Roles and Strategies of Teacher Evaluation: Teachers’ Perceptions

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Abstract

The main goal of this paper is to investigate the roles and the methods of teacher evaluation from the perspective of the teachers. The questionnaire consisted of 82 items. The sample comprises 421 teachers from primary and preschool level from ROMANIA and SPAIN. Teachers consider the assessment purpose is depending on several factors. In terms of the gained results we described teachers’ perception of the evaluation process and specific methods of evaluation. The final data helps to build a better system of teacher evaluation in in-service teacher training and for the optimizing the quality of the teaching and assessment process.

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Peer-review under responsibility of The Association “Education for tomorrow” / [Asociatia “Educatie pentru maine”].

Keywords: teacher’s evaluation, roles, methods of evaluation

1. Introduction

The post-modern society and the challenges posed by the world nowadays are leading to numerous changes in teacher initial training and lifelong learning. Romania’s EU integration and the reshaping of the Romanian educational system by means of cooperation and competition impose the necessity that the teaching corps should benefit from a training that ensures them the capacity to adjust their teaching style and methods to the changing demands of our modern society. Personality development is “a general recurrent phenomenon, determined by scientific laws that should be made known, the education of each individual being a unique process, inaccessible to
general laws, which we should be studied, in their turn” (Bărzea, 2005, p. 34). All throughout our life we are engaged in an on-going learning process taking place both in formal and informal contexts, in order either to satisfy our own thirst for knowledge or simply because the fluctuations specific to the labour market ask for it. The Stockholm European Council endorsed the Report on the Future Objectives of Education and Training Systems, adopted by the Council of Education on February 12th 2001, reasserting the importance of education and training of the European citizens. This report stipulates that: „Developing basic skills, particularly the skills in information and communication technologies (ICT) and the digital ones is a priority for the European Union that aims at turning the European economy into the most dynamic and competitive knowledge-based economy in the world. This priority includes the educational lifelong learning policies, as well as preventing the shortage of technical and scientific personnel”. In this context, one of the main objectives set by the European Commission relates to „The increase in the quality and efficiency of the education and training systems in EU. Improving education and training of teachers and trainers.”

In a knowledge-based society, access to knowledge becomes crucial, the teachers and trainers being key actors in the strategies meant to stimulate social and economic development.

The key-elements to achieving this objective are:

- Giving teachers and trainers the support they need in order to be able to aptly respond to the challenges implied by a knowledge-based society;
- Providing a clear-cut definition of skills to be acquired, including minimal ICT skills which teachers should possess, given the role played by them in the knowledge society;
- Guaranteeing adequate qualification to people entering the system, at all the subjects and levels, as well as ensuring enhanced attraction to the teaching profession.

The documents elaborated by the institutions of the European Community set guidelines meant to make possible the harmonization of the education systems in its member countries. The Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council outlines the key competences that must be developed both in initial training and in lifelong learning so as to make felt the importance of continuous education (December, 2006). These key competences are defined as a “combination of knowledge, skills and attitudes appropriate to the context. The key competences take into account the need for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship, social inclusion and responsible employment in the labour market.” Romania, as a EU member, is trying to adjust its reforms in the education field so as to integrate into the community. Over the past years, the reform of the education system has unfolded on several important directions: reforming the legal framework, reforming the curriculum and schoolbooks, reforming the assessment and examination system, reforming the management and the education financing and, last but not least, reforming the teacher training system. Training lies at the core of the most used ways of instruction and education, representing more than a mere sum of elements, usually implying a particular internal and external form of organization of the latter. Numerous oppositions, problems, disputes arisen in diverse educational contexts are neutralized by means of training sessions. Training also is a particular manifestation of professional status. Succinct yet complex knowledge, organized under the form of scientific methodical syntheses, work to the benefit and advantage of those who go through training sessions collaborating with the people directly involved in this activity. Acquiring ICT skills, being engaged in scientific documentation and conducting an applied approach of the numerous components of the education process confer assuredness and determination to the teachers involved in this process.

Lifelong learning is considered in the broad context of the education process as a requirement of an ever-changing society. The construction of a coherent system in lifelong learning must take into account the context it is meant for and the context it comes out of. Although teacher training has often been made a priority by the teaching system reform, it has known a rather slow development, the specialists noticing a discrepancy in terms of rhythm and efficiency when compared to other elements of the reform, especially the ones relative to curriculum, instruction, evaluation and management. By way of consequence, it is vital that teacher training system should become a priority; only by having well-trained teachers will the society benefit from a youth educated in a reformed spirit.

The methodology of secondary school teachers’ lifelong training stipulates that lifelong training must guarantee teachers that besides updating and developing their competences, they will acquire new knowledge. This should be in keeping with the evolution of the needs in the national education system and curriculum, and also with the demands regarding the adjustment of the competences of the teaching staff to the changes in the education field. Thus, lifelong training aims to:
- Update and develop the competences in the field of specialization corresponding to the teaching functions obtained through the initial teacher training;
- Develop competences necessary to advancement in the teaching career, by means of specific exams;
- Acquire or develop competences of leadership, guiding, monitoring, assessment in the structures and organizations specific to the education system;
- Acquire new competences, through postgraduate conversion/readjustment programmes for new qualifications or new teaching functions, other than the ones obtained through initial teacher training;
- Acquire complementary or extension competencies which broaden the range of activities and functions that can be fulfilled by teachers, such as E-learning, teaching in a foreign language, education counseling and career orientation, adult education etc.;
- Develop and extend transversal competences regarding social roles and personal and professional development, interaction and communication with the social and pedagogical environment, taking on responsibilities in organizing, managing and improving the strategic performance of the professional group one belongs to.

