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**INTERRELATEDNESS BETWEEN TEACHERS' EVALUATION  
AND CONTINUOUS PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT IN  
ROMANIAN HIGHER EDUCATION**

Aurelia Stanescu (a)\*

\* Corresponding author

(a) The Bucharest University of Economic Studies 6 Piata Romana, 1st District, Bucharest, 010374, Romania, e-mail:  
aurelia.stanescu@man.ase.ro

**Abstract**

The aim of this paper is to highlight the bonding between teachers' evaluation and continuous professional development in Romanian Higher Education. Evaluation of teachers' performance has grown in importance recently. Over the past thirty years, one of the most disputed issues in Human Resource Management has been consistency of performance evaluation taking in its entirety and the methods used in this, in particular. Such methods have been the main subject of controversy and criticism stated by specialists. By analyzing academic performance evaluation process from different perspectives the author takes into account several salient issues. Underpinned by a critical thinking approach, the paper is based on small-piece of research designed by the author. A series of informal interviews with academic staff were conducted, and the methodology was aimed at investigating attitudes towards of the evaluation and continuous professional development. The major implication of the paper should be a proper and better focus on the teachers' performance evaluation in higher education.

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**Keywords:** Higher education; professional development; teacher development; teachers' evaluation.

## 1. Introduction

Evaluation of teachers' performance has grown in importance recently. Over the past thirty years, one of the most disputed issues in Human Resource Management has been consistency of performance

evaluation taking in its entirety and the methods used in this, in particular. Such methods have been the main subject of controversy and criticism stated by specialists.

In order to professionalise academics, these „learning organizations” - universities - that strive for quality education, should offer educational development opportunities. If teachers themselves are interested in continuous professional development, this is only a benefit for those organizations. Excellent teachers are made, not born; they become excellent through investment in their teaching abilities. Thus, it has always been of most importance to find the appropriate ways of maintaining highly qualified staff.

As expected, the relation between teacher development and performance evaluation in higher education is an issue that deserves attention. The culture of academic institutions has been driven by changes in the external environment (Grant, Hackney and Edgar, 2010), and competences of the teacher should be continuously improved.

Although professional development is a highly relevant topic in education research and practice worldwide and it is often mentioned in books and articles about human resources, surprisingly few Romanian studies have systematically investigated the influence and the importance of the continuous professional development in Romanian higher education system.

There is a greater awareness by many teachers in higher education, of the need to engage in critical self-reflection, quality assurance, and the enhancement of educational training programmes (Ellington and Ross, 1994). The professional development involves progression, and individuals are to be engaged in continuous vocational development and training.

## **2. About Professional Development of the Teachers in Higher Education**

There is a rapidly growing body of literature in the domains of professional development and performance evaluation; those two areas are vast and very complex and cannot be presented exhaustively in this paper.

Harrison (1992/ 1995) points out that “Development is the all-important primary process, through which individual and organizational growth can through time achieve its fullest potential. In university seen as a “learning organization” teachers’ professional development represents an integral part of the overall human resources strategy of the organization. It is aimed at improving performance, “is concerned with developing core skills such as “observation and reflection, analysis, creativity, problem-solving, and evaluation” (Harrison, 1992/ 1995). Therefore, the professional development is considered a critical component of Human Resources Management, involving the full commitment of those who are involved in it.

The development towards professional standing involves progression, and individuals are to be engaged in continuous professional development and training that is maintained beyond academic graduation and acceptance into the profession. The purpose of self-evaluation is to prepare for, and contribute to the overall process. There is a good reason for this: by engaging in general self-evaluation an individual has an opportunity to review, pause and reflect on vital and valuable personal experience. For most teachers, informal self-evaluation happens naturally, sometimes even subconsciously. We constantly ask ourselves such questions as: How am I doing? How did that course go? What is going well and what is going wrong in my work? What support and improvement do I need?

At the Bucharest University of Economic Studies, the main professional development interest (concern) of the teachers is in achieving a better correlation between self-evaluation and assessment of student performance, as well as in fine-tuning assessment criteria and instruments.

Among self-evaluation, class observation, peer observation and student feedback are key-concepts in teacher professional development. Despite the fact that it is recommended as a means of improving teacher effectiveness and of promoting staff development, teachers are often reluctant to be observed, as they might associate this either with previous experiences of top-down observation, or with possible negative consequences. In our university too few teachers agree „with the idea of” class observation.

