**Research Paper**                                                           Open Access

# University Pedagogy–CTLs Dipole: A Dynamic Force in Academic Development

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**Abstract:** This paper explores the dynamic relationship between University Pedagogy and Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) as key components of academic development in higher education. It highlights how evolving pedagogical approaches, such as student-centered learning, transformative education, and inclusive teaching practices, are reshaping the university learning environment. Drawing on various theoretical frameworks, including Mezirow's Transformative Learning Theory, Illeris's Learning Model, and Knowles's Andragogy, the study examines how CTLs support faculty development, promote active learning, and enhance student engagement. Additionally, the paper considers the role of CTLs in integrating digital technologies, sustainability pedagogy, and inclusive practices. The context of Greek higher education is analyzed, focusing on recent advancements and persistent challenges in tertiary and adult education. The paper concludes that CTLs, in collaboration with progressive University Pedagogy, play a transformative role in fostering institutional resilience, academic excellence, and student success.

**Keywords:** Higher education, University Pedagogy, Centers for Teaching & Learning(CTLs), academic development

## I. INTRODUCTION

The landscape of higher education is undergoing profound transformations, driven by the need for effective teaching methodologies, student-centered learning environments, and institutional accountability. Historically, research has overshadowed teaching in universities, often relegating pedagogical training to a secondary role. However, contemporary educational demands necessitate a balance between research excellence and teaching quality. University Pedagogy, therefore, is evolving to embrace evidence-based and reflective teaching practices that prioritize student engagement and critical thinking.

Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) have emerged as essential institutional structures that support this shift. By offering faculty development programs, promoting inclusive and sustainable teaching practices, and integrating digital technologies, CTLs bridge the gap between traditional pedagogical approaches and modern educational needs. In Greece, tertiary education holds significant societal value, with 44.5% of Greeks aged 25-34 holding a tertiary degree in 2023, surpassing the EU average. Despite this achievement, challenges in adult education persist, with participation rates falling short of EU targets. Addressing these gaps requires a concerted focus on adaptable pedagogical models and the strategic role of CTLs in academic development. This paper explores the interplay between University Pedagogy and CTLs, highlighting their combined impact on enhancing teaching practices, fostering institutional growth, and promoting student success.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the primary functions of Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) is to support faculty in improving their teaching effectiveness. Research indicates that structured pedagogical training for faculty leads to better student learning outcomes and increased engagement (Gougoulakis et al., 2020). In the context of Greek higher education, Gougoulakis et al. (2020) highlight that teaching undergoes continuous internal and external evaluations under Law 3374/2005. These evaluations focus on faculty effectiveness, course organization, instructional materials, technology use, faculty-student interaction, curriculum relevance, and the integration of research and teaching. Despite these measures, there is limited empirical research on their implementation, and pedagogical training remains a low priority. The emphasis in Greek universities continues to be on theoretical and research expertise rather than teaching competencies. However, a significant development addressing this gap was the establishment of the University Pedagogy Network in Greece (2016),

following a symposium at Democritus University of Thrace. This initiative aimed to promote University Pedagogy as a critical field in Greek higher education.

In contrast to traditional models that emphasize content expertise, modern University Pedagogy demands that faculty develop didactical skills, reflective teaching practices, and adopt student-centered approaches. Kedraka and Rotidi (2017) examine this shift, emphasizing the growing recognition of academics' teaching roles in Greek higher education. They argue that the historical prioritization of research over teaching in European universities has contributed to a lack of pedagogical training. However, recent developments, including the 2016 symposium and related empirical studies, signal a shift toward a more balanced academic culture that values both teaching and research. Drawing on transformative learning theory (Mezirow, 1991), the authors advocate for critical self-reflection in teaching, suggesting that incorporating critical thinking, active learning, and experiential methods can significantly enhance educational outcomes. The study underscores the need for systematic pedagogical training and institutional reforms in Greece to support faculty development and improve teaching quality. Building on this, Kedraka (2016) traces the historical evolution of University Pedagogy and emphasizes the growing need for structured pedagogical training. The study identifies key national and European trends influencing teaching practices in Greek higher education. Kedraka (2016) argues that improving university teaching quality requires more than subject expertise; it necessitates professional training focused on instructional methodologies and student engagement strategies. She advocates for structured training programs and institutional policies that support pedagogical development, aligning Greek higher education with international standards that professionalize university teaching.

