

## QUALITY ASSURANCE IN THE TEACHER TRAINING PROGRAMS AT UNIVERSITY TEACHER TRAINING DEPARTMENTS. CASE STUDY: BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES

Corina Cace<sup>1</sup>, Maria Liana Lacatus<sup>2</sup> and Camelia Staiculescu<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1) 2) 3)</sup> *The Bucharest University of Economic Studies, Romania*

E-mail: corina.cace@dppd.ase.ro; E-mail: mlacatus2000@yahoo.com; E-mail:  
camistaiculescu@yahoo.com

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### Abstract

The goal of this evaluation research used in analysis of the quality of education programme cover three dimensions: (1) process evaluation and results of the educational program (the theoretical component of training); (2) training program relevance evaluation- in terms of current activities (indicators of quality related to acquisitions and transfers), and (3) program quality results and their use application. We started this study following the mission of this educational program at academic level, trying to maintain the direction of program aim and objectives. The analysis monitors 4 primary (internal) dimensions: theoretical – formative as imperative frame, applicative, beneficial – participative, change, in relation with 3 secondary (external) dimensions, which strengthen, facilitate and integrate with the primary dimensions: general aspects, previous training/mechanisms for training support, target group and groups results. As regards the results, the general feature is the acquisition of knowledge in the field of teaching. The TTD program activities provided the trainees a complex presentation of the types of intervention required by the teaching activity, by the research activity and by the class management, on the background of stimulating continuous quality only. The authors hope that all persons who will read this material will see it as a “useful tool” or an example of best practice for sharpening their understanding of a part of qualitative assessment.

**Keywords:** Quality assurance, teacher training programs

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### Introduction

Evaluation is an activity gaining appreciation and acknowledgement in an increasing and diversified number of spheres: from service quality assessment to the evaluation of the manner in which the (public or private) interventions achieve their objectives, or produce effects among the beneficiaries. This is due to the fact that evaluation tells whether a program or a project of an organisation is capable to provide quality or at high standards

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services. Universities, as higher educational organizations, are particularly interested to evaluate the quality of the education they provide. They developed sets of quality indicators in order to emphasize the key points of educational activity, identify high quality areas that have to be maintained or, if necessary, to be improved; identify priorities for organizational development they plan, or provide information regarding standards and quality within the organisation.

By definition, evaluation is a value oriented process. It is seen as a “process of establishing the merit and value of the things” (Scriven, 1991). Furthermore, evaluation means processing the information and providing feedback. In other words, evaluation is a systematic acquisition and assessment of information to get feedback from an object. Both approaches, convergent otherwise, show that evaluation is a systematic activity which deliberately uses ambiguously the term of “object” with reference, however, to programs, policies, technologies, necessities, activities, etc. the second perspective stresses rather the acquisition and assessing of information, than the pursuit of value. Entire activity of evaluation presumes collection and careful examination of real data, issuing value judgements based on valid information and conclusions of different interferences. The elements from Scriven’s explanation are under the form of a posteriori recognition (Vedung, 1997) of the merit, value and quality of the system outputs when referring to a planned change. Often, in education, the result of change is evaluated, and quality is thus wanted, and the a posteriori evaluations invoke the success, what is achieved by the change. The reference regards the quality of the outputs from the system in relation with the undertaken efforts. The importance of evaluation can also be related to the *functions* which it fulfils both by relation to the educational process, and to the educational system: control, system regulation, prediction, classification and selection, certification (Diaconu, 2004).

#### **Quality in Higher Educational Programs**

The evaluative process is necessary because its results provide the basics for the planning process that takes place at all the levels of education. For instance, at the organisational level, after analysing the results of evaluation the management, teachers, and students a decision of change is prefigured and an action is designed. New directions for the university management are opened by various projects which may result in reconsidering the management in terms of efficiency and equal opportunity, curricular development, human resources development, fund raising, or community relationships development. The projections are targeting the teachers, teaching plans, curricula, new sources and directions of information, changes at the mental and behavioural levels, and changes in learning and in teaching practices. Changes can be designed at students’ level, regarding the conscious and aware choosing of the curriculum, strong individualisation of the educational process depending on the interest of the pupils or of the students, changing the forms of final evaluation (exams) and increasing their weight in continuing the studies, changing the mentality and behaviour, being aware of own educational act, transition and successful insertion on the labour market.

