

# Teacher Evaluation in Higher Education as a Component of the Quality Assurance Process

Silvia TOTH<sup>11</sup>, Mariana CRAȘOVAN<sup>12</sup>

**Abstract:** Teacher evaluation in higher education is one of the quality assurance process components that influences a large array of subsystems of the higher education area. The present paper is analysing the teacher evaluation procedures of three universities, Aalborg University – Denmark, University of Bucharest – Romania and West University of Timișoara – Romania, in order to identify similarities and differences at a structural and qualitative level of the documents. There are significant similarities, especially content wise between the Romanian universities, but all the three documents touch on very similar information and are analogous and comparable on a structural level as well.

**Keywords:** teacher evaluation, quality assurance, higher education, peer evaluation, self-evaluation

## 1. Introduction

In a recent detailed analysis of the policies regarding quality assurance in higher education around Europe, The European Higher Education Area in 2015 Report (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015), the progress of quality assurance in European educational systems is presented, covering both internal and external quality assurance mechanisms. The main point of interest is the approach of national quality assurance systems in correlation with continuous change taking place in educational public policy. In the report it can be noticed that the main directions for quality assurance in education are internationalisation and the use of support from neighbouring countries in achieving quality assurance improvements, along with carefully watching the interventions of the important stakeholders in the quality assurance management and the challenges that these might bring to the system. More specifically, the report displays the following relevant data: all EU universities have their own autonomous internal quality assurance system, there is a significant growth in the number of national quality assurance agencies for higher education that are independent from the government, the number of reports that touch on critical or negative points is low (6) meaning that external quality assurance system is not transparent and trustworthy enough and needs improvement, 60% of the countries use an external quality assurance agency that is in line with the European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Area (ESG)<sup>13</sup> and the number of countries involving students in the quality assurance system had a significant increase reaching 31

---

<sup>11</sup> Master Student, West University of Timișoara, [silvia.toth@e-uvt.ro](mailto:silvia.toth@e-uvt.ro)

<sup>12</sup> Associate Professor, West University of Timișoara, [mariana.crasovan@e-uvt.ro](mailto:mariana.crasovan@e-uvt.ro)

<sup>13</sup> ESG – European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education Area. It became a mandatory request in 2003, as a part of European University Association (EUA) Graz Declaration

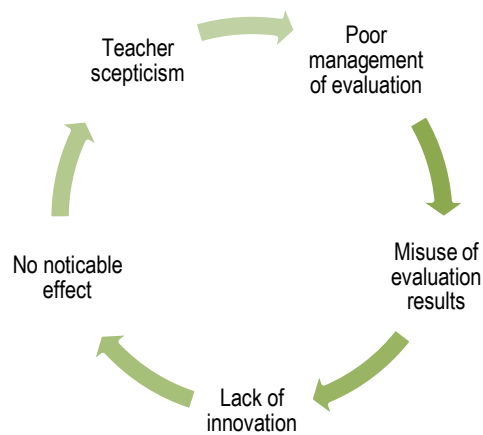
countries. This report offers strong evidence that quality assurance continues to be a dynamic area, permanently evolving, being strongly sustained by the Bologna process and the development of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA)<sup>14</sup>. As stated in the report, but also in other European policy documents (Crosier, Purser, & Smidt, 2007), there is an accentuated need for continuous development of the quality assurance processes within the European universities, but also a sustained development in the implementation of educational specific procedures in both internal and external quality assurance systems regarding the teachers' and students' educational activity. There is a trend in this direction from the early 1960 specially in American universities, where the student evaluation of teachers' activity is prevailing in the quality assurance process. This became also a current and largely spread issue in the European higher education area (Ghedini & Aquario, 2008). Even though Romania in most analyses meets all the minim criteria for quality assurance there is still room for improvement.

