Evaluation In Education – A Formative Approach In Measuring The Performances Of Academics

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Abstract
Higher education institutions are currently faced with a dilemma: how to preserve the quality of education they provide, and therefore how to survive in the conditions of budget cuts, increasing competition, decreasing school population, as well as quality and transparency requirements. No higher education institution can afford today to maintain a large teaching staff, inefficient in terms of teaching and research. This is an argument in favour of a teacher evaluation model in higher education, which should be effective, to ensure quality and, at the same time, to help teachers develop and refine. The “George Bacovia” University of Bacau has in view such a model.

In evaluating the academic staff, it is required a shift from summative assessments (out of administrative needs) to the formative ones (in need of improvement), and a special training of the academic staff for change. These changes involve the development of an integrated model of teacher evaluation that reflects the teacher's competence (knowledge, skills, attitudes) in the main components of its work (teaching, research, interpersonal relations, employment training, etc.).

Keywords: evaluation model, summative evaluation, formative evaluation

INTRODUCTION

In the literature, there are many definitions of human resource performance evaluation. Thus, Anton Rotaru and Adriana Prodan [11, p. 175], define the evaluation of professional performances as “the process of determining how and the extent to which the employee carries out his duties and responsibilities of the position occupied, compared with the set standards and results communicated to employees”.

J.M. Ivancievich and W.F. Glueck, cited by Aurel Manolescu [7, p. 277, cited in 8, p. 389], consider performance evaluation as “the basic activity of the human resources management carried out to determine the extent to which employees of an organization effectively fulfill their duties and responsibilities.”

Robert Mathis [9, p. 159] defines the evaluation of individual professional performances as the “assessment of the extent to which employees meet their responsibilities in relation to the position held.”

Petre Burloiu [2, p. 594] has an interdisciplinary approach of performance evaluation: “a complex process that examines the dynamic participation of components of an employee’s personality and its reflection in the final results of his work; an emotional evaluation because it reveals the employee to himself and to his colleagues.”

D.C. Fisher, F.L. Schoenfeldt, B.J. Shaw, cited by Aurel Manolescu [5, p. 450, cited in 8, p. 389] situates this problem in time: “performance evaluation is the process by which an employee’s contribution is assessed during a certain period of time.”

According to G.A. Cole [4, p. 339], “the evaluation of employees’ performances is a fundamental means by which managers and their subordinates can systematically discuss problems arising in their daily work.”
A. Manolescu integrates the evaluation of performances in the concept of performance management [8, p. 387]. “Performance management is a systematic approach to human resource management, in general, and to performance evaluation, in particular, using objectives, performances, appraisals and feedback as means of motivating employees in order to understand and fully exploit their creative potential.”

In higher education, evaluation is the extent to which academics’ work and results meet the expectations of the institution’s management, students and labour market. There are several reasons for which universities develop evaluation procedures [6, pp. 60-61], the general objectives of evaluation being:

- to identify the current level of performance in a teacher’s activity;
- to identify the strengths and weaknesses of a teacher;
- to ensure a proper reward of the job;
- to improve the work performance of employees;
- to provide a basis of rewarding employees in relation to their contribution to achieving organisational goals;
- to motivate the organisation’s members;
- to identify training needs and professional development;
- to identify the potential performances of the organisation’s members (for promotion or transfer);
- to provide the information needed for the sequential planning of the organisation’s activities;
- to facilitate the self-discovery and awareness of personal and professional qualities and skills;
- to create a climate of mutual trust between manager and employees;
- to encourage responsibility.

Evaluation mainly aims at creating and developing a coherent and effective performance measurement system at all levels of academic institutions, starting with the whole institution and ending with each staff member.

Individual evaluation is part of an institutional mechanism designed to contribute to:

- improve the overall performance of the university, of its subunits and of each staff member of the university;
- increase the individual contribution to achieving the objectives and performance indicators;
- assume the individual responsibility for their own activity;
- increase the staff involvement in solving tasks and problems of the university;
- increase professional competence and personal development.

