

## *Assessing the Didactic Activity of Higher Education Teaching Staff*

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**Abstract:** *Assessing higher education staff performance is an important aspect of higher education institutions management, because it can lead to a better understanding of the dynamic nature of professional development and its perception as a continuous process. The quality of the assessment should reflect the academic skills of teachers in the main components of their work (teaching activities, research, relationships, employment training, etc.). Although research has an important place in higher education, a particular attention is paid to the quality of teaching and assessing the teachers' contributions to the development of the professional activity. The quality of research also determines the quality of didactic process. The assessment of teaching quality in higher education is a global and complex process made upon the information obtained directly from colleagues, students, alumni, staff, and experts. These information processed by management, should lead to an accurate view on the work of the teacher. The questionnaire used in research of this article is intended to identify which is teachers' perception on the value and efficacy of the assessment of teaching process. Applied to a number of 114 teachers from three universities in North-Eastern Romania, the questionnaire aims to identify the current situation in the field, to improve certain practices in assessing teaching and learning function.*

**Keywords:** *assessment, teaching process, academic skills.*

### **Introduction**

The objective of any university is to use human potential as a key road to success and to devote time to this goal. Therefore, teachers must be accurately assessed with objectivity. Scholars' assessment approach may offer answers to the following these questions[1]:

- To what extent one can make a competent assessment designed to contribute to the improvement of education and teacher professional development?
- Should or not the evaluation system make a significant distinction between experienced teachers and beginners?
- Within the current system, how well trained are the assessors in order to evaluate teacher performance?  
It is necessary or not to offer training programs for skills training opportunities for personal self and professional development planning?
- To what extent teacher performance should be assessed in connection with the performance of school as a whole and not separate from it?
- To what extent the university teacher training incorporates content and ways of working that would train and motivate future teachers?
- To what extent the current evaluation system encourages and facilitates continuous improvement?
- Provide ongoing training programs or opportunities to develop teamwork skills (including planning, implementation and evaluation of teaching process, development of teach communities, build bridges between school and community, etc.)?

Teacher evaluation may lead to:

- Maintaining and enhancing the quality of education and research;
- Establish relationships based on teamwork between teachers in departments, faculties, university;
- Improving communication with students and team;
- Providing positive suggestions for improvement in teacher education and research.

Within the evaluation, research will be given primary attention because according to the own researches it also depends the didactic value of the teacher. Teaching abilities mean the capacity to offer students a way of thinking and thus it results a permanently enlargement of their knowledge horizon. Focusing exclusively on research, neglecting the fact the first mission of the university, is that learning and training qualified personnel for the economy, society, based upon self research, some undesirable effects may appear. Therefore, teaching should not be ignored, but focused both on transmission of knowledge, especially and on developing long - life - learning skills for the inclusion of the graduate into the labor market, thus creating jobs. The fact that the teaching activity focuses on skills is revealed even by university curricula, without neglecting the basic training, basic.

The most important information on teaching is offered by students, professional colleagues, experts / counselors and teachers themselves (self-assessment). Students are consulted in particular to assess the teaching performances of the teacher. Colleagues and experts, in turn, play an important role in analyzing the material taught, course planning, awareness of the concepts taught, and research. Finally, it is important to encourage teacher participation in their own assessment, given that they remain the base for improving teaching. In addition, the teacher is the person best placed to identify variables likely to influence the assessment.

An important problem is the context in which the action takes place evaluation of teaching academics. Thus, evaluation results are influenced by a number of features related to: current (academic group size, character optional / mandatory of course, the number of loans, specific subject), academic (scientific degree, work experience, gender, personality ), students (biographical characteristics, learning ability, personality traits), conducting the evaluation (anonymous student, stating the purpose and evaluation period, number of participants to be assessed).

An aspect apart of the assessment process is the its splitting into the 3 levels of the academic Bologna process. If at the bachelor level, the importance of the research abilities is minimum (25-30%), at the master level the self research takes 75 % of the curricula, arriving at 95% for the doctoral level.