In the context of quality assurance, evaluation plays an important and decisive role in all the levels of the educational systems. There are a few perspectives over how educational evaluation can be seen. Some examples in this direction are: as a process that shows the degree to which the objectives of an educational programme had been reached (Tyler, 1950), as collecting and using information in order to make a decision about an educational programme (Cronbach, 1960), as a judgement of the result of an educational programme through observations, testing, questionnaires, interviews focusing on how the evaluation is made (Wheeler, 1967) or as attribution of a value to an entity in relation to an set of objectives or criterial values (Yoloye, 1981). Also, over time a classification of the different types of teacher evaluation was established, differentiating them based on the agent that runs the evaluation process (Braskamp, Brandenburg, & Ory, 1984; Kyriakidesa, Demetrioua, & Charalambousa, 2006; Looney, 2011) as student evaluation of teaching performance, peer evaluation and self-evaluation. For each of these, there are different methods of evaluation. Student evaluation of teacher performance can be measured using feedback forms from current students, questionnaires from alumni, interviews and focus groups, mid-semester feedback or analysis of achievement of learning outcomes. Peer evaluation can take the form of observation of teaching activities, analysis of supporting teaching materials or analysis of research products. The self-evaluation usually takes the form of a personal portfolio that contains information regarding the academic trajectory, the academic environment of the teacher, materials used in the teaching process, publications, etc. Out of the three forms of teacher evaluation student evaluation of teaching is the most used at European level and is considered to be the one that offers concrete information about the teachers and the quality of teaching (Marsh, 2007; Hattie, 2009). Moreover, there has also been found a positive correlation between student evaluation of teacher performance and increased engagement and satisfaction for studying (Chen Tsai & Lin, 2012). About peer evaluation teachers feel that it might be biased, but they still consider it essential for the quality assurance process even though

---

<sup>14</sup>EHEA – European Higher Education Area was launched in 2010, at the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Bologna Process, at the Budapest-Vienna Ministerial Conference. It aims at assuring compatibility, coherence and analogousness between the European higher education systems

improvements should be made (Salih, 2013). For self-evaluation the success depends on mutual support, openness and cooperation between teachers (Vanhoof, Van Petegem, Verhoeven, & Buvens, 2009), but an important role is also played by the educational manager which should aim at developing an atmosphere suitable for fair and equitable self-evaluation in order to encourage a proper quality assurance process. One of the main challenges in teacher evaluation is the teacher resistance, and even though evaluation is not a new phenomenon can still generate scepticism, tension and stress among university teachers. They are very used to play the evaluator, but are not as comfortable being evaluated. Contributing to this situation in some cases is the fact that the evaluation process does not have stable and clear rules of how is made, missing a transparent overview of the evaluation process. The lack of proper organization of the evaluation process is linked with the misuse or lack of use of the evaluation results, creating an impossibility for innovation in the teaching process. Due to the fact that even though the evaluation takes place, but the effects cannot be seen, a perpetuation of scepticism and rigidity towards teacher evaluation occurs. For a better understanding of this process the figure below was developed.



### **Possible challenges in teacher evaluation**

(Own source)

As teacher evaluation systems started developing, studies measuring their effect become more and more popular. And the results managed to show that there is a significant increase in teaching effectiveness, measured by students' learning outcomes, when the teachers are exposed to an evaluation environment. More interesting is that evaluation keeps its positive results even more than one year later after the evaluation moment (Taylor & Tyler, 2012). Today researchers try to discover the right mix of teacher evaluation methods, as part of a functional system, which can generate precise data about the way teachers organize their teaching and perform daily making use of scales for evaluating teaching effectiveness (Altaf, Kamal, & Hassan, 2013).

## **2. Methodology**

The aim of this study is to analyse the universities' quality assurance documents regarding teacher evaluation in order to identify similarities and differences at structural and qualitative level. The main hypothesis is that the documents present significant structural similarities, but the integration of teacher evaluation as an important component to quality assurance management is different.

To choose the universities to be analysed in this study the QS University Ranking 2015 was used, due to the fact that it offers the possibility to rank universities by different criteria. One of the criteria is Teaching Rating, being the most relevant to the study. Because this study is focusing on Romanian universities, two of the ranked Romanian universities were chosen for the comparison, the first Romanian university ranked and the last Romanian university ranked in the QS University Ranking 2015, precisely University of Bucharest and West University of Timișoara. These two universities will be compared with the first university ranked for Teaching in the QS University Ranking 2015, Aalborg University. For all three of the universities the documents regarding the procedure of teacher evaluation were analysed using the eight different factors, which were chosen based on qualitative research method for documents analysis (Bowen, 2009). Each of the factors has to be at least mentioned in the teacher evaluation procedures and will be offered a measurement depending to the extent of their presence in the three documents. The factors are:

1. aim / purpose of the teacher evaluation

The presented aim/purpose should be on the lines of continuous improvement of the teaching activity, taking into account partial evaluation results and a concrete final target, in line with other components of the quality assurance management process.

2. evaluation timeframe / when is the evaluation taking place

The timeframe of the evaluation during an academic year should place methods at the right time in order to allow an assessment and reconfiguration of the teaching process.

3. types of teacher evaluation

The ideal situation is when all of the three types of teacher evaluation are being used: student evaluation of teaching performance, peer evaluation and self-evaluation in order to create a comprehensive image to the teaching practice.