A first answer to the previous questions focuses around the functions which the educational program fulfils in order to secure its finality and success. Any successful program has two functions: (Chen 2005, p. 5), an internal one – ensuring the transformation of inputs into desirable outputs, and an external one – constant interaction with the environment. Under the interaction with the environment, the educational program is considered to be an open system. Thus, one may speak of the permanent correlation of the system inputs, which must

be analysed in relation with the outputs. This relation actually is a transformation imposed by the environment surrounding the system (in which the program runs). An essential feature of the environment is increased competitiveness, and the transformation requires the capacity for permanent maximal effort (Cheung et al., 2011). The inversed connection, the feedback as action of evaluating the program, expresses its success or failure. Depending on the results of the evaluation, decisions are made regarding the allocated resources, the process of implementation, the relation with the environment; it is also possible to revert to previous stages and make adjustments. This latter component of the program highlights the major role of evaluation: provide feedback and allow improvements.

A second orientation of the answers is given by the assessment of the impact which the training program has. Even though the explanations regarding the evaluation are not comprehensive enough to capture all the aspects of program evaluation, they draw attention to an essential advantage: understanding the impact of the program on the beneficiaries or, in other words, whether the program meets the expectations of the beneficiaries. The project design is observed, the level of objective accomplishment is monitored, the resources must be properly allocated, the quality of results must increase, the uncertainty must decrease and decisions are taken regarding the evaluated program “evaluation focused on utilisation” (Patton, 2008). By improving the decisions, a climate of communication and cooperation between the interested parties is ensured, and errors are not repeated. The optimistic approach, the evaluation is beneficial for all, it creates an apparent consensus between the interested parties by highlighting the reasons why the public policies should be evaluated (Davies, 2016), this approach being translated and adapted within the programs of the organisations that supply educational services. On the background of the social dynamics, the increased weight of the reasons supporting the evaluation of the educational programs contributes to their permanent improvement and becomes a *sine qua non* condition of quality assurance (Teeroovengadum et al. 2016).

The results of the evaluation should serve equally all the interested parties, but this is rather an ideal than a reality. The evaluation has a multitude of potential users, each with different perceptions on the evaluation of program quality.

### **The Teacher Training Department at The Bucharest University of Economic Studies**

The Teacher Training Department (TTD) is a distinct academic structure functioning within the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, with the goal of professionalization in the teaching career and educational research.

The main activity of TTD consists in training provided to students and university graduates, mainly from schools of economics and business that are targeting a teaching career. Other activities are oriented to improve initial training of teachers of economics and economic subjects in further education programs and their teaching competences, to assist and provide support to teachers in the process of building and developing their teaching career, to assess pre-university teachers of economics and economic subjects that candidate for teaching degrees.

The TTD curriculum is derived from a general framework of competences that describes both professional and transversal competences developed through TTD programs. Each course of the training programs has its own contribution to competences development process. The syllabus is seen as an instrument of quality assurance and efficiency. It emphasizes competences that has to be developed, describes lectures planned to be provided

and class activities that will be conducted, content, teaching methods, references and assessment.

The curriculum for initial teacher training program, so called psycho-pedagogical module, is structured in three parts: core curriculum, extended curriculum, and optional curriculum. The core curriculum includes compulsory courses that provide basic psycho-pedagogical knowledge to students and teaching methodologies oriented courses and practical stages in schools. They all are representing so called Level 1 of psycho-pedagogical university program. After finalizing all compulsory courses, students will receive 18 credits, respectively 12 credits that means, 30 credits in total. Level 1 graduates are qualified teachers and legally with the right to teach in compulsory education system.

The extended curriculum is consisting in courses that are compulsory at the Level 2 psycho-pedagogical program, which means usually, university master programs. It represents an extension of the Level 1 courses, such as pedagogy or teaching methodology at the next level. Usually this means new topics, more complex syllabus, deeper or different perspective analysis of concepts, or issues related specifically with non-compulsory education. Stages in school are extended too. Level 2 students could spend one more semester in high schools, focusing on teaching activities at 11 or 12 grade, or they could assist university professors, plan and even teach class activities for university students. After graduation the Level 2 program, students will get 20 (10+10) additional credits and they could teach in non-compulsory education (high schools, 11-12 grades, and colleges or universities).

The optional curriculum and are oriented to complementary competences relative to the teaching ones, such as school management, teaching in multi-cultural contexts, planning educational programs, or educational counselling. Students have to choose 2 courses from some sets of courses specifically designed for teacher training programs. Optional courses are parts of the Level 2 program and will bring 10 (5+5) additional credits to graduates.