### **1. The Perception of Evaluating Teaching Academics**

The interest in assessing performances of the teaching activity has increased dramatically during the last years due to a reconsideration of its role and importance with the academic management; nowadays the share of teaching activity and the activities included in this category re-presents at least 50% of the total activity of a teacher.

In this context, the survey conducted and presented below aims to gather responses showing the current situation on the assessment of teaching in higher education that would allow certain measures to correct evaluation practices.

The questionnaire is made up of three parts. The first includes 40 items considered pertinent for answers to a series of questions concerning the evaluation of teaching. Subjects must decide on a scale of agreement - disagreement for each item. The second part contains statistical information relating to teachers, lecturers or speakers, and the third of subjects are invited to comment freely assessment of teaching practices and make suggestions for improvement.

114 professors, associate professors and lecturers from three universities in the northeastern region responded to the questionnaire administered in winter 2012, of which 38 professors, 34 lecturers and 42 lecturers. More than 60% of them have experience in education for over ten years and only 7% have less than five years experience.

The questionnaire used in order to collect information [2] was applied to a sample of 190 persons, chosen at random among the 1090 teachers of the three universities. Among the 190 persons, only 114 agreed to fill in the questionnaire.

51,75% of those who responded are women and 48,25% are men. As concerns the distribution in groups, this is as follows:

- between 26 and 35 years old - 26,32%;
- between 36 and 45 years old - 25,44%;

- between 46 and 55 years old - 23,68%;
- between 56 and 65 years old - 24, 56%.

### Questionnaire

In order to conduct research on teacher assessment in higher education, please accept answer the following questionnaire.

I invite you to mark an "X" on each item, one which is closer in your opinion the most studied concept.

The result of this survey is the base of an analysis aiming to improve the quality of higher education. Please send responses to the questionnaire at the email address: [andrea.melnic@ugb.ro](mailto:andrea.melnic@ugb.ro). Thank you for your time.

Legend: 1 - strongly disagree, 2 - disagree, 3 - neither disagree nor agree, 4 - agree, 5 - strongly agree

1. The assessment realized by the students helps to identify the strengths and weaknesses of the teaching process.	1	2	3	4	5
2. The students have the necessary competence to evaluate the teacher	1	2	3	4	5
3. The results of the assessment conducted by students should not be realized for promotion, maintaining or renewing the labor agreements.	1	2	3	4	5
4. The capacity of training and the personalities characteristics of the student influence the results of the assessment	1	2	3	4	5
5. The assessment realized by the students are useless.	1	2	3	4	5
6. Colleagues can be more competent than students when judging the quality of the training process.	1	2	3	4	5
7. The graduates are better judges of the teaching activity quality than the actual students	1	2	3	4	5
8. An external assessor is more competent than students to judge the training process.	1	2	3	4	5
9. The students should not be the only one to judge the quality of the teaching process.	1	2	3	4	5
10. The assessed teacher should be able to express himself/herself upon the didactic activity	1	2	3	4	5
11. The questionnaires filled by the students do not represent means for assessing the didactic activity.	1	2	3	4	5
12. The comments formulated by the students are a valuable source of suggestions to improve the didactic activity.	1	2	3	4	5
13. The didactic materials distributed to the students (course notes, recesses, case studies, applications etc.) should be submitted to assessment from the part of the colleagues.	1	2	3	4	5
14. The comments made by the students at the end of the questionnaire are a place for repression	1	2	3	4	5
15. The teacher should be free to follow his/her own progress.	1	2	3	4	5
16. The teaching activity is a too complex function in order to be assessed.	1	2	3	4	5
17. Only courses taught by new teacher should be assessed	1	2	3	4	5
18. Only courses taught by lecturers should be assessed	1	2	3	4	5

