

EVALUATION IN EUROPEAN ACADEMIC EDUCATIONAL SYSTEMS

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Abstract

In recent years the teaching evaluation process has become one of the pillars of academic education. It is a form of students participation that creates better teaching quality. The students' active participation in affecting the quality of teaching is a basis for forming the academic educational identity. This article is an attempt to bring closer and compare the scheme of teaching evaluation in three academic systems. We are going to analyze questionnaires from University of Wroclaw, "La Sapienza" University of Rome and The University of Wales, Aberystwyth. We are interested in specificity and identity of the evaluating criteria and function it performs in educational system. Through this analysis we are also trying to define the concept of evaluation as an essential criteria of: collecting data, description, estimating or valuing.

Key words: *analyze questionnaires, evaluation, specificity and identity of the evaluating criteria.*

Introduction

The term *evaluation* has come into common use in Polish language relatively recently. In general we can assume that its appearance is connected with the social and political changes that took place in Poland during the last 17 years. Its etymology, as A. Brzezińska (Brzezińska, 2000) rightly pointed out, derives from the Latin *evaleo-ere-* which literally means: to strengthen, to get stronger, to grow in strength. In assumption of this word formation lies first of all the idea of better quality of the existing state of affairs. Improving teaching quality is executed with the use of developed teaching standards that are supervised by the accreditation process of each structure of academic education.

According to Z. Ratajczak "Accreditation is a crowning achievement of evaluative procedures more commonly used in institutions and organizations which have a sense of duty to settle their obligations included not only in law or statute but also in the mission of the institution, even if it is not made in the form of a written document." (Bańka, Łącała, Noworol, Ratajczak, 2002, p.28). Among the developed accreditation criteria consistent with the Bologna Process Provisions (signatory of which became Poland in 1999) are so called students questionnaires.

Students evaluation of teaching quality is regarded as a necessary condition defined by accreditation standards (Brzezińska, Brzeziński, 2000). It is assumed that evaluation should concern all forms of teaching activities and that evaluation reports, which may serve various functions (e.g. formative, corrective, promotional or legitimizing) are required each semester. All academic education units construct teaching quality evaluation scheme independently. Lack of imposed standards results in a situation that students, even within the same academic unit, fill in different evaluation sheets. There are developed methodological theories and foundations of evaluation process which

show its remarkable complexity. The crucial question posed in this article is: what is a contemporary university model like (in Poland and in Europe)? What constitutes its specificity and identity? In practice, evaluation reflects (or should reflect) the mission of particular university, its values, and characteristics that distinguish it from the others. On one hand, evaluation is something typical of the given place, process and people. On the other hand, evaluation should respect certain rules and should be carried out in accordance with the research procedure. This article attempts to bring close and compare teaching evaluation scheme in three academic systems. We are going to analyze questionnaires from the University of Wroclaw, "La Sapienza" University of Rome and The University of Wales, Aberystwyth. We are interested in specificity and identity of evaluating criteria and the function which students evaluation questionnaires perform in educational system. Through this analysis we are trying to define the concept of evaluation as an essential criteria of: collecting data, description, estimating or valuing.

Theoretical and methodological aspects of evaluation

The term *evaluation* gives rise to various doubts- in one case it makes us think of assessment and estimate, in another, it is a source of uncertainty and insufficiency, resulting from simplified interpretation of the notion. The essence and role of evaluation is not obvious for subject experts, nor it is for evaluators. The term *evaluation* is included in methodology of teaching mainly because of practical Americans (Niemierko, 1996, p. 3-4, 3-32). The inspiration for the development of theoretical and methodological aspects of the evaluation issue was provided for practical reasons, such as the intention to verify what the society gains from the large-scale and expensive educational programs financed with "federal dollars," carried out in the United States in 40- 90s. As early as that period, it turned out that procedures enabling description, evaluation and directive on the use of evaluation results in further practice are indispensable. Thus, evaluation is a field that originated from scientific research and administrative activity, practices of management, social intervention, planning and control activities, set in political and cultural realities of a given community (Keeves, 1992).

In evaluation we can distinguish many research trends and approaches, which can be grouped into two fundamental:

- Formal measurement-oriented evaluations.
- Comprehensive (holistic) evaluations.

This distinction has far-reaching consequences in reference to goal setting, role and evaluation proceeding.

