EDU WORLD 2018
The 8th International Conference

BEYOUND THE QUALITY PARADIGM: CONSEQUENCES AND POSSIBLE REMEDIAL ACTIONS

Petru Lisievici (a)*
*Corresponding author

(a) *S*piru Haret University, Department of Psychology and Education Sciences, 46G Fabricii Street, Bucharest, Romania, lisip52@gmail.com

Abstract

Problem statement: We have in a number of studies analysed the impact of the Quality Assurance System on Romanian Higher Education and found *little evidence* of beneficial effects. We have found that this quality assurance system favoured control versus support, standardisation and uniformity versus creativity and diversity, centralization versus academic freedom. We have also found that it diverted large financial, human and time resources from teaching, scientific activity and research. Instead of promoting an"evaluation culture", it generated a culture of preparing documentations and reports and use of rigging tactics for better scoring. *Purpose of the study*: The purpose of this study is to further clarify the negative consequences of extensively using the quality paradigm and submit remedial actions. *Methods:* We have used critical analysis and case studies to highlight negative consequences and the need for remedial actions. *Findings and results:* The remedial actions put forward include changes in the quality of education construct, changes in the components of ARACIS activity, streamlining of documentation requested and assessment procedures. *Conclusion* The quality paradigm has for too long been used to preserve the beaurocratic structure and staff, modus operandi and privileges associated with the quality assurance institution, rather than motivating academic staff and supporting universities.
There is an urgent need for change.

1. Introduction

We have identified in a series of papers (Lisievici, 2011; Lisievici, 2013; Lisievici, 2014) the conceptual, validity and negative impact problems of the current quality assurance system in Romanian education. The quality assurance system favoured control versus support, uniformity versus diversity, centralization versus academic freedom. We have also found that it diverted large financial, human and time resources from teaching, scientific activity and research. Instead of promoting an „evaluation culture", it generated a culture of preparing documentations and reports and rigging procedures for better scoring. Last but not least it did not provide support that would have been instrumental related to the demands is formulated.

Some other researchers also expressed their profound dissatisfaction for the direction Romanian education is headed (Ilica, 2016).

We come to a better understanding of the "quality paradigm" underlying quality assurance (Lisievici 2017a; Lisievici 2017b).

Quality of educations de facto means meeting the standards and performance indicators formulated by the external evaluation agencies. The education provider is the sole responsible for education quality. The funding of education or the legislative framework generated by the government are not taken into account. Written documentation is the main type of evidence of quality that is expected from education providers. Apart from preparing documents for external quality assurance agencies, institutions are encouraged to develop own "quality assurance" systems.

2. Problem Statement

We have shown (Lisievici 2017a; Lisievici 2017b) that the dysfunctional quality paradigm has become dominant within the education system. Basically, the quality paradigm is used to justify any decision detrimental for education and quality of education. It also informs the standards and procedures of the quality assurance institutions.

Further steps are necessary in order to clarify its destructive impact and have it replaced with a better paradigm.

Also, steps have to be taken to improve the functioning of the quality assurance institutions.

3. Research Questions

3.1 What are the consequences of the current Quality of Education Paradigm on the design and operation of the quality assurance institutions?

3.2. What remedial actions are necessary in order to eliminate the destructive impact of the Quality of Education Paradigm?

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to further clarify the negative consequences of extensively using the quality paradigm and submit remedial actions.

5. Research Methods

Case studies have been used to highlight negative consequences generated by the quality paradigm becoming dominant in decision making and managing education.

We have used critical analysis to identify remedial steps to be taken.

6. Findings

6.1. Any number of bad decisions may be taken and rationalized under the umbrella of quality of education paradigm

Case study a: Retiring teaching staff over 65 (for better quality of education)

As a consequence of the Law of National Education being passed by the Parliament in 2011 (Parlamentul Romaniei, 2011), universities had to abruptly retire professors over 65.

A deficit of 10 to 20% of teaching staff appeared practically overnight and consequently, the danger of not meeting the standards of quality assurance agency regarding the teaching positions a professor was allowed to cover.