To better understand the shift toward student-centered and reflective teaching practices in University Pedagogy, it is essential to explore key adult learning theories. Mezirow's (1991) Transformative Learning Theory emphasizes that adult learning involves changing existing beliefs through critical self-reflection. According to Mezirow, transformative learning occurs when learners critically examine their assumptions, leading to new perspectives and more inclusive worldviews. This process is particularly relevant in higher education, where developing critical thinking skills is a primary goal. Complementing Mezirow's perspective, Illeris (2003) proposes a comprehensive model of learning that incorporates three dimensions: cognition, emotion, and environment. Illeris argues that adult learning is not only about acquiring knowledge but also about managing emotions and interacting with social contexts. His model highlights that learning is a complex process influenced by both internal and external factors, making it highly applicable to university settings where diverse student backgrounds and learning environments play significant roles. Furthermore, Knowles's (1980) concept of Andragogy outlines key principles of adult learning, emphasizing that adults are self-directed learners who bring valuable life experiences into the classroom. Knowles asserts that adult learners prefer practical, problem-solving approaches and need to understand the relevance of what they are learning. This perspective aligns closely with student-centered pedagogical approaches that prioritize active participation, experiential learning, and real-world application. Cranton (2002) explains that transformation in learning occurs when students reconsider their assumptions and adopt new perspectives. While educators cannot directly teach transformation or always determine why it happens, they can create conditions that support its possibility. Although no specific methods guarantee transformation, it remains a key goal of teaching. Effective instruction requires balancing challenge, support, and student empowerment. Sometimes, asking a well-timed question is crucial; at other times, validating a student's thoughts or encouraging independent responsibility is necessary. Ultimately, according Cranton(2002) transformation is the student's choice. Together, these theories provide a robust framework for understanding how University Pedagogy can be designed to meet the unique learning needs of adult students, supporting the development of critical, reflective, and engaged learners.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic further highlighted the need for adaptable pedagogical practices. Kedraka and Kaltsidis (2020) explore how the sudden shift from face-to-face learning to online education presented both opportunities and challenges. While students appreciated the flexibility of distance learning, they raised concerns about reduced social interaction, engagement levels, and the lack of hands-on experiences, particularly in laboratory-based courses. Despite these challenges, students valued instructors' efforts to sustain education through digital platforms. The study concludes that although online learning can complement traditional education, it cannot fully replace the benefits of in-person teaching and collaborative learning. Therefore, universities must invest in digital infrastructure and faculty training to enhance the quality of online education while preserving essential face-to-face learning experiences.

Beyond faculty development, CTLs play a pivotal role in supporting students. According to Gougoulakis (2017), effective teaching requires more than subject expertise; it demands pedagogical training that equips faculty to foster student-centered learning environments. Comparing Greek and Swedish higher education systems, Gougoulakis notes that Swedish universities have successfully integrated mandatory pedagogical training, whereas Greek institutions lack structured preparation programs. The study distinguishes between professionalization, which pertains to the regulation and status of a profession, and professionalism, which focuses on the internal quality of teaching. To bridge existing gaps, Gougoulakis advocates for reflective,

research-based teaching practices supported by CTLs. These centers not only assist faculty in refining teaching methods but also help students develop essential academic skills, digital literacy, and self-directed learning abilities.