Formal measurement is usually performed in accordance with the bureaucratic procedures. Authors of these procedures prefer evaluation of the effectiveness with the use of countable indicators. For these purposes, standardized tests and statistical indicators are applied. In this instance the role of evaluation is to provide countable evidence of success or failure of the given undertaking. This form of evaluation is performed in public education and in all technocratic institutions (Majewski, 1999, p. 14-15).

The other form of approach to evaluation is the holistic approach. It is characterized by democratic and dialogue-like features of the evaluation process. These features are present at the different stages, i.e. at the stage of designing evaluation process, conducting research works, analyzing the results and their further use. In this case the evaluation is characterized by sensitivity to social context in which activities are performed. It takes into account each party's interests, investigates essentiality and the meaning of activities from the perspective of expectations, attitudes and capabilities of the participants. The research is based on the compilation of methods, with particular emphasis on the qualitative methods enabling the collection of data on participants' state of awareness, their opinions and experience. Evaluation procedures are open at all stages of research works. It introduces elements of dialogue between the parties concerned, program recipients, executors and customers. Evaluation criteria, the aims of program or aims of organization, essential questions and the ways of using evaluation outcome are the subject of the

parties arrangements.

“Evaluation is a process of the systematic collection of information about the activities, characteristics and outcomes of program, personnel and products; this information is used by experts in order to reduce uncertainty and to improve effectiveness. It also serves decision making by taking into account what this program, personnel or products do and what they refer to.” (Patton, 1982, p.15 (in:) Korporowicz, 1997).

Evaluation may be assigned by superiors of the given organization (e.g., project managers or at the request of the top management of the given institution) and carried out by the suitably trained personnel of the given organization, who participates in the organization functioning, which is an *internal evaluation*. Evaluation aimed at investigating an organization’s own activities, their results, or degree of accomplishment of the established goals, may be conducted by this given organization, often with the participation of so called social actors. The crucial evaluation rule is to collect information in systematic manner and for defined purpose. The purpose is to evaluate the particular issue not only with the view to the own, earlier established goal, but also with respect to other results and qualities of evaluated activities. In practice, evaluation it is a procedure conducted in social situations, aimed at the improvement of functioning of certain institutions, organizations and also the improvement of some specific project or program. Most often, it is a basis for development of the certain remedial strategies taking the shape of planned change, intervention program or prevention, because the reason for evaluation research is a need to solve the problem. Evaluation may be treated as a component of decisional procedures. It is the element of decision chain that consists of ascertaining the facts and “assessing value (Korporowicz, 1997, p. 241).

Evaluation project, of an assessing nature, is strongly connected with the system of values held by decision-makers or people who conduct the analysis. It is rare to obtain pure and free valuation research scheme. In social surveys, which by its very nature are involved in system of values, it is actually impossible. Even in objective evaluation research, for instance those concerning the selection of technical facilities in education, the role of valuation appears to be vital. The essence of evaluation consists not only in the description of specific state of affairs, but also in giving them sign, that is valency. In other words, it is the collection of information and assigning meaning in order to distinguish between beneficial and malign. Functions ascribed to evaluation may simultaneously transform into evaluation goals, thus, evaluation research may: activate, modify, collectivize, improve, explain, aid, summarize, direct, legitimize etc.

Moreover, the functions ascribed to evaluation correspond with the subject or areas of activities within the evaluation process. When it happens, the best way is to analyze by sticking to the logic of the process of evaluation design.

From the ethical and methodological point of view, evaluation should take into account certain criteria. Robson (1997) emphasizes the following distinguishing features of evaluation and states that evaluation is pointless if there are no prospects for using it. Therefore, evaluation should be useful. Evaluation should be conducted only in the situation when it is possible considering policy (the given institution acting policy) and practical reasons, and when benefit balances costs. Only then may evaluation be regarded as feasible. Evaluation should be carried out only when it is possible to demonstrate that it will be performed honestly, in accordance with ethical values, so that it will be decent. After confirmation of its usefulness, feasibility and decency, evaluation should be conducted professionally and precisely. The regulatory power of evaluation may be influenced by various factors (Wojciszke, 1991):

- the extent and depth of the reflection on values
- the content of evaluation
- the manner of collecting and sorting data (i.e. from the outer perspective of a person who is not a member of the organization and does not participate in its functioning – or from inner perspective, of so called social actor of evaluation research, technocratic-democratic, based on dialogue or autocratically imposed, unilateral or multi-aspectual, etc.)
- the way of its delivery

Methodology of Research

The quality of teaching evaluation criteria (students questionnaires)

In our research we use the interpretative-comparative methodology which enables us to make a comparison between social phenomena and find their differences and similarities. Therefore, in the case of our subject, we made a comparison between the three systems of evaluation and seek to find their differences and common features. An outcome of our analysis is to be a model which helps to formulate postulates for an ideal set of principles for evaluation.