19. Only teacher that are subject of a claim from the part of the students should be assessed	1	2	3	4	5
20. Students should have access to the assessment of the teaching process	1	2	3	4	5
21. The assessed teacher should be the only one having access to the results of the assessment process	1	2	3	4	5
22. The Rector/Dean/Direct should have access to the results of the assessment of the teaching staff way of teaching made by the students when there is about a promotion or renewal of the working contract	1	2	3	4	5
23. A departmental committee should have access to the results of the assessment made by the students	1	2	3	4	5
24. Students should identify themselves when making the teaching staff assessment	1	2	3	4	5
25. The courses of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> level should also be assessed	1	2	3	4	5
26. The teachers working with big groups have lower results than those working with smaller groups	1	2	3	4	5
27. The teachers working with students attending optional courses get better results when being assessed than those teaching compulsory courses	1	2	3	4	5
28. The more advanced the students are in their courses, the more obvious the results of the assessment are	1	2	3	4	5
29. The teachers proving a good communication with their students get better results when being assessed than those possessing lower communication skills	1	2	3	4	5
30. The teachers according high marks to their students get better results when being assessed than those who are more severe when according marks	1	2	3	4	5
31. Teachers who are more sympathetic with their students get higher results when being assessed than the teachers who are reserved in their relations with students	1	2	3	4	5
32. The results of the assessments made by the students should be presented accurately	1	2	3	4	5
33. The terms for presenting the results of the assessment made by the students are too long	1	2	3	4	5
34. An assessment made during an examination session is more useful for the improvement of the didactic activity	1	2	3	4	5
35. The teacher does not dispose of the necessary resources when the results of the evaluation show certain aspects that should be improved	1	2	3	4	5
36. It is easy to consult a colleague when the results of the assessment prove difficulties within the teaching process	1	2	3	4	5
37. The Rector or the chief of the department have the necessary competence in order to help the teachers confronting with problems within the teaching process	1	2	3	4	5
38. The university should apply certain disciplinary measures against teachers that have constant difficulties within the teaching process	1	2	3	4	5
39. The university should enterprise concrete actions for ameliorating the teaching process within the institution	1	2	3	4	5
40. At the level of the university there is a weak preoccupation regarding the education quality	1	2	3	4	5

2. For a better interpretation of the collecting data, please fill in the following set of data:

Age	26-35 years old		36-45 years old		46-55 years old		Over 56 years old		
Sex	Female				Male				
Academic work experience	1 – 5 years		6 – 10 years		11 – 15 years		16 – 20 years		over 20 years
Held position	Institutional high position (Rector, dean, department director)			Institutional middle position (vice-dean)			Without leading position		
Level of qualification	University studies			Master studies			Doctorate		
Field of training	Socio-humanist sciences			Economic sciences			Sciences		

Didactic degree:  Lecturer  
 Associate professor  
 Professor

3. Please comment on teachers' assessment practices in your university and make suggestions for improving them.

## 2. Interpretation of Survey Results

Table no. 1 presents the percentages obtained for each of the 40 items: the percentage of agreement (responses 4 and 5 of the questionnaire), the percentage of disagreement (responses 1 and 2 of the questionnaire), and percentage of neutral (reply 3 of the questionnaire).

### The results obtained by studying the questionnaire

Table no. 1

ITEMS	4 and 5	1 and 2	3
1. The assessment realized by the students help to identify the strong and the weak points of the teaching process.	52,4%	19,4%	28,2%
2. The students have the necessary competence in order to evaluate the teaching staff	38,6%	32,4%	29%
3. The results of the evaluation, realized by the students, should not be used by students with the purpose of promoting, maintain or renew the working contracts.	41,2%	38,5%	20,3%
4. The capacity of learning and the personality features of the student influence the results of the assessment	51%	28,2%	20,8%
5. The assessment realized by the students are useless.	17,5%	61,3%	21,2%
6. The colleagues are more competent than the students to judge the quality of the teaching process.	50,2%	20,1%	29,7%
7. The graduates are better judges of the teaching activity quality than the actual students.	40,2%	31,8%	28%
8. An external assessor ( a specialist in pedagogy) is more competent than the students in order to judge the teaching process	26,2%	42,4%	31,4%
9. The students should not be the only ones judging the quality of the teaching process of the teaching staff.	80,2%	10,2%	9,6%
10. The assessed teacher should express himself/herself upon the quality of his/her teaching activity.	76%	9%	15%
11. The questionnaires completed by the students do not represent the appropriate means for assessing the teaching activity	28,4%	40,2%	31,4%
12. The comments formulated by the students are a valuable source of suggestions in order to improve teaching.	51,4%	21,2%	27,4%