Inclusive pedagogy is another essential dimension of University Pedagogy, ensuring that all students, regardless of background, have equitable access to learning opportunities. Carballo and Cotán (2024) argue that inclusive pedagogy requires faculty to adapt teaching methods to accommodate diverse learning needs. Beyond supporting students with disabilities, inclusive pedagogy fosters an environment where diversity is valued and integrated into teaching practices. Faculty must adopt flexible instructional strategies, provide reasonable adjustments, and recognize the varied learning needs of students to create truly inclusive learning spaces. Sustainability pedagogy also plays a crucial role in contemporary higher education. Burns (2015) proposes the Burns Model of Sustainability Pedagogy (BMSP), which integrates critical thinking and social responsibility into teaching. The model serves as a framework for embedding sustainability education within university curricula. Burns (2015) reveals that students' understanding of sustainability evolves when they recognize its interconnection with power, privilege, and social justice. The BMSP emphasizes experiential, participatory, and place-based learning, encouraging students to challenge dominant paradigms and integrate sustainability principles into their educational and professional lives. This approach highlights the transformative potential of sustainability pedagogy in shaping socially responsible graduates prepared to address global challenges. De Ketele (2010) adds a systemic perspective by conceptualizing University Pedagogy as a dynamic system comprising curriculum design, pedagogical activities, learning outcomes, and external influences. His framework underscores the importance of aligning faculty development, student learning, and institutional policies to enhance teaching effectiveness. The model includes five interrelated components—curriculum, pedagogical activities, learning outcomes, external factors, and contexts—structured along two axes. The diachronic axis tracks the progression from curriculum design to learning outcomes, while the synchronic axis reflects external influences, such as institutional policies and student backgrounds. This holistic approach ensures that teaching practices are contextually relevant and responsive to diverse learner needs. Public pedagogy further extends the role of universities beyond classroom instruction, fostering societal engagement and critical discourse. Masschelein (2019) argues that universities should act as spaces for public learning, where students engage with communities through experiential learning. By critiquing traditional hierarchical knowledge transmission models, Masschelein (2019) promotes participatory education that links research and public engagement. Using a course in Athens as an example, he illustrates how students transform urban spaces into learning environments through activities such as walking, mapping, and conversation. This approach fosters collective and open-ended education that challenges preconceived notions and encourages critical public engagement. Adding another dimension, Carcasson (2017) introduces deliberative pedagogy, which prepares students for participatory decision-making and addressing complex societal issues, or "wicked problems." This pedagogical approach emphasizes divergent thinking, negotiation of competing values, and convergent decision-making. By fostering critical thinking and communication skills, deliberative pedagogy positions universities as incubators of democratic values, encouraging students to collaborate in solving public issues.

Finally, the rise of digital learning environments has further cemented the essential role of CTLs in University Pedagogy. Ulla et al. (2024) examine the potential of Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) tools, such as ChatGPT, in promoting inclusive and equitable language education in Philippine universities. The study shows that GenAI enhances student participation, confidence, and learning experiences through personalized feedback and interactive learning opportunities. However, ethical concerns related to plagiarism, over-reliance on AI, and data privacy highlight the need for robust pedagogical guidelines and institutional policies. Ultimately, Ulla et al. (2024) conclude that GenAI can support critical pedagogy principles by promoting social justice, inclusivity, and equal access to learning opportunities, especially for linguistically diverse students.

The evolution of University Pedagogy in higher education reflects a growing need to shift from traditional, input-based teaching methods to student-centered and evidence-based approaches. Mandal (2018) critiques the persistent focus on content transmission in university teaching, advocating for constructivist learning models that prioritize student engagement, critical thinking, and adaptability. His introduction of the Multi-dimensional Analytical Tool for Teaching-Learning (MATT) emphasizes a holistic reform that considers institutional, national, and global influences on teaching practices. Mandal (2018) argues that relevant University Pedagogy must integrate policy reforms, pedagogical innovations, and a deep understanding of how teaching methods, institutional structures, and student experiences interact.

Expanding on the student-centered approach, Bovill (2011) introduces the concept of evaluation as learning, which encourages students to assess their own engagement alongside traditional evaluations of teacher performance and course structure. This participatory approach fosters self-regulation and metacognition, aligning with transformative education goals. Bovill (2011) suggests that when students share responsibility for

learning, it deepens their educational experience and strengthens the teacher-student partnership essential for meaningful education.

Student engagement is further explored by Padilla-Petry and Vadeboncoeur (2020), who examine self-evaluations of university students in Spain. Their study highlights the complexity of student engagement, demonstrating that it is influenced by both institutional efforts and students' personal experiences, agency, and the relationship between pedagogy and course content. The findings show that students engage with learning in diverse ways; some prefer participatory methods such as discussions and debates, while others may struggle with verbal participation due to factors like shyness. This diversity underscores the need for flexible and adaptive pedagogical approaches that recognize and accommodate various forms of student engagement.

Clark (2018) explores the role of lectures in critical pedagogy within university education, questioning whether a traditional lecture format can be transformative. While student-centered learning is widely promoted, large class sizes and institutional constraints often limit its implementation, leading many educators to rely on lecture-based instruction. Drawing on Freire's (1970) critique of the "banking model" of education, Clark argues that lectures can foster critical engagement if they interrupt traditional thinking patterns, encourage active questioning, and challenge power dynamics. By incorporating dialogue, diverse perspectives, and problematizing knowledge, lectures can be transformed into spaces for critical reflection and social change. However, systemic barriers such as assessment frameworks and institutional policies often constrain the full implementation of participatory pedagogy.