4. number and types of instruments used in teacher evaluation

In the same line with the previous factor, an array of instruments for each of the types of teacher evaluation has a significant contribution in building a complete picture of the teacher activity.

5. percentage of direct (self-evaluation) versus indirect (by others) sources of information

The number of indirect sources of information should be at least equal with the number of direct sources to be able to analyse the teacher performance as objectively as possible.

6. focus of evaluation

What will exactly be evaluated. The teachers need to know what components from their activity will be assessed. This type of information reveals what is important for each university, what is the most valuable component of the teacher activity and tells the teachers how they should approach it.

7. use of evaluation results

Shows how the results of the evaluation will be used by the university, by the faculty management, by teachers, by students, etc. This factor reflects the long-term perspective of the universities in setting up quality assurance documents in order to reach their goal.

8. last update of the document (date)

How old or new is the procedure of teacher evaluation is an indicator to the level of changes that affect quality assurance documents.

The above factors can offer an overview of the three documents, even though they might vary in size, degree of specificity or terminology. One of the universities presents three different documents, for each type of evaluation used, but it will be considered as a single compact document for the purpose of the analysis. From this point on, the University of Aalborg will be referred to as UA, the University of Bucharest as UB, and the West University of Timișoara as UW.

### 3. Results

Each of the documents regarding the teacher evaluation was analysed using the eight factors mentioned above. A summary of the result can be observed in Table 1. The results of the analysis for each of the factors show the following outcomes: UA states an aim that explicitly is directed towards teaching improvement, while UB and UW just tangentially mention improvement as their goal; UA and UW use at least one type of evaluation every 6 months, while UB has an annual procedure for evaluating teaching activity; all of the three universities use all three types of teacher evaluation, self-evaluation, peer evaluation and student evaluation of teaching performance. UB and UW both use the same instruments in running the teacher evaluation, utilising for each of the evaluations type mentioned above one type of instrument, self-evaluation form, student questionnaire and peer evaluation form based on peer observation of activity, while UA additionally appeals to alumni questionnaires, student focus groups and analysis of student academic results as a determinant for teaching effectiveness. The focus of the evaluation for UA is on how teachers are dealing with teaching in specific situation, how do they organize the learning programmes and what educational progress is registered; UB and UW both focus on teaching and research activity, but additionally UB is valuing institutional activity of the teacher and the effort put towards student-teacher relationships. The post evaluation results are being used by the UB to see if the institutional and individual desired perspective are met and are vaguely described at all. UW mentions implementation of changes based on the measured data, improvement of the educational process quality and assurance that the implementation procedures are correct and UA uses the results to analyse the cooperation between different departments, to implement necessary changes in the

instructional activity, to develop strategies for improving teaching quality, but also to verify the success of previously implemented improvement strategies and last, in order to be able to offer feedback to the students by granting access to teachers' evaluation.

**Table 2. Analysis summary**

<b>Analysis factor</b>	<b>Aalborg University</b>	<b>University of Bucharest</b>	<b>West University of Timișoara</b>
<b>Aim / purpose of teacher evaluation</b>	Improvement	partially improvement	partially improvement
<b>Evaluation timeframe</b>	6 months	12 months	6 months
<b>Type of evaluation</b>	self-evaluation	self-evaluation	self-evaluation
	peer evaluation	peer evaluation	peer evaluation
	student evaluation	student evaluation	student evaluation
<b>Evaluation instruments</b>	self-evaluation form	self-evaluation form	self-evaluation form
	student focus group		
	student questionnaire	student questionnaire	student questionnaire
	alumni questionnaire		
	student academic results		
	peer evaluation form (observation)	peer evaluation form (observation)	peer evaluation form (observation)
<b>Indirect instruments</b>	5	2	2
<b>Direct instruments</b>	1	1	1
<b>Focus evaluation of</b>	teaching in specific situations	teaching activity	teaching activity
	the organization of the study programmes	teacher-student interaction	
	Tracking of educational progress	research activity	research activity
		institutional activity	
<b>Use evaluation results of</b>	analysis of the cooperation between departments	institutional perspective	implementing changes based on the income measured data
	implementing necessary changes in instruction	individual perspective	improving the quality of the educational process
	developing strategies for improving teaching quality		assuring the implementation of procedures
	verifying the success of previously implemented strategies of improvement		

	giving feedback to students		
<b>Last update of the document</b>	2015	2009	2012, partially updated in 2015