**Table no. 1: Teacher Training Programs at TTD**

<b>Program</b>	<b>Beneficiaries</b>	<b>Qualification</b>
Initial teacher training: Level 1	Students enrolled in bachelor programs in schools of economics and business University graduates	Teacher in compulsory education
Initial teacher training: Level 2	Students enrolled in master programs in schools of economics and business University graduates with Level 1 certificate	Teacher in non-compulsory education
In-service teacher training: 2 <sup>nd</sup> degree	Pre-university teachers	2 <sup>nd</sup> degree teacher in pre-university education
In-service teacher training: 1 <sup>st</sup> degree	2 <sup>nd</sup> degree teachers	1 <sup>st</sup> degree teacher in pre-university education

Source: [www.dppd.ase.ro](http://www.dppd.ase.ro)

In order to finalize a Level 1 or Level 2 program, TTD students have to write and present a graduation paper. They receive support from teachers to elaborate the graduation paper at

the quality level required by scientific standards and to properly demonstrate the knowledge and competences they gained. Graduation paper writing and presentation allow students to receive 5 credits per paper each level, in total 10 credits.

Level 1 program is credited with 35 (30+5) credits. Level 2 program is credited with 35 (30+5) credits too.

There are also special TTD programs special designed for in-service pre-university teachers of economics and economic subjects. They are counted as continuous training or further education of teachers. TTD works as an assessment center of teaching competences too and each year organizes exams for in-service teachers that candidate for 2nd and/or 1st teaching degrees. To get the 2nd teaching degree teachers have to pass 2 exams. The first exam tests teachers knowledge in teaching economics and economic subjects. Teachers have to demonstrate good economic and business related subjects knowledge and understanding, capacity to plan lessons, design effective learning activities for students, use active-learning methods in teaching, and assess students' knowledge and competences. In other words, they have to demonstrate that they are good teachers of economics or other economic subject they are teaching in school. The second exam is oral and is focusing on pedagogy, in general. To get the 1st teaching degree, teachers have to elaborate a paper emphasizing a particular economic or business content scientifically analysed and didactically valued from a teaching perspective. They are invited to an interview at TTD and asked to demonstrate that the paper they think about will demonstrate capacity to permanently update their knowledge in the field of economics and business, and use this knowledge in innovative ways in the classroom. Teachers have also to demonstrate very good teaching competences. TTD experts are observing and assessing teachers competences in classroom and decide if this meet or not the requirements for 1st teaching degree. There are high standards for 1st teaching degree, expressed by 9 as the minimum grade of a scale up to 10. The assessment process is ending with paper presentation in public. Teaching degrees are seen in teachers professional community as signs of professional recognition, prestige, and promotion in teaching career.

#### **Quality Assurance in TTD Programs**

The teacher training curricula are centrally designed by the Ministry of Education and have to be nationally applied. Following the national curricula, TTD provides a teacher training program to university students in economics and business at required quality level and standards.

In addition, TTD has proper mechanisms used to analyse periodically the knowledge gained by students in bachelor and masters programs and the changes in qualifications profiles. The period of analysis must not exceed a schooling cycle. Collected data about the number of students enrolled in TTD programs demonstrates that TTD quality assurance mechanisms work well during the all 5 years of the Level 1 and Level 2 programs. In the first year, the average number of enrolled students is about 750. At the end of the first year only 2/3 of them (about 500) graduate and only 370-400 are enrolled in the third year, which is the final year of Level 1 program. Data demonstrate a selection process while the program is running. In the first year, students can sign-up for TTD courses with no restriction. They have only to complete an application form that asks identification data as a student in the university. Actually students are signing-up if they are interested in, if they think to have a teaching career, or, we do not exclude this alternative too, by accident.

The standards are high, there are different kind of activities students have to do: there are courses, class activities, readings, and writings, and, of course, they have to study individually. In a 5 credit course, the percentage of individual study could reach up to 65%, including the time allocated to class activities and exams preparation. This could be very stressful for a first year university student and if he or she have difficulties to figure out short time after the beginning of the semester how to deal with all university requirements and successfully manage the learning process, most probably give up. Selection is made by exams too.

In Level 2 programs the selection effect is quite evident. At the end of Level 1 program about 300 students graduate, but only 100-150 students were enrolled in Level 2 program. The students' number could decrease in the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester and then in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of the program. The decrease rate is lower than in the 2<sup>nd</sup> year of Level 1, about 10% in comparison with about 40%, mainly because of the fact that many of students who signed-up are familiarized with the standards and requirements and, although for them the time could be even scarce as it was in previous years of schooling (they could be employed and together with psycho-pedagogical program they follow a master program), they are independent learners who have effective learning strategies.

The selection made through exams is evident in TTD programs for in-service teachers.