Currently there are available a series of models of classroom observation. The classic perspective approach emphasizes the difference in status between the observer and the observee. The observer makes comments on the course observed and suggestions for improvement. In the alternative approach the supervisor focuses on the teaching problem and suggests a number of alternatives to what has to been observed in class. In the collaborative supervision approach the observer attempts to see the class through the teacher’s eyes, adopting a positive, non-judgemental attitude. Both observer and observee are on equal footing. (Arsene, 2010)

Concerning the feedback, it is a very powerful tool that can be used to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the teachers’ work but its impact can be either positive or negative. One could ask the following question: How can students contribute to ongoing improvement in university teaching?

Globally, the literature suggests that the student voice in feedback has increasing status and value as a source of rich insight into teaching effectiveness and the learning experience (Blair and Noel, 2014). Prosser and Trigwell (1990), Biggs and Tang (2011), and Ramsden (2003) have clearly articulated a pedagogical emphasis on students and learning, and it is in this context that learner perceptions, as reflected through student evaluation of teaching, become a potentially valuable performance indicator with wide-reaching impact to inform and lift quality in the higher education. In examining the validity of student evaluations, Prosser and Trigwell (1990) linked students’ perceptions of quality teaching to high-quality approaches to learning.

The university are using student feedback as performance indicators of data, and because most of the times online system is used to evaluate the overall teaching and learning components in terms of teacher’s quality assurance and performance, content and infrastructure, the data may not be answering properly to the questions. In order to do that, data need to be “good-quality, actionable data to determine whether policies, programs, and practices are having a desired effect” (Kuh *et al.*, 2001). Only under these conditions the students’ feedback will help to improve the course formats, materials, and requirements, assessment methods, classroom management and interactions.

McKeachie (1997) described that data from student evaluation can be used as a guide for the teachers to be conscious of their strengths and weaknesses in teaching so that they can improve their teaching effectiveness, consequently enhancing student learning quality.

As a conclusion, student perceptual data hold potential as an instrument of teaching data analysis for quality improvement. Concurrently, further involving and engaging students in the evaluation process and in reporting and application of the outcome data is essential.

### **3. Performance Evaluation Process in Higher Education**

#### **3.1. Theoretical Aspects of the Evaluation Process**

Evaluation has been an ongoing concern for people and organizations for several decades but in spite of the increasing interest in the topic, there is still room for looking at the direct implications. The main focus in this section is on the performance evaluation, so we could see the relevance of this process from both perspectives: individual and organizational.

“People work more effectively when they know what is expected of them...if they know that their performance is being monitored by a boss who is prepared to be honest with them at least once a year, but hopefully more frequently.” (Ron Shepard, training manager at Ford Motor company).

But „What is evaluation process?” “How important it is from the perspective of both teacher and university?” “What are its effects/ implications on teachers’ and students’ results?” These questions are important and I should find their appropriate response considering the fact that in universities teachers are able to engage in a review process which is clearly aimed at identifying their developmental needs. This process provides the opportunity for giving and receiving constructive feedback on performance. All teachers in the universities are able to manage change continuously for the benefit of all members of their university.

Evaluation is a control tool through which the human resources of the organization are determined to fulfill / accomplish the job requirements. In general terms, the concept of evaluation implies additional aspects (Mathis, 1997) related to the decision-making, salary raising or granting promotion. Evaluation is a process that has direct consequences on the level of employee motivation, performance recognition and shapes a certain image of the person subject to evaluation.

#### **3.2. What Means Performance Evaluation**

In the current literature, performance evaluation is seen as a type of cognitive activity performed by an evaluator and that is based on a set of standards or on the evaluator’s own value system.

Manolescu (2001) points out that performance evaluation is a very complex process, that focuses both on analysis and feedback on work behavior and on performance obtained by employees, and on the potential for its development capacity.

In practice, the evaluation process has some particularities determined by concrete circumstances in which it is performed, by the aims and methods used. But the evaluation process might have a beneficial role for the entire organization only if it is conducted properly / correctly. According to Popescu-Neveanu (1978), in general terms it is assumed that organizational performance is represented by the results that come up to a certain level, whether we refer to individual or to collective performance. Likewise, for many employees, performance means a great achievement in a particular / specific field. Performance is associated with a series of factors that are interacting with each other: skills, abilities, experience, interests, motivations, value system, age, the level of training, reward system.