In order to compare students questionnaires, criteria which enable direct monitoring of similarities and differences between the questionnaires was applied. This was Based on the experience of applying Student Satisfaction Survey questionnaire at the University of Birmingham and Lund, (cultural adaptation of this questionnaire to the Polish conditions was presented by Z. Łącała and C. Noworol (Brzezińska, Brzeziński, 2000). The areas affecting quality of teaching in academic education were selected. An important aspect of comparison, resulting from methodological assumptions on evaluation process, is the way of collecting and organizing data, so the way in which instructions are given and information about the students are collected during evaluation, etc.

Table 1 below presents all the points by the use of which the evaluation process conducted at the three European universities in signatory countries of Bologna Declaration was compared.

Table 1. The quality of teaching measurement categories (Brzezińska, Brzeziński, 2000).

Evaluation content	The way of collecting and organizing data
1. Teaching	1. Instruction
2. Conditions of studying	2. Information about student
3. Evaluation of self-development capabilities	3. Response scale
4. Evaluation of university management and conditions of studying	4. The way of data collection

Results of Research

Comparative analysis of the content of students questionnaires

In the initial stages of the analysis, it is easy to notice that questions included in students evaluation questionnaires, in the largest part, refer to the teaching area. The largest amount of data on university's functioning, in various aspects, is obtained by the Welsh questionnaire. The presented Polish questionnaire contains the least number of questions. The questions included in Polish questionnaire focus mainly on lecturer's work. Bearing in mind intention to formulate more precise conclusions from the comparative analysis of three selected European examples of students evaluation questionnaire, we would like to give a direct presentation of them.

La Sapienza, Università degli Studi di Roma, Italy

Teaching program and materials:

Information about a course (the aim of a course, its program, exams, office hours, supplementary classes) are available/accessible in clear and exhaustive form. Do issues raised during the classes comply with the program? Are recommended teaching materials, books suitable for learning the subject?

The lecturer and the classes:

- Does the lecturer miss the classes?
- Is the lecturer really eager to explain?

- Are lecture hours respected by the lecturer?
- Does the lecturer express her/himself lucidly?
- Are the lectures helpful in preparations for exams?
- Does the lecturer stir up students' interest in the subject?
- Do the lectures explain the usefulness of the given materials for the further scientific and professional career?
- Does the lecturer use teaching aids (board, overhead projector, computer etc.)?
- Does the lecturer encourage students participation?
- Is the former knowledge sufficient to understand raised issues?
- Are you interested in raised issues (irrespective of the way in which they are implemented)?

Supplementary classes:

- Are the supplementary classes (laboratory classes, tutorials) useful for deepening the knowledge of the given subject
- Are the lecture rooms and their equipment suitable?

Exams:

- Does the lecturer encourage students to pass the exams in due time by organizing trial exams or other initiatives?
- Does the lecturer prepare exams on the basis of studied material?
- Was the form of the exam defined clearly?
- Do you think that the prepared form of the exam would be a suitable test of students knowledge?
- Is the date of the exam available at this point of the course?
- Do you have your own comments and observations concerning the lecturer and his/ her classes?
- Are you satisfied with the offer of the given course?

Aberystwyth The University of Wales, UK

The module:

- The module had a clear and coherent structure
- I found the subject of this module interesting
- I can see the relevance of the subject matter of this module

The lecture and the lecturer:

- The lecture is substantively difficult
- I have learned a lot from the lecture
- The lecture helped me in working on other subject matters
- The lecture is useful for my career
- The lecture is interesting
- The lecture is challenging / demanding
- The lecture is well taught by...
- The lecture helped me to understand the subject matter
- The lecture was well delivered

- The lecture was intelligible and involving
- The lecture room facilities were suitable
- The visual materials / handouts were useful

Readings:

- The module outline / reading list was useful
- Have you found other books useful? What kind of books?
- The supplementary reading list was useful
- The recommended reading was easily available from the library

Support teaching:

- The amount of support teaching (classes, tutorials, seminars) was adequate
- The support teaching worksheets, essays, exercises, projects helped me to understand the subject matter
- Student participation was encouraged
- The sessions were effectively managed and delivered
- The tutor was approachable and considerate towards students

Assessed coursework:

- The assessed work was consistent with the content of the module
- The amount of time available to complete the assessed work was reasonable
- Write your general comments on the subject and the materials

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Lecturer:

- The lecturer introduces the subject (defines goals, program, reading, provides syllabus)
- The lecturer clearly sets the requirements
- The lecturer is prepared to the lectures
- The lecturer intelligibly delivers information
- The way he conducts the classes involves students
- Creates pleasant atmosphere
- Did all the planned classes take place?