ITEMS	4 and 5	1 and 2	3
13. The didactic materials delivered to the students (course notes, recessions, case studies, applications etc) should be submitted to an assessment by the colleagues.	50,2%	29,4%	20,4%
14. The comments formulated by the students at the end of the questionnaire are a place of refutation.	51,2%	29,2%	19,6%
15. The teacher should be free to evaluate his/her own courses	24,3%	60,5%	15,2%
16. The teaching activity is a far more complex function in order to be evaluated.	9,6%	80,2%	10,2%
17. Only courses taught by the new teachers should be assessed.	5,6%	90,2%	4,2%
18. Only courses taught by the lecturers should be assessed.	3,6%	91,2%	5,2%
19. Only teachers that are the subject of a critic from the part of the students should be assessed.	6,2%	89,2%	4,6%
20. The students should have access to the results of the assessment.	39,6%	35%	25,4%
21. The assessed teacher should be the only one having access to the results of the assessment of the teaching process.	18,6%	61,2%	20,2%
22. The Rector/Dean/Direct should have access to the results of the assessment of the teaching staff way of teaching made by the students when there is about a promotion or renewal of the working contract	13,4%	71,2%	15,4%
23. A departmental committee should have access to the results of the assessment made by the students	49,6%	26,4%	24%
24. Students should identify themselves when making the teaching staff assessment	36,8%	51,8%	11,4%
25. The courses of the 2 <sup>nd</sup> and 3 <sup>rd</sup> level should also be assessed	92,4%	3,3%	4,3%
26. The teachers working with big groups have lower results than those working with smaller groups	51,1%	18,7%	30,2%
27. The teachers working with students attending optional courses get better results when being assessed than those teaching compulsory courses	61,2%	18,7%	20,1%
28. The more advanced the students are in their courses, the more obvious the results of the assessment are	52,1%	19,5%	28,4%
29. The teachers proving a good communication with their students get better results when being assessed than those possessing lower communication skills	91,2%	3,7%	5,1%
30. The teachers according high marks to their students get better results when being assessed than those who are more severe when according marks	61,2%	20,4%	18,4%
31. Teachers who are more sympathetic with their students get higher results when being assessed than the teachers who are reserved in their relations with students	59,4%	15%	25,6%
32. The results of the assessments made by the students should be presented accurately	30,4%	52,4%	17,2%
33. The terms for presenting the results of the assessment made by the students are too long	51,4%	23,4%	25,2%
34. An assessment made during an examination session is more useful for the improvement of the didactic activity	47,2%	24,2%	28,6%
35. The teacher does not dispose of the necessary resources when the results of the evaluation show certain aspects that should be improved	51,2%	28,4%	20,4%
36. It is easy to consult a colleague when the results of the assessment prove difficulties within the teaching process	21%	59,4%	19,6%
37. The Rector or the chief of the department have the necessary competence in order to help the teachers confronting with problems within the teaching process	15,4%	58,4%	26,2%
38. The university should apply certain disciplinary measures against teachers that have constant difficulties within the teaching process	48%	26,4%	25,6%
39. The university should enterprise concrete actions for	92%	4,2%	3,8%

ITEMS	4 and 5	1 and 2	3
ameliorating the teaching process within the institution			
40. At the level of the university there is a weak preoccupation regarding the education quality	49%	38%	13%

Table no. 1 provides the following information:

- 61.3% of subjects shall decide favorably on the usefulness evaluation (item 5) and 50% recognize the formative role (items 1:12).
- If we consider the administrative role of assessment (item 3), 41.2% of teachers are against using the results of student assessments for promotion, retention or renewal of employment contracts. Most of them are lecturers and professors who have the negative impact it can have them on future promotions.
- The survey results show that, although subjects agree with the assessment, the evaluator had difficulty identifying the ideal profile: 80% of them agree that the only student who can play this role (item 9), and 50% believe that colleagues have the same power as students to evaluate teachers. No external evaluator - specialist in education (item 8 -26%) or graduate (item 7 to 40.2%) obtain a majority of respondents' answers. Only the teacher himself (item 10 to 76%) appears to be fully competent. Here is a contradiction, though the subjects agreed that the assessment is necessary, but do not seem to need an external evaluation, their judgment is sufficient.
- Although written comments are an interesting source, 51.2% of respondents estimated that they are also an opportunity for students discharge (item 14).
- In terms of staff evaluated subjects are in favor of a universal rating system applies to all teachers unit (items 15, 17, 18, 19, 25), whether taught in cycle 1, 2, 3, that is students complain that they are teachers or junior. Only 24.3% of respondents estimated that the teacher should be free to evaluate their courses (item 15).
- 80% of respondents do not consider that teaching is a function too complex to be evaluated (item 16)
- Having access to the student assessment results (item 20) is a sensitive issue for teachers - only 40% of respondents ruling in his favor.
- The responses to item 22, 71% of the subjects disputed access to evaluation results only for administrative purposes, the default ruling a formative assessment. They favor intervention of a departmental committee of 50% (item 23). Also, 61% of respondents disagree that the only teacher who has access to the results of its evaluation (item 21)
- If we consider the problem of identifying students who completed the questionnaire (item 24), the results of teachers, lecturers and lecturers differ significantly. Lecturers and instructors shall give 42% in favor of signing questionnaires to students, while 65% of teachers oppose this.
- Research shows that 51.2% of subjects surveyed consider that group size can influence the results of the evaluation (item 26). The results also show that 61% the options of respondents consider that compulsory / optional nature of the course can affect the results of the evaluation (item 27), leading to the finding that teachers are informed about the variables likely to influence the results of the teaching.
- 91% of subjects are convinced that better results charismatic teachers in evaluation (item 29) than those with communication problems. The same thing happens with teachers giving higher marks (item 30 to 61%) or those who sympathize with the students (item 31 to 59%).
- About 52% of respondents expected that conditions evaluation to fully play a formative role: lack of clarity and lack of resources results in difficulty (items 32 and 35).
- 92% of respondents want concrete action to improve the quality of teaching (item 39). For example, they want to obtain a shortened assessment results (item 33-51) because this will allow the process to fully play a formative role. The faster access to results of the evaluations, they even help to improve the teaching in the following semester. In addition, respondents suggest (item 34 to 47%) a evaluations during the semester, considering that it has a formative role.

- 58% of respondents believe that the rector / director department not competent to advise the difficulties in teaching (item 37). In addition, 59% of them consider the problem to consult a colleague when facing such difficulties (item 36). After being unable to identify the ideal evaluator, now subjects have difficulties in identifying the person that can advise on teaching.
- 48% of subjects are in favor of disciplinary measures for teachers who have persistent difficulties in teaching (item 38). Such a response may be due to a sense of injustice for which responsibility lies with the institution rather than teachers or it indicates a need for equity or a concern for the quality of teaching.
- 49% of respondents believe the university level there is little concern for the quality of teaching.