The significant effort in gathering all the data about teaching activity can easily be steered into the right direction offering a possibility to host innovation and change for the teaching evaluation system, but also to the system as a complete quality assurance system. Regarding the instruments used for the teacher evaluation, for both UB and UW there is a lack of instruments that could offer a deeper look into the teaching performance and activity, even though the proportion of direct versus indirect sources of information is right. UA uses indirect instruments that allows a more comprehensive analysis, staying true to their aim, by reaching out to alumni questionnaires and student focus groups. It is interesting that the student learning outcomes play a role in the teacher evaluation process for UA, rising a lot of possible interpretations to the procedure (Steele, Hamilton, & Stecher, 2010; Zabaleta, 2007). The time frame of the evaluations does not present significant differences, but there is a major difference between the last update of the documents. A newer, updated document is much more likely to be a reference point in the quality assurance process.

The analysis has the specific limitations of a comparative study of documents. The documents regulating the teacher evaluation process in higher education institutions can show mostly structural similarities and differences, but there are in depth content details that can be separately analysed in order to track better the alignment with policy documents, national strategies and quality assurance management at a bigger scale. Also, the analysed documents were not constructed to meet quality assurance criteria, but to be functional documents inside the organization, justifying in this way potential minuses of a consistent quality assurance instrument. Because of the above mentioned limitations a general conclusion cannot be drawn, but it can be said that teacher evaluation procedure documents follow a similar pattern and touch on similar information, even though there can be seen a difference on the approach of the evaluation focus and the capitalization of the teacher evaluation result towards innovation and continuous development of teaching performance.

## References

- Altaf, I., Kamal, A., & Hassan, B. (2013). Development and Validation of University Teacher's Evaluation Scale. *Journal of Psychological Research*, 28(1), 155-178.
- Braskamp, L. A., Brandenburg, D. C., & Ory, J. C. (1984). *Evaluating teaching effectiveness: a practical guide*. London: Sage Publications.
- Chen Tsai, K., & Lin, K. (2012). Rethink Student Evaluation of Teaching. *World Journal of Education*, 2(2), 17-24.
- Cronbach, L. (1960). *Essentials of psychological testing (2nd edition)*. New York: Harper.
- Crosier, D., Purser, L., & Smidt, H. (2007). *Trends V: Universities Shaping the European Higher Education Area*. Brussels: European University Association.

- European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice. (2015). *The European Higher Education Area in 2015: Bologna Process Implementation Report*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Ghedin, E., & Aquario, D. (2008). Moving towards multidimensional evaluation of teaching in higher education: A study across four faculties. *Higher Education*, 56(5), 583-697.
- Hattie, J. (2009). *Visible Learning: A Synthesis of Over 800 Meta-Analyses Relating to Achievement*. New York: Routledge.
- Kyriakidesa, L., Demetrioua, D., & Charalambousa, C. (2006). Generating criteria for evaluating teachers through teacher effectiveness research. *Educational Research*, 48(1), 1-20.
- Looney, J. (2011). Developing High-Quality Teachers: teacher evaluation for improvement. *European Journal of Education*, 46(2), 440-455.
- Marsh, H. (2007). Students evaluations of university teaching: Dimensionality, reliability, validity, potential biases and usefulness. In Perry, R., & J. Smart, *The Scholarship of Teaching and Learning in Higher Education. An Evidence-based Perspective*. Dordrecht: Springer.
- Salih, A. R. (2013). Peer Evaluation of Teaching or 'Fear' Evaluation: In Search of Compatibility. *Higher Education Studies*, 3(2), 102-114.
- Steele, J. L., Hamilton, L. S., & Stecher, B. M. (2010). *Incorporating Student Performance Measures into Teacher Evaluation Systems*. California: RAND Corporation.
- Taylor, E. S., & Tyler, J. H. (2012). Can Teacher Evaluation Improve Teaching? *Education Next*, 12(4).
- Tyler, R. (1950). *Basic Principles of Curriculum and Instruction*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Vanhoof, J., Van Petegem, P., Verhoeven, J. C., & Buvens, I. (2009). Linking the Policymaking Capacities of Schools and the Quality of School Self-evaluations. The View of School Leaders. *Educational Management Administration & Leadership*, 37, 667-686.
- Wheeler, D. K. (1967). *Curriculum Process*. London: Hodder and Stoughton.
- Yoloye, E. A. (1981). Institutional arrangement for evaluation, planning and coordination of science and technology. *National Policy on Science and Technology*, (pp. 12-16). Lagos.
- Zabaleta, F. (2007). The use and misuse of student evaluations of teaching evaluations of teaching. *Teaching in Higher Education*, 12(1), 55-76.