchers, philosophers of education, educational policy makers and teachers and educational leaders at classroom and school level”.

The reason of fund rests on that the majority of the studies brings over of the professional competences of the educational sound fruit of quantitative or qualitative researches (on these matters see Amy S. D’aprix, Katherine M. Dunlap, Eileen Abel, Richard L. Edwards, 2004; Kalishman, 2002; Krejслer, 2005; Pulana Lefoka, 1997) that little or nothing they bear the reason of the teacher in mind, so as McLaughlin (2005, 306) indicates, “the notion of ‘ethos’ is notoriously difficult to bring into clear focus in the context of teaching and schooling, as elsewhere”.

There is no doubt that one of the ideas that have influenced this proliferation of studies on competencies, is due to a concept that takes on vast proportions. We refer to the concept of internationalization or globalization if preferred. Though this concept has its origin in the area of the right and the economy, it is not less true that it has extended its field of reference to designate the growing existence and process perception that they operate transnationally in other many social subsystems, included that of the education. (Schriewer, 2000). In particular we refer to the EQF model that emerges from the ‘Bologna Declaration’.

3. Description of EQF

Since 1998, the project of a common framework of higher education has meant the celebration of various meetings and seminars. In the Berlin conference of 2003, the member participants compromised themselves to elaborate a common framework which would make the qualification levels, in their different systems of higher education, compatible and comparable. For this they proposed a meta-framework which could be assumed by national and local frameworks, for the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).

A Working Group (WG) was created in 2004. Its starting out objective was a perspective of permanent training or lifelong learning, together with the creation of a framework of EHEA qualifications which would comprise all the national qualification frameworks, which follow their own legislations, articulations and local criteria.

The creation of a meta-framework that comprises and connects the -at that time- forty participant nations is sought, to make compatible the demand that the national approaches. It should be based on a common concept of professional qualification. The employment framework should include a systemic description, with coherent relations and conditions for it to be internationally understood.

The principal reasons given for the creation of this European meta-approach group are three: international transparency (among all the members and looking outwards), the possibility of the international recognition of the professional qualifications obtained in the different nations and thirdly, student mobility.

This European meta-framework incorporates six elements: the conception of a model centered on the ‘learning outcomes’; the outcomes constitute the results which give rise to the possession of certain ‘competences’; competences that are acquired gradually at different stages, depending on the ‘learning levels’; there should have a common unit of measure for learning outcomes in all the nations, throughout the use of an agreed ‘credit system’; a measure and credit system that would be based on the ‘workload’ required for the learning; and lastly, the description of the learning objectives, in what would be denominated as the professional ‘profile’ (Guillén, Fontrodona and Rodríguez 2007).

4. The EQF model and the competences

The EQF (European Qualifications Framework) model for lifelong learning (Smith and Spurling (1999) tries to respond to the petition formulated by the heads of state of the EU, who had a meeting in Brussels in March 2005, within the creation process of a common focus. A greater connection between the educative system and professional exercise is aimed at, and employment as an element to have in mind in all and each of the educational systems has priority. The compromise of each of the member states of the EU is to assume the EQF model, which will not be imposed. The final objective is to obtain a common education principally based on a focus of learning outcomes and, as has been mentioned, with a lifelong learning perspective.
The meeting gathers the recommendations made by the Ministers of Education, between February and December, 2004. The proposed of the model EQF constitutes the base on which a consultation has been effected, between July and December, 2005, to policy markers, social partners, stakeholders and experts in qualifications systems of the whole Europe.

A study of these characteristics seems to be pertinent if we have present that difficultly nobody questions, today, the connection of each one of the levels and cycles of the educational process, with the achievement of goals that demands the society of the knowledge. In the words of document itself: “The relevance of an EQF to individual citizens will be further strengthened when national and sectorial qualifications are systematically referenced to the EQF”. This approach is consistent with the position that supports Bently (1998, 19), who argues that the key resources for the generation of wealth for the future will be ideas, knowledge and creativity, not the land, labour and physical materials of the past. The goal of education “should be the development of understanding which can be applied and extended by taking it into spheres of thought and action which, in the real world, demand intelligent behaviour”.

In this perspective, the task is to increase individual responsibility for learning, with the aim of developing the competences that will allow each citizen to achieve lifelong employability in a dynamic and changing world (Smith and Spurling, 1999; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Spencer and Spencer, 1993; Kwiek, 2004). Ethical training may be considered as a key element in terms of individual responsibility development for a lifelong employability and its sustainability.