Wittman (2023) adds another dimension by discussing how composition teachers function as third space laborers in higher education. Drawing from Moten and Harney's concept of the undercommons, Wittman explains that composition instructors occupy a marginal yet generative position within the university, navigating the tensions between critical thinking and professional assimilation. This liminal status makes their work both precarious and potentially transformative. Wittman suggests that writing instruction and composition classrooms can serve as third spaces—sites of collective meaning-making, resistance, and intellectual freedom within the constraints of the university system.

Similarly, Naskali and Keskitalo-Foley (2017) discuss feminist pedagogy, which challenges the neutrality of knowledge by emphasizing its social construction and connection to power, values, and historical context. Unlike mainstream University Pedagogy that prioritizes teaching methods and assessments without questioning content, feminist pedagogy encourages critical reflection on how knowledge is produced, whose perspectives are included or excluded, and how power dynamics operate. This approach fosters collaborative knowledge construction, where diverse perspectives are valued, and students are encouraged to engage critically with dominant norms. The authors argue that feminist and other critical pedagogies, such as intersectional and indigenous approaches, create spaces for diverse students to engage in academic discussions on more equal terms. Ultimately, they call for a shift in University Pedagogy that reaffirms the university as a space for critical inquiry, where knowledge is actively produced through dialogue between teachers and students.

Shifting the focus to institutional transformation, Anninos and Kostopoulou (2020) explore how Greek higher education institutions are adapting to international trends, national policies, and quality assurance mechanisms. They argue that fostering a quality culture, supported by systematic management and leadership commitment, is crucial for academic excellence and institutional effectiveness. Sustainable reform, according to the authors, requires universities to integrate innovation, internationalization, and resilience into their core structures. Such integration aligns academic offerings with labor market demands, creating environments that support student success and institutional growth.

## III.     DISCUSSION

In Greece, tertiary education holds a significant place in society, with recent data showing that 44.5% of Greeks aged 25-34 held a tertiary education degree in 2023, surpassing the EU average of 43.1%. This achievement reflects a 7.3 percentage point increase over the past decade, underlining Greek society's emphasis on higher education and aligning closely with the EU-level target of 45% by 2030. However, despite this progress, adult education in Greece faces notable challenges. With only 39.5% of adults aged 25-64 participating in learning activities in 2022, Greece falls short of the EU-level 2025 target of 47% and the 2030 target of 60%. Participation rates among key target groups—such as low-qualified adults, those aged 55 and over, the unemployed, and individuals in rural areas—remain particularly low.

As universities strive to improve educational outcomes, Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) have emerged as vital support structures for faculty and students. Asimakopoulos, Karalis, and Kedraka (2020) highlight the pivotal role of CTLs in enhancing teaching, learning, and research by providing faculty development programs and academic support services for students. Complementing this view, Mihai (2023) notes that CTLs are evolving from traditional support units into agents of institutional change. Positioned between academic and administrative spheres, CTLs bridge institutional gaps, promote educational innovation, and improve teaching practices across disciplines. Mihai (2023) argues that CTLs' effectiveness depends on

their integration into institutional structures and their ability to adapt to evolving educational needs. By promoting active learning, inclusive teaching, and digital pedagogy, CTLs are reshaping university education and fostering student-centered learning environments.

Incorporating the perspective of social entrepreneurship, Bloom and Pirson (2010) describe emerging University Pedagogy through experiential models such as the Social Entrepreneurship Collaboratory (SE Lab). This model provides students with opportunities to transform their passion for social change into practical projects, bridging the gap between theoretical knowledge and real-world applications. By fostering experiential learning, teamwork, and mentorship, the SE Lab highlights the potential of universities to act as catalysts for social innovation. Student engagement is further explored by Padilla-Petry and Vadeboncoeur (2020), who emphasize that engagement is influenced not only by institutional efforts but also by students' personal experiences and agency. Their findings highlight the need for pedagogical approaches that recognize diverse forms of engagement, which may not always be visible to instructors but are essential for meaningful learning experiences.

Addressing the integration of theory and practice, Vereijken and van der Rijst (2023) demonstrate that university lecturers' pedagogical approaches vary based on disciplinary knowledge, personal expertise, and teaching orientation. Their study identifies institutional constraints, such as large class sizes and rigid curricula, as significant barriers to effectively connecting theory and practice. The authors argue that academic development programs should support lecturers in aligning teaching methods with subject-specific needs and professional applications.