The Senates of the universities reacted by raising the teaching loads for one teaching position. For example, the current teaching load for a professor position at Spiru Haret University is 12 hours/week. The combination of higher teaching loads and stagnant salaries led to a de facto decrease of per hour salaries.

Case study b: The lowest teaching degree in Higher Education requires a Doctor diploma (for better quality of education)

Ever since the communist regime universities, the lowest teaching position, namely Assistant, acted as an exceptionally powerful motivation factor for students to work hard, as those with best grades and scientific activity could have been kept on after graduation, as Assistants, and start a Higher Education teaching career.

As a consequence of the same 2011 National Education law provisions, an Assistant cannot be hired unless he/she possessed a doctor's Diploma. The Assistants already under contract were given a period of time to either graduate doctoral studies or enrol in such a program and graduate.

However, for various reasons, not all assistants managed to complete their doctoral studies in time.

For example, just in the Psychology and Education Department Bucharest of Spiru Haret University, eight employment contracts had to be terminated for this reason. Out of the eight ex assistants, three were enrolled in doctoral programs at one of the Sorbonne universities. Needless to say, in any such young ex member of faculty, universities had invested resources, according to teaching needs and career development plans.

6.2. Remedial actions necessary

Using a better construct for the quality of education

The current construct used by domestic quality assurance agencies (one for Pre-university and one for Higher Education) uses meeting the "expectations" of beneficiaries as the key component (ARACIS, 2006), while most of the international and domestic reports and studies on the quality of education prefer to use the concept "needs" (OECD, 1989; Lisievici, 1997; Lisievici, 2009). The definition associates the quality in education with meeting the "expectations" of the "beneficiaries" and the "quality standards". It

goes on to stipulate that there are "direct" beneficiaries, like the persons enrolled in education programmes, and "indirect" beneficiaries, like employers, employees, families of beneficiaries and, to a larger extent, the "whole society".

The needs of education providers are completely disregarded. The methodological documents of quality assurance agencies (ARACIS, 2006) contain numerous suggestions that quality of education can be rigorously measured.

The consequence is that the assessment reports go beyond descriptions and suggestions and can be used as basis for granting or denying government funding, making classifications or even dissolution of institutions.

We submit the following construct for the quality of education as being far more adequate: The quality of education is a mixture of realities, perceptions and attitudes related to the way in which the education providers and beneficiaries behave in order to learn about and meet their respective needs, both the ones they are aware of and the ones they are not aware of. As such it cannot be measured, but it can be described and used to inform suggestions for improvement.

This construct has a series of merits as opposed to the currently used one.

First, it takes into account "the forgotten side of quality" (Lisievici, 2015), namely, the needs of education providers.

Secondly, it accommodates the idea that for an education provider it is more important to meet the needs of its particular beneficiaries than some general standards.

It also clarifies the idea that it is impossible to make decisions leading to quality without taking into account the particular beneficiaries of and education provider, or the human, material and financial resources of a particular education provider.

- Restructuring the mission and the scope of activity for the quality assurance institutions

According to the new construct for quality of education, both quality assurance agencies (for pre-university institutions and for Higher education) should expand their scrutiny to the county and municipal inspectorates for education and also, to the Ministry of Education.

They should concentrate on their ability to provide adequate funding for institutions, on strategies and decision making, on fairness of treatment of state versus private education providers, on promoting decentralization, institutional independence and intellectual freedom.

They should also concentrate on the quality, stability, consistence and conciseness of regulations, on their connection with the European education cultural space.

There is also necessary to renounce the current orientation towards allocating quality diagnostics like "High Trustworthiness", "Trustworthiness", "Limited Trustworthiness" and move towards descriptive reports, including recommendations.

- Reshaping the standards and procedures and for both visits of teams from quality assurance agencies and for decision making

Currently, the self-assessment report the education providers have to prepare before the visit from the quality assurance agency may be have about 1500 pages, out of which more than 90% consist of "Annexes". Compiling ownership documents for the institution's buildings or the surfaces of its different facilities is widely known as being both time-consuming and frustrating.