Analyzing the results it arises:

a) A consensus on the following elements:

- The teaching is too complex to be evaluated;
- All teachers should be evaluated without taking into account academic rank, teaching status and cycle;
- Students may not be the only source of information consulted, evaluated teacher should be able to express his opinion on how the teaching;
- Teachers communicate very well, will get the best results in evaluation;
- Institution should take concrete actions to improve teaching.

b) Statements provided about half of respondents supported are:

- The evaluation made by students is a useful exercise that helps identify strengths and areas to improve the teaching of teachers;
- Comments students are a valuable source of ideas, even though they may be, in some cases, an opportunity to say everything they think;
- Results are not only accessible professor, rector can consult at any time, and a committee of department may have access to them;
- Colleges are as competent as students, to judge the quality of teaching;
- Teachers who sympathize with their students as those who give high marks better results than other
- Subjects consider that the rector has no jurisdiction to help teachers experience difficulties in teaching and no colleagues are not available.

c) Conflicting perceptions of respondents are the following:

- questionnaires are good means of assessment;
- students are competent to perform the assessment;
- students must be identified when assessing the teacher;
- graduates are the best judges of teaching.

Analysis of comments and suggestions from academics can provide answers to problems encountered in valuation, knowing the fact that respondents comment mainly aspects that are important to them or bothers them deeply.

Regarding the competence of students to make judgments about the quality of teaching, subjects expressed reservations, many of whom see it necessary to operate a distinction between teaching competence, which can be easily addressed by students, and scientific competence, students cannot still have a relevant opinion in this area.

Related quality evaluation questionnaire for teachers, 35% of the respondents suggested a review of its questionnaire considering too short, too long, or insufficiently accurate in ruling on a questionnaire as adapted for the specific courses (course tutorials, seminars, projects). This suggests the predominance purpose of formative assessment.

25% of observations address the issue of written comments of students, most confirming that they are an opportunity to discharge or settlement of accounts and to a lesser extent provides very useful information.

Regarding the question of signing the student questionnaires, many subjects were in favor of it estimated that students will have a responsible attitude and consider relevant comments, if their words will assume paternity. They also proposed that the evaluation process to take into account the number of courses attended by students. They have also commented on the training of teachers and students for assessment, stating the purpose of evaluation, assessment several times during the course of a semester, and the voluntary nature of the questions below.

Subjects are critical in the use of evaluation results. Many believe that these results have no purpose, the evaluation often does not have a formative character and there is no counseling for people with difficulties in teaching.

### **Conclusions**

In terms of university autonomy, the issue of quality is an issue of strategic management. University determines where it wants to go, how it wants to position itself in the national supply and what steps to take to achieve the vision, of these measures, those relating to quality management are among the most important. Quality management system creates an environment where all staff is encouraged to performance on individual responsibility for the mission and objectives and the introduction of internal performance evaluation mechanisms.

The assessment of the education process, made on each level of study, properly conducted, may be one of the concrete actions aiming to an improvement of education. Nevertheless, perception is important and "actors" participating in the evaluation process (teachers, students, graduates, experts) in process efficiency. Students believe that evaluation is important and that they play an important role in this process or doubt its usefulness? What is the opinion of teachers on this topic? If their perceptions of the assessment are negative, it is possible to change these perceptions.

The questionnaire used in research aims to find out the opinion of scholars on the evaluation process of teaching. Applied to a number of 114 teachers, professors and lecturers from three universities in the Northeast region, the survey highlights the strengths and weaknesses of evaluation activity, paving the way for measures to improve the teaching. These measures should inform teachers of educational objectives, to mold in various areas of teaching - learning, to prepare to intervene in various situations of instruction: large group / small seminars, laboratory work, internships, etc, to focus on improving all aspects of teaching, to prepare both for formative assessment and for the administration. These measures can be seminars on effective strategies to motivate students for learning on effective teaching methods (cooperative learning, problem-based learning method participatory activities), features seminars on effective teaching (course organization, clarity of course): There can also be seminars on improving communication skills, seminars on use of multimedia equipment in teaching, seminars for design and design courses / workshops, seminars on effective ways of assessing students' knowledge, advice and interpretation of results using course evaluation by students, workshops on monitoring and assess their progress in teaching.

The process of assessing the didactic skills should match the process of assessing research skills, a fact proving that good teachers are also good researchers.

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