1. FORMATIVE OR SUMMATIVE EVALUATION

The evaluation of the academic quality of teachers aims at the teaching, learning, research, communication processes as well as at the obtained results in order to establish the level of educational effectiveness. Ensuring the quality of the teaching staff is a fundamental requirement for any higher education institution that aims to apply its own strategy for continuous improvement concerning the quality of its own formative programs and activities.

The periodic evaluation procedures of the activities the academic staff provide are the main guarantee that a university can offer for its quality or prestige. The formulation of purpose is essential in building and implementing an evaluation system. The purpose helps to set the evaluated aspects, determines the choice of sources and methods of analysis and data collection, the analysis depth, as well as the way of disseminating the obtained results.

The evaluation for diagnosis and improvement of the teacher’s work can help improve not only the person as a teacher but also the teacher as a person. In this case, the evaluation tends to promote both professional growth and the personal growth and therefore it is called formative evaluation.
The evaluation for administrative purposes generally refers to all activities for teachers and is linked to a regulatory approach: it is used for decision-making processes concerning the appointment or employment or remuneration of a teacher and serves on the teacher career decisions. It is useful for selecting candidates to fill vacant positions or for removal during the budgetary restrictions.

The question now is the relationship between formative and summative evaluation, with reference to the complementarity and distinctions between them.

Centra, John A. (1979) [3, cited in 8] makes a clear distinction between formative and administrative evaluation, believing that they are mutually exclusive and should be realised only in parallel. According to the author, the formative evaluation is used to improve education: the information, regardless of its sources (students, colleagues, experts), are returned to the teacher in order to cause a positive change. According to Centra, the various functions of the teacher (teaching, research, etc.) must be continuously evaluated to give individuals the chance to improve weaknesses and build, create, based on their strengths. The formative evaluation applies to all functions of the university professor. They are interrelated and must be evaluated first in order to help professors improve one or another of these functions.

Starting from the hypothesis that formative evaluation generates an improvement of the quality of education, Centra believes that significant improvement is possible only if the evaluation meets four conditions: a) it provides new training knowledge to the professor, b) it is designed by the professor as relevant c) it makes it clear that changes must be made; d) it motivates the professor to change the way they provide “services”. In this case, the formative evaluation is part of a broader context, called by Centra the model C+V+S+M [1, pp.625-650], which summarizes the four components: knowledge (C), the value of information (V), willingness to change (S), personal motivation (M). Applying such a model will allow the transformation of the evaluation process into a real and formative approach and it will avoid sliding into a purely administrative management.

Usually universities put more emphasis on formative evaluation rather than on the administrative one. To be really effective the evaluation system should have both a formative and an administrative purpose, since both forms of evaluation have the same objectives: to improve teaching. Administrative evaluation tends to improve teaching through the selection of the teaching staff, while formative evaluation aims to improve teaching through diagnosis, retroaction (feedback) and development.

Formative evaluation has to be made before the administrative evaluation, particularly for new teachers who will thus receive the information needed to improve their activity.

For formative purposes, the evaluation will refer to certain aspects of teaching. For example, a teacher will carry out a current evaluation of its course (over 4 -5 weeks after the beginning of the semester) to get a picture of the course development from the beginning of the semester. He might ask students if the exposition is clear, if the used technical aids and the suggested lectures help them understand the materials, if the teaching aids are useful. He could propose a course outline to a colleague to see if it is clear and complete. The teacher could invite an advisor on issues of higher education pedagogy and psychology to analyze the course or the way of presenting it. These partial information obtained from the teacher’s initiative, cannot serve as data for administrative evaluation. Within the administrative evaluation, however, there are used data from all activities that make up the teacher’s charge. For example, all courses, including the instructional material, will be evaluated through various information sources.