Lack of response about:

- Program, materials, module
- recommended reading
- supplementary classes which facilitate studying
- exams and assessed works
- general evaluation of teaching subject and materials
- socio-living conditions

Table 2. Comparative analysis of three discussed students questionnaires-summary.

Categories	La Sapienza, Università degli Studi di Roma, Italy	Aberystwyth The University of Wales, UK	Department of Psychology, University of Wrocław, Poland
Teaching	1. Program and materials (3 questions in questionnaire) 2. The lecturer and the classes (11 questions) 3. Supplementary classes (2 questions) 4. Exams (6 questions in questionnaire) 5. Students comments and observations on the lecture and lecturer (1) In total 23 items	1. Module (3) 2. The lecture and lecturer (12) 3. Reading (4) 4. Support teaching (5) 5. Assessed coursework (2) 6. General comments on subject and materials (1) In total 27 items	1. The lecturer (7 items in questionnaire, 100%)
Studying conditions	Lecture rooms equipment and timetable (2 questions)	Level of satisfaction survey : support services (20 items)	Lack of questions
Evaluation of self-development capabilities	Compare 6 questions of "Teaching" category: The lecturer and the classes	Compare 4 questions of "Teaching" category: The lecturer and the lecture Would you choose Aberystwyth for the second time?	Lack of questions
Evaluation of university management and studying conditions	General level of satisfaction (1)	Open questions (4): Studies management, lectures and learning process improvement, , other useful comments	Lack of questions

Studying conditions:

Table 3. Evaluation questionnaires on studying conditions.

La Sapienza, Università degli Studi di Roma, Italy	Aberystwyth The University of Wales, UK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The lecture rooms equipment and timetable • Are the lecture rooms suitable (can you find seat, can everything be well heard and seen)? • Does the timetable enables you to participate in other anticipated classes? 	<p>I am satisfied with:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. the admissions process 2. fresher's weekend is a good intro to university life 3. the student registration 4. the careers service 5. personal tutoring service 6. Financial Contingency Fund 7. the Students Loan Service 8. the university health centre 9. the university welfare service 10. the S.U. welfare service 11. students association service 12. the computing facilities 13. the Library facilities 14. the language and learning centre 15. the Hall Accommodation 16. the private accommodation 17. the university sports facilities 18. the Town sports facilities 19. the university eating/drinking establishment 20. the Town eating/drinking establishment 21. If i had to choose a university again I would choose Aberystwyth

Institute of Psychology, University of Wrocław, Poland – lack of questions

The way of collecting and organizing data

The scope of questions about a student in three discussed students evaluation questionnaire is diverse (see table 4). The Italian questionnaire reveals high level of interest in the degree of involvement in studying and individual studying conditions of the person who completes the questionnaire. The Welsh questionnaire, in the first place, focuses on the feeling of safety and discretion (anonymity) of disclosed opinions. Whereas the Polish questionnaire shows strong methodologically appropriate approach to the collection of data on the research subject.

Table 4. Information about a student who fills in the questionnaire.

La Sapienza, Università degli Studi di Roma, Italy	Aberystwyth The University of Wales, UK	Department of Psychology, University of Wrocław, Poland
Age range Gender Type of course Year of studies The question about class attendance How many exams have you passed in recent 12 months? How much time (hours) have you spent on individual learning in recent month? In recent month you have lived in hall / private accommodation	Coded data	Academic year Year of studies Winter / Summer semester Type of studies: intramural/ extramural studies

The style of the Italian questionnaire instruction is the most developed, open and partner-like. The instruction from the Welsh questionnaire is shorter, but relevant and partner-like. The Polish questionnaire instruction is relevant but clearly official and technocratic in its form.