In order to drastically reduce the volume of documentation needed, a standard for the self-assessment report should be set to a maximum of 100 pages, including Annexes. This remedial action addresses the finding that writing documentations and reports for quality assessment agencies may occupy up to 60% of job related time (Lisievici, Ticuşan, & Todor, 2013).

Stability and predictability should also be observed.

The current situation is that the format of "Discipline charts" is being changed almost every year, as well as the classification of disciples between Fundamental, Domain or Specialization. As a consequence, education providers have to frequently modify curricula and calculation of percentages of different types of components.

Professional association should be called to suggest requirements for curricula and the number of suggested components should not exceed 50% of the total. The current standards are so specific that little room is left for the institutions to take into account both the needs of the students and the teaching resources they have.

Decision making process should also be revised. Currently the reports of the visiting teams are being used as a basis for decisions made by the boards of quality assurance agencies. Basically decisions are being made not by individuals who actually visited the institutions.

Decision making processes should include recommendations for resources allocation. For example, private universities, for financial reasons, are frequently in crisis of support staff and divert to faculty various repetitive tasks associate with preparing reports for quality assurance agencies. In such situations, recommendations for government funding should be made, i.e. to allocate funding for support staff.

7.   Conclusion

The current quality of education paradigm underlines uniformity and conformity rather than creativity and freedom.

There is an urgent need to rethink the whole quality assurance system, beginning with the quality of education construct up to the mission and scope of institutions, standards and procedures, decision making and of course, putting back creativity, independence and intellectual freedom in their rightful place..

References

ARACIS, (2006). Methodology for external evaluation, standards, standards of reference, and list of performance indicators of the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Bucharest, Retrieved from www.aracis.ro.

Ilica, A., (2016). Contra direcției de astăzi în educația românească – opinii și eseuri pedagogice [Against the Current Direction in Romanian Education – Pedagogical Opinions and Essays]. Arad: Editura Tiparnița.

Lisievici, P., (1997). *Calitatea învăţământului* [The Quality of Education]. Bucureşti: Editura Didactică şi Pedagogică.

Lisievici, P., (2009). The quality assurance system for Higher Education in Romania: Part of the solution or part of the problem? In Dobrescu, P., Pricopie, R., Ionescu Mihaela Alexandra (Eds), *Proceedings of the International Conference R&D perspectives: Promoting Innovation through Education, Culture and communication* (pp. 329-336). Bucharest: Editura Comunicare.ro,

Lisievici, P., (2011). Methodological, technical and ethical issues of quality assessment in higher education: The case of Romania. In *IATED, 4th International Conference of Education, Research and Innovation*, 14th -16th of November (Proceedings CD). Madrid.

Lisievici, P., Ticusan, M., Todor, O., (2013). An Exploratory Inquiry into the Attractiveness of Teaching Career in Romanian Education System. In *Procedia – Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *78,* 260 – 264.

Lisievici, P., (2015). The forgotten side of quality: Quality of education construct impact on quality assurance system. In *Procedia - Social and Behavioral Sciences*, *180*. 371 – 375.

Lisievici, P., (2017a). The Dysfunctional Paradigms of Romanian Education. In Future Academy, *The European Proceedings of Social & Behavioural Sciences, Edu World 2016 7th International Conference, XXIII,* 61 – 68.

Lisievici, P., (2017b), Education Killers Paradigms: The Dysfunctional Paradigms Hypothesis. In *SGEM 4th Multidisciplinary Scientific Conference on Social Sciences and Arts SGEM Conference Proceedings*, Book 3, Science and Society, V, Education and Educational Research, 121 – 128.

OECD (1989). *Schools and Quality. An International Report*. Paris: 1989.

Parlamentul României (2006), Legea 87/2006 (…) privind asigurarea calității educației [Law for Quality of Education Assurance]. Retrieved from http://www.uaic.ro/uaic/bin/download/Academic/ServiciulCalitate/legea87.pdf

Parlamentul Romaniei, (2011). Legea Educației Naționale 1/2011 [Law of National Education]. Retrieved http://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2017/legislatie%20MEN/Legea%20 nr.%201_2011_actualizata2018.pdf