In formative evaluation the teacher can consult any person able to provide a valid judgement in order to improve his activity: students, colleagues, specialists in higher education, etc.. These people will be able to offer different information depending on the request made. For administrative purposes, the sources of information should be multiple. It is not enough to appeal only to students who have benefited from only a part of the educational process, namely the provision of courses. By means of complementary information sources other dimensions of the professional activity have to be evaluated, as well. For example, one could call on similar experts to assess the quality of the material taught, the degree of meeting objectives, relevance of content, etc.. However, it is not recommended to evaluate the teacher’s
activity starting from the observation of a single lecture, as these data are neither objective nor representative of the overall work of the teacher.

The formative evaluation is prior to the administrative evaluation. It will serve to detect the changes to be done before a particular decision regarding the teacher’s career to be taken.

The means used for formative evaluation are usually non-standard means. They may be written or oral, the written statements containing open or closed statement. Statements are specific to an instructive situation and based on some aspect of teaching. For administrative evaluation, there will be used standard questionnaires, including questions about the course as a whole. Statements must be common to all teachers who are in the same instructive situation.

In the case of the formative, the evaluation method can be very flexible. For the administrative evaluation, a standard method is recommended, appropriate for all teachers evaluated.

The formative evaluation results are intended primarily for the evaluated teacher or any person designated by him. The formative evaluation, being partial, must not appear in the teacher file. The administrative evaluation results will be accessible to the evaluated teacher and to any other authorized person: Head of Department, Dean, Rector, examination commission etc. The data will be global and will represent the entire activity of the teacher. They will be obtained through standardized and validated tools and will come from true and valid information sources.

The formative evaluation can be made whenever needed. In contrast, the administrative evaluation is valid only at the end of an instructive activity (course, seminar cycle, etc.), and in a competition or renewal of the contract, when overall activity of the teacher is being assessed.

Both purposes of evaluation, the formative and the administrative one, without being opposed to one another, in complementarity, by specific means and methods, provide useful data to the evaluated person.

2. THE FORMATIVE EVALUATION AND THE PROFESSIONAL AND PERSONAL DEVELOPMENT OF THE ACADEMIC TEACHING STAFF AT “GEORGE BACOVIA” UNIVERSITY IN BACAU

The purpose of formative evaluation during the academic year is to enable teachers to identify the strengths and weaknesses of its work. Teachers can then introduce the necessary corrections to improve such activities.

The development of questionnaires for formative purposes is strongly connected to the teacher’s interest and initiative. These questionnaires are different from the administrative one by a series of characteristics. The questionnaires deal with certain aspects of the teacher’s activity; are applied throughout the year, before the administrative assessment; the frequency of administration depends on the needs and on the teacher. They may be written or oral, open or closed [8]. The written questionnaires may contain both indicators relating to the positive aspects, and those that need improvement, their formulation is flexible and subjective. The teacher may ask students a global view or a detailed assessment of a single aspect, e.g. the course structure and content, the clarity of the teaching material exposure, the clarity of explanations for the tasks to accomplish, the clarity of teaching aids, relevance, of the bibliography and suggested readings etc.

An important issue is the context in which the evaluation of the teachers’ performance takes place. Thus, the evaluation results are influenced by a number of features related to: the course (the academic group size, the optional / compulsory character of the course, the number of credits, the specificity of the discipline), the teacher (degree, work experience, gender, personality), students (biographic characteristics, learning ability, personality traits), the evaluation development (students’ anonymity, purpose and period of evaluation, the number of participants to assess).

2.1. The formative evaluation of courses, seminars, practical work

The most important aspects of a teacher’s activity helping to realize the desired formative evaluation are:
• Catching the students’ attention;
• Introducing the subject;
• Explaining the subject;
• The aids necessary for teaching and learning;
• Keeping the students’ interest;
• Teacher-student interaction;
• Organization of students;
• Retroaction;
• Communication with students;
• The use of time;
• Lecture summary.