The response scale applied in evaluation questionnaires it is 5-point scale (the exception is 4-point scale in the Polish questionnaire: 5-very good, 4-good, 3- satisfactory, 2 – unsatisfactory) albeit varied adequately to the content of items in the questionnaire, e.g.,

- never, rarely, often, always, I don't know
- never, rarely, often, very often, I don't know
- not at all, little, enough, entirely, I don't know
- yes, it is ready and available; yes, it is ready but not available; it is not ready; I didn't ask for clarification.

Instruction:

La Sapienza, Università degli Studi di Roma, Italy	Aberystwyth The University of Wales, UK
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please complete all parts of the form expressing your opinion • Your opinions serve the improvement of our academic offer • The questionnaire is anonymous and for statistical survey only. Under an act 675/96 we inform that completing the questionnaire is not obligatory and students have the right to refuse to participate in the survey. • Please, read each question carefully and mark a square with the first letter of selected answer. • Please, mark " I don't know" only when your experience is too inadequate to give answer. • Please, use blue or black ink. In case of correction, draw a star next to the right answer. After the completion, give the questionnaire to a person responsible for its distribution, who afterwards will deliver it to our commission. • Thank you very much for cooperation. • Evaluation Department 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Please, answer all the questions by marking appropriate boxes like this: — • Attention!!! • Mark the code of the lecturer by choosing one number from each column • Multiple choice field complete by marking appropriate boxes like this: X • Use blue or black ballpoint pen • Do not tick, cross or ring boxes • Do not correct already completed boxes • Do not fold the paper

The conclusions about the model of contemporary university

1. The extent and depth of the reflection on values:

In contrast to Poland, European students to a greater extent co-create identity of their university. Due to efficient and developed evaluation system they can actively affect quality of teaching and functioning of university, and, thus form its identity.

2. The content of evaluation:

In Europe there are more categories and more questions: about many aspects of a teaching process, about evaluation of self-development capabilities, study conditions, and organizational, living and teaching, and personal conditions.

3. The data is collected mainly from inner perspective of a social actor of evaluation research, in this case a student.

In Poland evaluation is carried out in technocratic, unilateral, legitimizing style, with intention to rationalize, whereas in Europe it is conducted in democratizing style, to a greater extent basing on multi-aspectual dialogue. It has clearly formative, rationalizing function. It can be seen in number and kinds of questions about a student, in the form of instruction, in the number of description categories, even at the level of applied evaluation scale.

4. The way of evaluation delivery:

In Europe the questionnaires are sent to students' homes at the end of semester or / and given to them on the last lecture by the lecturer. The outcome of evaluation, in the form of generalized feedback, is announced to the students and employees on the university website. The outcome of evaluation is taken into account in order to improve university functioning in organizational and teaching areas; evaluation and control of the level of teaching through lecturer's work evaluation is typical Polish. This may be only Wroclaw way of evaluation for development- as for now.

Although the pursuit of unification of academic system in Europe initiated by the Bologna Process brought about positive changes such as the establishment of common level of teaching programs comparison or the introduction of European Credit Transfer and Accumulation System (ECTS), in case of evaluation of teaching quality with the use of students questionnaire allows us to observe significant differences resulting from various approaches to the student-university relation. The students questionnaires analyzed in this article come from universities in Great Britain, Italy and Poland, clearly demonstrate lack of common standards, referring to the content of students evaluation of teaching quality. Differences are visible especially in the thematic areas. In the Polish questionnaire there are only questions concerning teaching, mainly focusing on the lecturer. In accordance with the results of analysis presented in this article we can acknowledge that the Polish questionnaire has a personal dimension – a student evaluates a person, whereas in European questionnaires the above mentioned factor constitutes only a slight percentage and questions rather refer to the content and form of classes as well as studying conditions. Presumably it results from the fact that European Universities may use the experience of democracy where the whole evaluation process is more emphasized than its personal dimension. It also appears that a complete lack of questions about studying conditions, prospects of students self-development capabilities and general evaluation of the university management in the Wroclaw University students questionnaire may account for the fact that democracy in Poland was unavailable for almost half a century. This has caused many profound changes in the mental terms of relations between student, univer-

sity authorities and employees. Mutual efforts of democratic changes introduced after 1990 are slowly observed in the whole Polish academic system, but their pace is not parallel to the degree of development of such social structure as it is in the founder members of European Union. Through this article we wanted to present a small fragment of argumentation that striving to develop the common grounds of academic education at the level of teaching quality evaluation is complicated due to the different approaches to the process of evaluation.

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