

**EDITORIAL**

This volume of *Synergy* is dedicated to interdisciplinary synergies, reflecting various dimensions of teaching, learning and quality assurance in Higher Education, while offering insights into professional development and research in an academic environment, with applications also in business and economics. Most of the articles are based on research projects and studies carried out within the framework of the Interdisciplinary Master programme *English Language Education and Research Communication in Business and Economics*, at the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest.

Section 1 on **Dimensions of Quality Assurance in Education** - with special reference to higher education (HE) and language education - comprises articles on aspects of quality assurance at various levels. Thus, the first article sets the scene at macro-level: Monica Roman interprets quantitative data obtained at national level, in order to highlight correlations between demographic trends and developments in HE in Romania. Rodica Zaharia's study is based on a qualitative analysis carried out at institutional level, reflecting the views of academics on quality assurance procedures applied to academic research. Diana Șandru's article addresses questions related to dimensions of quality assurance in HE, with a focus on quality based performance measurement. Radadiana Calciu illustrates quality assurance processes and instruments developed and applied in language education, with special reference to EAQUALS - the European Association for Quality Language Services.

Section 2 - **Research into Aspects of Teaching, Learning and Communication in Academic and Business Environments** - combines multiple perspectives on teaching and learning processes in HE in various subject fields, while illustrating the value of practice-based research, leading to innovative methodological approaches. Raluca Ion and Attila Gyorgy are particularly interested in finding out more about their students' learning preferences and perceptions of various teaching methods in the economics subjects they teach. In addition to interpreting the findings of their research, they also elaborate on several new methodological approaches that they have implemented, giving concrete examples of procedures, activities and teacher-student communication, transferable also to other subjects

and HE contexts. Irina David's and Cristina Catargiu's articles illustrate the benefits of integrating critical thinking in the business English class, with practical examples of activities for the development of advanced presentation skills and business writing competencies. Georgeta Ghiga's study approaches business negotiations from the perspective of phatic language functions in Romanian, showing how the quality of interaction and, consequently, success and failure in negotiations may depend on the negotiators' ability of using phatic elements effectively.

Section 3 - **Institutional Learning and Personal Professional Development** - starts with Florentina Balu's article on "Learning Organisations", which provides a thorough overview of the literature in the field, clarifying concepts and highlighting their applicability to practice. Even if the examples given refer primarily to the business environment, the *learning organisation* concepts and approaches are relevant also to educational contexts and programmes, as shown in Bardi (2006), Mureşan (2004), as well as in the second and third articles in this section. Laura Mureşan explores characteristics of the Interdisciplinary Master programme *English Language Education and Research Communication in Business and Economics* from a learning organisation perspective, while Teodora Şerban-Oprescu discusses key issues in individual development in organizational settings. With the help of a case study she then exemplifies how project management experiences can contribute to professional development and the improvement of transferable skills. In her article, Ramona Păun takes a self-reflective approach to professional development - with a focus on the complex process of improving writing for research and publication - integrating insights derived from learning experiences abroad with those gathered through the interdisciplinary Master programme at the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest. Her analysis illustrates the close correlation between teaching and learning, as well as the value of self-assessment, self-reflection and constructive feedback in key-stages of one's progress.

The articles in Section 4 exemplify **Integrative Approaches to Research in Various Fields**. The first two articles explore dimensions of language, with a view to raising awareness to the multiple layers of meaning involved in communication. Lucia Grosu, for instance, combines *Critical Discourse Analysis* and *Critical Thinking* in order to analyse a political speech (George Bush's inaugural speech in 2005), while Cristina Prelipceanu investigates the presence and relevance of "war associations" in business (and marketing, in particular). The following three articles reflect different methodological approaches to economic realities. Cristian Bănaşcu's article presents an innovative instrument - *Circular Synergic Benchmarks* (CSB) - applied to the integrated management of business processes according to criteria of environmental impact, underlining its advantages. Mihai Palfi elaborates on the design of an Integrated Security System for the critical infrastructure protection of a maritime port. He illustrates an innovative way of applying *critical*

thinking principles to the management of this type of project. In her article, Cristina Covaci Voicu analyses aspects related to a widespread economic phenomenon - the *underground economy* - and presents the findings of her study on specialists' perceptions of the Romanian underground economy. Using the Delphi investigation method, she sets herself as a goal to check whether good research methodology yields correct and coherent results, aiming to provide some insights into the main causes of underground economy and its effects on the official economy.

Beyond this formal grouping into sections, the reader will discover that there are also other threads inter-twined at various levels, reflecting the authors' participation in a complex process of sharing ideas, expertise, concerns across disciplines, as well as a mutually supportive atmosphere of working towards finding solutions. Methodological synergies include, for instance: applications of *critical thinking* techniques in domains as diverse as business English and maritime port security project management; *qualitative analysis* applied both in an academic setting and when investigating the views of specialists on the underground economy; *communicative approaches and techniques* integrated not only in the business English or business Romanian class, but also in courses and seminars on European Agricultural Policies, a.s.o. The articles, thus, reveal not only the authors' professional preoccupations but also the pleasure of exploring innovative ways of approaching their field of interest - inviting the readers to enter into dialogue with the questions and reflections put forward here.

Laura Mureşan