2.2. Formative evaluation of theses/research projects

The formative evaluation of research theses/projects has its characteristics. The formative approach aims at improving the process of improving the drawing up the theses by 2nd or 3rd year students and allows both parties (teaching staff and student) to express their requirements, to clarify their rights and responsibilities in order to improve the paper guiding process. The evaluation, in this case, takes place during the whole student’s process of supervision.

In the elaboration of the formative evaluation approach of research theses/projects, the following efficacy factors are taken into account: organisation, structure, clarity; the support offered to the student; meeting the specific objectives; knowing the materials and the methodology; general assessment.

There are three stages in the evaluation process:

1. Planning the research project;
2. The realisation of the research project;
3. The typing of the research project.

Each stage contains the indicators representative for efficiency factors. The approach is accomplished both by the teacher and by the student, serving as a self-evaluation instrument for both parties. At the end of each stage both parties (teacher and student) discuss the progress of the accomplished work.

2.3. Colleagues and experts

The colleagues with an experience in the field of activity of the evaluated person and the experts in the field represent another valid source of evaluation. If the students are the main source of information in order to evaluate the professor’s activity, the colleagues and experts are the most valid sources to evaluate the taught content. When formative objectives are followed, experts represent the most indicated persons to assess different aspects of academics’ activity.

Colleagues and experts are the most qualified persons to evaluate the taught materials, being able to assess it as they know very well the taught discipline and they also have experience in evaluating the teachers’ materials, all these allowing them to issue value judgements on the validity of the presented materials. The colleagues’ judgements will refer to: the taught content, the accuracy, complexity, pertinence, thoroughness and type of competences involved in teaching.

However, despite all precautions taken during the evaluation of materials by colleagues or third parties, certain problems may appear, such as:

• friendship relations between the evaluated person and colleagues/third parties;
• the limited number of experts;
• insufficient knowledge of the candidate’s field of study;
• the competition with the candidate;
• the double role of the expert (lawyer or opponent etc.)
In order to avoid such problems, institutions should appeal to the exchange of experts activating in the same field.

Colleagues and experts can assess both the teaching and the research activity of the teacher. They can supply valid information on the following aspects: knowledge and experience in the field of the evaluated colleague; the relevance of the formulated objectives and the teaching aid used (for example, tasks, evaluation papers, projects, documents, bibliography etc.); the students’ performances (notes, projects); the quality of the used teaching methods and procedures; the interest for teaching and research; the quality of the research activity (originality and significance of work, the contribution to the field, the theoretical, logical and/or methodological rigueur); the quality of professional services (complexity and utility of problems, of initiated projects).

2.4. Self-evaluation

The purpose of self-evaluation is to encourage teachers to closely examine their activity. This self-analysis is important both for his/her professional development and for his/her personal life because it depends on a thorough examination of the ups and downs of his teaching activity. By means of self-evaluation, teachers can provide a complete description of their work and the intellectual effort behind this work. The teacher can specify different aspects of teaching: course objectives, course outline, teaching strategies, the relevance of the used evaluation means, the adjustment of teaching according to the received feedback etc. The teacher is the only person who can justify the appropriateness of personal contributions, the self-evaluation, however, having value only if accompanied by other information sources.

Evaluation may also involve people outside the school (alumni, employees, specialists) whose experience can enrich the meaning of the most suitable education objectives and learning standards. Therefore, evaluation is not a task only for a small group of experts but a collaborative activity. Its target is deeper, a greater attention and better information on learning can contribute to the concentration of efforts from several directions in order to improve teacher performance.

2.5. The management of evaluation results

Evaluation is not an end in itself. It is important to develop training strategies and psycho-pedagogical training for teachers wishing to improve their work. Such mechanisms favour progress and minimizes incompetence.