**Table no. 2: In-service teachers in 2<sup>nd</sup> teaching degree program at TTD**

Year	Number of pre-university teachers of economics and economic subjects		Absolute variation	Relative variation
	Enrolled	Certified		
2012	26	19	7	27%
2013	20	18	2	10%
2014	28	23	5	18%
2015	32	29	3	9%
2016	24	18	6	25%

Source: TTD statistics

The variation between the number of in-service pre-university teachers enrolled in continuous training programs to get 2<sup>nd</sup> teaching degree and the number of those who successfully finalized them is not constant. Years with highest absolute and relative variation were 2012 and 2016. Attending courses organized at TTD to prepare teachers for the exams is a factor that significantly influence the results, mainly because provide teacher training and detailed explanations in respect with exam requirements. In 2012, only 54% of teachers who were examined attended the courses; in 2012 the rejection rate was 27%. In 2016, course attended rate was 58% and rejection rate 25%. Attending the courses could be a factor of success, and for sure, understanding the requirements in the assessment process and preparing for exams accordingly increase the probability of success.

**Table no. 3: In-service teachers in 1st teaching degree program at TTD**

Period	Number of pre-university teachers of economics and economic subjects		Absolute variation	Relative variation
	Enrolled	Certified		
2012-2014	26	24	2	7.7%
2013-2015	32	32	0	0%
2014-2016	35	24	11	31%

Source: TTD statistics

For teachers who participated in 1<sup>st</sup> degree program year 2012 was very good: all completed successfully the program. On the contrary, 2016 was a bad year, with a 31% rejection rate. In our understanding, this conduct to idea, that selection process should start at the very initial moment of the program and only teachers who demonstrate at the interview a clear understanding of scientific and methodological requirements in respect with their paper should be will be accepted as 1<sup>st</sup> degree candidates.

Together with requirements and standards regarding the learning process, assessment requirements are quality assurance instruments in TTD programs. Regularly, students have to pass exams, participate in class discussions, take tests, present papers, have projects, conduct investigations or surveys, and so on. The required activities are described in the course syllabus and presented to students. Students can make their own study plans, depending of the level of performance they would like to have and availability to spend time and make efforts to study a specific content/subject.

**Table no. 4: Syllabus of Teaching economics. Assessment**

Assessment criteria	Assessment methods	Percentage in the final grade
Understanding basic concepts and theories of teaching economics and economic subject at compulsory pre-university level; Applying concepts to solve problems, sustain and interpret ideas	Exams	50.000
Planning teaching activities on economics/ economics lessons	Case studies in respect with textbooks, curricula, lesson plans, and assessment; Designing a lesson, an assessment tool, and a set of handouts to be used in a class activity	30.00
Demonstrating positive attitude toward teacher training	Attending the class activities	10.00
Demonstrating effective teacher behavior	Teaching simulation	10.00
Minimum performance standard: - Knowing the required documents for teaching activity: the general teaching plan for economic subjects, the syllabus, and the textbooks - Arguments in favor of one particular textbook to be recommended to school/students - Developing annual and semester school plans and designing a lesson		

Source: <http://fisadisciplina.ase.ro/SelectDisciplina.aspx?IDD=2398&IDF=1>

Quality is ensured by the teacher too, who makes the assessment. TTD has regulations regarding students' assessment and asks teachers and students to rigorously and consequently comply with these. It is clearly stated that assessment should be correct, objective, according with established criteria; criteria and minimal standards should be communicate to students. Learning outcomes should be recorded in standardized format documents.

Pre-service teacher training in schools is part of the teaching competences developing program and, according with university regulations. Quality assurance procedures require at least 10% of the time to be allocated to practical activities/stages. In the level 1 program students have to spend 78 hours in schools and in level 2 program, 36 hours. They have to observe classes and extracurricular activities, to interact with students, to plan lessons, to assist teachers in classes, and to teach. For all these activities there are standards and requirements. Schools that serve as training centres are carefully selected according with clear defined criteria (profile, specialization, teachers experience, competence, and availability to tutor). The tutors are invited to apply for this position and they are asked to demonstrate tutoring competences. Quality assurance procedures require a balance between experience and openness and periodically renewing the group of tutors.

### **Conclusions**

TTD should provide information about qualifications, programs, certification, teaching and research staff, and opportunities provided to students, and any other aspect that could rise public interest, in general or students interest especially. Such information could be, for instance, professional training for students or scholarship regulations.

TTD programs are teaching competences oriented. Students that finalize the programs should be able to teach economics or one of the economic and business subjects thought in schools. Teaching competences should be defined separately for compulsory pre-university education and non-compulsory pre and university education and developed through specific psycho-pedagogical programs.

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