### 3.3. Evaluation Criteria and Indicators in Higher Education

One of the most important decisions related to evaluation focuses on the type of criteria chosen. For teachers in Romanian HE system evaluation criteria are established through Education Law and Internal Regulations. For job promotion, it's mandatory for teachers to meet "minimum standards" as they are stipulated in The Bucharest University Economic Studies Regulation.

Quantifiable performance indicators are important at university level. They are explicit descriptions of evidence against which quality is measured. In the contemporary university, performance indicators are a key factor and have far-reaching impact through global rankings of higher education institutions (Breakwell and Tytherleigh, 2010; Guthrie and Neumann, 2007; Kettunen, 2010).

As university performance indicators were being articulated, research output was readily amenable to quantification. For example, academics report number of publications, impact ratings and grant income (Low Hui et al., 2013). Beyond research output, higher education institutions use performance indicators to determine, measure, report, evaluate and compare contribution to student learning, engagement and the overall student experience (Crosling et al., 2009; Kerr and Kulski, 2009; Sultan and Wong, 2010)

Although the purpose of student evaluation is to evaluate the quality of teaching, it is also intended to help faculty members to improve their teaching effectiveness. However, the main purpose to administrators is to make decisions on faculty tenure and promotion and most faculty members think they are not valid and reliable to be used for such decisions.

The Bucharest University of Economic Studies use online Likert-type scale-based questionnaires, which typically seek to evaluate the course and teacher across three common pedagogical themes: learning, engagement and the student experience. Other examples included: "appropriate teaching techniques are used by the teacher to enhance student learning", "learning activities encouraged participation" and "the learning resources (handouts, text, web resources, etc.) were adequate for the study in the unit". Among most of the universities, the majority of questions address content to do with students' perceptions of learning, and the results are often used to report *data* to do with how much or how well students have learned. The main concern regarding relevance of student feedback as performance indicator of teachers' performance is about data that cannot be obtained through the questions that are being asked. Data need to be "good-quality, actionable data to determine whether policies, programs, and practices are having a desired effect" (Kuh et al., 2011).

In order to be credible and effectiveness, the performance evaluation system has to be based on clear ethics principles who must be applicable both to the evaluaters and to the evaluatee.

## 4. Methodological Approach and Survey Findings

In Romania, in our traditional educational environment there are many voices who advocate the idea: "Why is the performance evaluation process necessary?" And it is naturally to rise another question: Can the university bear the risk of letting at hazard the performance evaluation process? Obviously the answer is no.

#### **4.1. Research Objective and Methodology**

To explore teachers' views about professional development, performance evaluation processes, and the link between these two, I conducted a small piece of qualitative research. The main research questions are: 1. Is there a connection between continuous professional development (CPD) and academic performance, with specific reference to teaching/training and related activities? and 2. Does evaluation reflect CPD and improvements in academic performance?

For the purpose of the study I have decided upon the primary objective of the questionnaire: to explore teachers points of view about evaluation process, professional development, and the subsidiary issue might includes the necessity of improvement related to the current evaluation form. I used the Google Drive platform in order to facilitate for respondents the access to online version. In this research were involved teachers from all 12 faculties from The Bucharest University of Economic Studies. The questionnaire includes a total of 15 questions divided into three categories:

- The first category includes questions which enable to obtain the information regarding the in-service specialization training attended, and the average duration of those training courses.
- The second category includes the set of questions, and focused on issues such performance evaluation, and teachers' evaluation by students.
- The third category was focused on a critical and at the same time neglected issue: mentoring.

#### **4.2. Discussion of the Results**

The results of the questionnaire yielded interesting data and in this section I will present the main results according to questions addressed in the survey and in interviews. Most of the respondents (89,2%) have attended in-service specialization training courses programmes and this is because all of them are interested in improving their professional performance. Teachers have attended training courses in their own field of specialization, and most of the times they received funding or scholarships.

It is significant percentage of teachers who attended training courses at-home, and at-home and abroad.

Training programs with a duration of more than three months and more than one year have the highest share among all mentioned. Only 2,5 % of teachers who responded to the questionnaire were rather unsatisfied. Their dissatisfaction is related either to organizational issues or their acquired knowledge couldn't be properly and complete capitalized through teaching materials.