In this sense, it seems appropriate to emphasize that the model EQF guards a narrow relation and try to respond to the recommendations of the Delors Report (1996). This report seeks precisely to influence education lifelong learning, so that it allows arranging the different stages, to prepare the transitions of each one, to diversify and to give value to every life story. “The concept of learning throughout life is the key that gives access to the twenty first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education. It links up with another concept often put forward, that of the learning society, in which everything affords an opportunity of learning and fulfilling one’s potential” (Delors, 1996, 36).

This approach underlies the EQF model and reinforces its social commitment, is also influenced by (Duderstadt 1997):

1. The value of knowledge as a development factor.
2. The globalization processes.
3. The consolidation and expansion of information technology and communication.
4. The rise of networks of individuals and institutions that come to replace traditional social structures such as the University.

5. Purpose of the competences in the EQF

From this perspective, is to enhance the responsibility of each individual as a subject of learning, in order to achieve and maintain their own employability, assuming their responsibilities, to enhance their culture and exercise their rights. It manifests as the notion of a ‘job for life’ has become obsolete, and knowledge, or more generally information itself has become the ‘raw material on which the new technologies act’ (Castells 2000). The model EQF has to affect, therefore, in the development of the competences that allow that every citizen should be capable of achieving this employability for lifelong learning in a dynamic and changeable world. This it will be the purpose of the learning outcomes in the model EQF.

According to that end, “competences require integration of relevant knowledge, skills and attitudes to enable handling of complex situations and problems in an appropriate manner. When curricular goals are defined in terms of competences, the focus in education and assessment will have to be on the integration of skills, knowledge and attitudes rather than on isolated (components of) skills and knowledge. This will further authentic learning and help bridge the gap between theory and practice” (Daelmans et al, 2004, 305).

This approach places us before a training that makes sense in the measure in which it promotes the economic growth, the employment and the productivity (Kwiek 2004). It seems clear that the purpose that prevails is the
professional training, not the pursuit of knowledge. The training is meant, then, as investment in human capital of each company. Being valid the pretension of the model EQF, it does not have to overlook that the above mentioned consideration leaves out any of the recommendations of the Report Delors that probably was pertinent to have presents for a better and more suitable development of the above mentioned model.

It is known as in the Report Delors (1996, 37) emphasizes in four recommendations that continue being very useful and valid: learning to know, learning to do, learning to live together and learning to be.

1. Learning to know, by combining a sufficiently broad general knowledge with the opportunity to work in depth on a small number of subjects. This also means learning to learn, so as to benefit from the opportunities education provides throughout life.

2. Learning to do, in order to acquire not only an occupational skill but also, more broadly, the competence to deal with many situations and work in teams. It also means learning to do in the context of young peoples’ various social and work experiences which may be informal, as a result of the local or national context, or formal, involving courses, alternating study and work.

3. Learning to live together, by developing an understanding of other people and an appreciation of interdependence - carrying out joint projects and learning to manage conflicts - in a spirit of respect for the values of pluralism, mutual understanding and peace.

4. Learning to be, so as better to develop one’s personality and be able to act with ever greater autonomy, judgment and personal responsibility. In that connection, education must not disregard any aspect of a person’s potential: memory, reasoning, aesthetic sense, physical capacities and communication skills.

A careful look at the EQF model allows us to observe that in some way, are the first three recommendations. Instead it seems to dilute the fourth. An interesting study by Deakin and Wilson (2005, 360), shows a similar intention to which we wish to make. These authors affirm as intention of their work: “In this paper we explore the qualities, values and dispositions necessary for lifelong learning and their links with notions of virtue and character. Character we define as a complex mix of values, virtues and dispositions which normally guide conduct, while a virtue is that quality of character which enables a person to become a ‘good example’ of what it means to be fully human”.

Conclusion

The development of skills in the EQF model is linked to be done through the learning outcomes and, of course, that does not serve for throughout life, since making is defined by its purpose and skill. The claim of the model for lifelong learning EQF falls short. As noted by Aristotle in his Nicomachean Ethics, "ethical actions are not forgotten." This observation leads us to ask a question we will try to answer in another paper: Is it proper the consideration of ethics in the model linked to the EQF made through the learning outcomes?

References