The implementation of the evaluation approach must be accompanied by a training program for teachers (especially for young people, lacking experience). It should facilitate personal development, the development of relational and communication skills with educational partners (students, colleagues, the academic community), the improvement of techniques to stimulate students’ creativity and their use in teaching.

The training program must inform teachers on the pedagogical objectives, to train them in different areas of teaching – learning, to prepare them to intervene in various teaching situations: large/ small groups, seminars, laboratory work, internships, etc., to guide to to improve all aspects of teaching, to prepare them both for both formative administration evaluation.

In workshops, conferences, individual discussions with teachers, a series of topics can approached, such as:

- designing and planning a course;
- the educational objectives of the course;
- effective communication of the course;
- effective teaching at seminars;
- interactive methods of teaching / learning;
- evaluation of the teaching quality;
• assessment of students;
• encourage the independent work of students;
• use of teaching aids.

Oriented on the educational quality – performance axis, “George Bacovia” University in Bacau, has in view the assurance of the quality of initial training processes and professional development of teachers. The main areas under consideration for improving teaching refer to the organisation of seminars on various topics:

• seminars on effective strategies to motivate students for learning;
• seminars on effective teaching methods (cooperative learning, problem-based learning, participatory activities);
• seminars on the characteristics of effective teaching (course organization, clarity of the course);
• seminars on improving communication skills;
• seminars for the use of multimedia equipment in teaching;
• seminars for the design of courses / seminars;
• seminars on effective ways of assessing students’ knowledge;
• advice on the interpretation and use of the evaluation results by students;
• seminars on monitoring and evaluating their own progress in teaching.

As for the research activity, there are taken into account the following directions for professional development:

• workshops on issues of higher education pedagogy and methodics, information sessions on obtaining scholarships abroad, scientific partnerships with other teachers / researchers, partnerships and collaborations with the practitioners in the filed;
• the opportunity to benefit from teaching assistants and research assistants, workshops on the management and exploitation of results of scientific research, on the development and coordination of grants;
• seminars on the implementation of their own professional development plan;
• debates on scientific themes within teams;
• accessing prestigious scientific publications;
• scientific sessions, conferences, symposia, summer schools, visits to universities in the country and abroad;
• providing funding for participating to at least one conference a year;
• workshops on academic management issues;
• informal meetings to share professional experiences with colleagues;
• funds for the purchase of equipment teaching (including software).

Conclusions

Ensuring the quality of the teaching staff is a fundamental requirement for any higher education institution that aims to apply its own strategy for continuous improvement in the field of programme quality and formative activities.

The evaluation of the academic quality of teachers’ aims has in view the teaching, learning, research, communication processes as well as the obtained results for determining the level of educational effectiveness. The evaluation connected to performances favours the observance and diagnosis function. The share of the evaluation criteria must be realistic, depending on the importance of the three components (the activity with students or the teaching-learning process, the research or creative process, the collaboration with local communities or the provision of services) to the institution’s objectives. Their relative weight can be found in the quality plan, which derives from the objectives of the university and its strategy.
It is evident that in the evaluation process, research will be given primary attention. Yet, concentrating exclusively on research, neglecting the fact the first mission of the university, that of learning and training qualified personnel for the economy, society, may have undesirable effects. Therefore, teaching should not be neglected, but focused on sending knowledge, and especially on the training of skills that the graduate use on the labour market, skills that can create jobs. Teaching should, of course, be focused on skills, fact revealed even by university curricula, without compromising the basic training.

Based on the past performance, the university management has the opportunity to provide to the teaching staff some suggestions on how to improve performance to achieve his career goals. As a result, the evaluation of performances allows the knowledge of each teacher’s evolution opportunities according to his/her own performances and organizational goals.

Teacher training programs should provide opportunities for the development of professional skills to be demonstrated by the teacher, in order to cope with the rigours of the evaluation process, but primarily to meet the real needs of today’s student.

References

Supplementary recommended readings