To address the need for conceptual clarity in University Pedagogy, Lindén et al. (2024) propose a holistic framework that integrates educational theory, knowledge production, institutional context, and the agency of academic communities. Critiquing managerial approaches that overemphasize learning outcomes, the authors advocate for critical reflection, interdisciplinary collaboration, and academic freedom. Their framework empowers educators to actively shape higher education's future through meaningful pedagogical engagement. Huaire-Inacio et al. (2024) contribute to this discussion by examining the relationship between learning approaches and academic experiences. Their research shows that deep learning approaches are strongly associated with positive academic outcomes, such as professional aspirations and positive attitudes toward study. These findings underline the need to promote deep learning strategies to enhance academic quality and prepare students for professional success. From a public engagement perspective, Ripatti-Torniainen (2017) introduces public pedagogy, which connects universities to the broader public sphere through dialogue, collective learning, and civic participation. By fostering spaces for open-ended inquiry, public pedagogy positions universities as agents of democratic engagement, where knowledge transcends institutional boundaries and promotes critical public discourse.

McDaniel (2017) shifts the focus to institutional governance, examining the impact of capitalist governance models on faculty-administration relationships. The study emphasizes that shared governance and democratic accountability are essential for creating transparent institutions that value academic contributions. Involving faculty in decision-making processes can improve institutional climates, enhance faculty retention, and foster collaborative academic cultures. Olsson, Fylkesnes, and Yri (2024) address the need for decolonizing University Pedagogy, emphasizing epistemic diversity, cognitive justice, and pedagogical transformation. Their study highlights the dominance of Western epistemology in higher education and calls for the integration of Indigenous perspectives and critical reflection among educators. By confronting colonial legacies, universities can foster more inclusive educational practices, where diverse voices contribute meaningfully to knowledge production and institutional development.

University Pedagogy and Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) form a dynamic and interdependent relationship that significantly contributes to academic excellence and institutional growth. While CTLs are often positioned as key drivers of pedagogical transformation—promoting active learning, inclusive education, and digital integration—the extent to which they can successfully carry this responsibility remains an open question. Their effectiveness depends not only on their internal initiatives but also on broader institutional policies, funding structures, and strategic priorities.

Without adequate support and alignment with institutional goals, CTLs may struggle to enact meaningful change, particularly in environments where research remains the dominant academic priority. Furthermore, while CTLs offer spaces for critical reflection and self-directed learning, their impact on addressing pressing challenges—such as low adult education participation and the integration of sustainability education—varies across different educational contexts. Institutional strategies, national policies, and available resources shape their ability to implement large-scale pedagogical reforms. In some cases, CTLs operate as isolated units rather than as integral components of university governance, limiting their capacity to influence systemic change.

Additionally, networks among CTLs at national and international levels are essential for sharing best practices, fostering innovation, and maintaining consistency in educational quality. However, the effectiveness

of these networks depends on institutional willingness to engage in collaborative development rather than treating CTLs as supplementary support structures. A critical question remains: How can universities ensure that CTLs are empowered to act as agents of change rather than being constrained by administrative and financial limitations, especially in countries where their establishment is still in its early stages? While some European countries have well-developed CTLs integrated into institutional strategies, others are only beginning to recognize their value, facing challenges in securing resources and institutional legitimacy.

The partnership between evolving university pedagogy and CTLs offers both opportunities and challenges. While CTLs can bridge traditional academic structures with modern educational needs, their impact depends on institutional support, clear policies, and strategic integration. Without these, their role in driving innovation and inclusivity may remain aspirational rather than fully realized.

## IV. CONCLUSION

University Pedagogy and Centers for Teaching and Learning (CTLs) form a dynamic dipole that plays a transformative role in academic development. As higher education continues to evolve, the shift from traditional, content-centered teaching methods to student-centered and evidence-based approaches has become imperative. The integration of transformative learning principles, as outlined by Mezirow, Illeris, and Knowles, provides a robust theoretical foundation for developing reflective and engaged learners. CTLs complement these pedagogical advancements by offering essential support structures that promote faculty development, inclusive teaching, digital literacy, and sustainability education.

The case of Greek higher education underscores the importance of aligning national educational goals with broader European targets, especially in tertiary and adult education. While Greece has made significant strides in tertiary education attainment, challenges remain in achieving adult learning participation goals. Addressing these disparities requires a multifaceted approach that incorporates innovative pedagogical practices and the strategic involvement of CTLs. Ultimately, the partnership between University Pedagogy and CTLs is central to fostering institutional resilience, academic excellence, and student success. By embracing this dynamic relationship, universities can better navigate contemporary educational challenges and prepare graduates who are not only knowledgeable but also adaptable, socially responsible, and capable of contributing meaningfully to a rapidly changing world.

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