A representative segment of respondents are teachers who consider that the most relevant form of performance evaluation are self-evaluation and evaluation of the head of department. In other words, they do prefer to be evaluated only by those whom understood the specific of their job / of the teaching and research area in higher education.

Concerning the score that they have obtained at former evaluation, the answers are enlightening: 55% of teachers said that always they had scores of at least 4 out of 5. This „four” is equivalent to getting the qualifier "good" , which is needed to promote job (equivalent to meet the minimum standard, as is stipulated in our university's Regulation, based on legislation in force – Education Law).

The results depict that an overwhelming percentage of the respondents 76,2% are agree with the fact that the main benefit of mentoring is improving teacher- student communication. As it is well-known, the mentoring process is based on the following values and principles: knowing the way in which individuals learn; recognizing that there are differences between individuals; personal and professional development are necessary for a person to reach success; encouraging individuals to develop; skills development; searching for new ideas, theories and knowledge; reflecting on past experiences as a way to understand and learn. But more than this, mentoring is "significant contribution from one person to another to help the transition of one of them in terms of knowledge, experience and way of thinking" (Megginson and Clutterbuck, 1995, p.13). Newby and Corner cited by Bogathy (2007) emphasized that it is not sufficient to be a mentor, it is critical to be a good one, and for this you have to have certain abilities (the capacity to share to others trust and optimism, skills to provide support and guidance to the needs identified). Moreover, it is necessary to have dedication, involvement; mentoring is a complex process, and can become the key to improving individual performance, motivation and communication. In order to become common practice in the realm of academic, mentoring is required to be appropriately recognized and rewarded.

## **5. Conclusions**

During the past three decades, Romania's Higher Education has faced with various challenges and problems. Admitting the fact that the most important organizational asset is the human resource is a long time reality. The human factor becomes central as a source of competitive advantage and as an indispensable asset for developing. The quality of the whole educational process could be increased at least under two conditions: continuous professional development of the main asset: teachers, and a valid and adequate evaluation.

As we all know, it is mandatory to upgrade our skills and to adapt to the new requirements of the changing labor market. The quick changes anticipated in the labor market in the knowledge-based economy demand workers who are very well prepared. So it is imperative to promote life-long learning, sharpen individual skills and strengthen relations between the educational system and industry, to ensure the availability of required skills.

The findings of the study point to the way in which I advocate the idea: there is a strong relation between professional development and teachers' evaluation in Higher Education, and from this perspective it is important for university to pay attention to the teacher performances' recognition and reward.

Beyond any management strategy, the university should recognised teaching excellence, and mentoring, and has to allocate meaningful funding for the teachers continuous professional development. It is critical to offer to evaluated teachers the evaluation results because them provide information on quality and effectiveness of their work (in class with students).

The evaluation must be focused mainly on the future perspectives, on performance improvements, and not to be focused on a simple analysys or comparison of the results with the standards – tick if the results meet the standars. Academics must be prepared for their teaching duties and for their role as

researchers and should be encouraged to engage in both, continuous professional development and performance evaluation, as there is a symbiotic bonding between them.

I strongly recommend class observation and a bottom-up approach to developing an evaluation form based on collegiate / peer observation. This has to be seen and used more often as a means of improving teacher effectiveness. However, in practice, it can be difficult to implement because: teachers have many demands on their time, they are sometimes reluctant to allow colleagues into their classrooms, and they may not see any potential benefits from peer observation.

One way in which peer observation can be very effective is when teachers acquire new skills or ideas at conferences and then model those new approaches for their colleagues. Professional development should be job-embedded.

Continuous professional development and constant improvement of personal skills are seen as the main channels for being competitive in this ever-changing environment. The individual and institutional need for professional growth represents a complex process which include aspects like specialization training program, intensive follow-up activities and a multitude of evaluation procedures.

Through continuous interest in improving teaching skills, combining learning with practical activities, teachers could become better and better in their profession and thus will ensure institutional learning and its growth. In addition, professional development represents a critical factor in organizational performance assurance, with specific reference to “the learning organization”. The key to the future of the organization’ performance is to create an environment in which all members are continuously buzzing about and striving to improve their competences.

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