It is common knowledge that education is a key factor contributing to the social progress. The educator, given his training and the importance of his activity, is a stimulating force of a people’s spirit, capable to generate positive chain reactions on the part of the people he educates, to increase their thirst for knowledge and to put into motion their motivation. A well-trained teacher, receptive and adjustable to change, will in his turn succeed in training generations of young people eager and ready to contribute to the evolution of the society he is part of.

Lifelong learning also implies the integration of these training courses into the teaching practice, and teacher evaluation should include criteria meant to assess these elements. Teacher evaluation in the lifelong learning process is particularly formative. In order to highlight the importance, role and assessment strategies of teacher evaluation we applied a complex questionnaire measuring these aspects.

In order to determine the professional standards for teaching in the education system, the authors analyzed the competences and activities that should be fulfilled by a teacher. These standards constitute as many starting points for evaluating the initial training and lifelong learning. The evaluation purpose is to enhance the quality of the teaching practices in relation to the mission and objectives of the institution, so that this should influence the quality of students’ performance and, implicitly, the performance of the educational institution. There are numerous bibliographic references detailing secondary teacher evaluation modalities (Seldin, 1997; Silvermann 2001; Alemoni, 1999; Wachtel, 1998; Ludlow, 2002 si 2005), as well as the methods measuring teaching performance in the higher education system (Gadamer, 1979; Cuban, 1998; Darling-Hammond, 2000; De Landsheere, 1996; Friedus, 1998; Rennert-Ariev, 2005).

2. Methodology

2.1. Instrument and objectives

The method lying at the basis of our investigative approach was the questionnaire-based survey. The questionnaire was made in 2010 by a group of researchers from the University of Padova, Italy, and „Ştefan cel Mare” University from Suceava, coordinated by prof. Ettore Felisatti. It was made up of 82 multiple choice questions, each with 5 answers, from 1 to 5, where 1 represents total disagreement and 5 total agreement. The Questionnaire items dwell on the following aspects:

- Teachers’ opinion about the purposes of evaluation in lifelong training (guaranteeing professional development, highlighting teachers’ strong and weak points etc.)
- Who should this process of evaluation be conducted by (experts, principal, other teachers etc.)?
- When should the evaluation take place?
- What aspects should it relate to (theoretically-based competencies, applied competencies, relational competence etc.);
- Which tools should be used in the teacher evaluation process (school documents, theoretical exams, practical tests, portfolio etc.)?
- Which should be the evaluation criteria and modalities?
- Which aspects should be taken into account by an authentic teacher evaluation?
- In what way should the results of the evaluation be made known?
What is teachers’ perception of the necessity of this evaluation?

Which are the current policies at a national level in the process of teacher evaluation?

The objectives of the experimental approach were to make known teachers’ perception of the current policies in teacher evaluation at the national level. To this purpose, the respondents had to answer to the following statements:

- if they are adequate, useful,
- a necessary and stimulating practice,
- insufficient,
- are absent,
- established at the European level,
- in keeping with the nature of the school etc.

We also took a keen interest in teachers’ perception of the strategies used in teacher evaluation. This is why we introduced items relative to:

- Teacher evaluation tools (written tests, oral tests, practical tests etc.),
- Modalities and criteria recommended for the evaluation process (communicated, negotiated with teachers, established at a national / local level, etc.).

This tool was applied between September and December 2012 and May-June 2014 to 167 teachers in primary schools in the Bukovina county (and 118 in Iaşi), and to 136 teachers in Spain, in the Lleida county; 421 teacher respondents altogether. The respondents were fully informed on how the obtained data would be used later on and were asked to participate in completing the questionnaire. Teachers were also guaranteed the confidentiality of their answers. The data relative to the years of service in the education system for both countries can be read in the table below.

We can notice that the average seniority benefiting from a permanent contract in the education system is 1 year, which means that most of the teachers did not have yet a significant teaching experience. In the case of the teachers working on a fixed-term basis, the average is 4 years, which means that they had a certain experience in the education system. As the experienced teachers are more numerous, we are entitled to consider their answers representative for teachers’ perception of the teacher evaluation.

2.2 Results analysis and interpretation

In what follows we shall present a few of a significant data which resulted form the statistical analysis of the data for competence evaluation.

The first item was relative to the perception of the necessity to evaluate teachers, the respondents having to choose between the following statements:

- a useless practice which should be eliminated,
- a necessary and stimulating practice,
- it does not yield innovative results
- motivating for teachers.

Teachers mostly considered that the evaluation is not a useless practice and it should not be eliminated. These teachers consider evaluation as a necessary evil, a necessity because it measures the effort made by a teacher.
There are no significant differences between the Romanian and the Spanish respondents concerning this item, although the teachers from Spain do not have a clear-cut system of national or local evaluation measuring their lifelong learning process. Here are the representations of this process for the Spanish sample. Teachers consider that the process of evaluation is very necessary and that it could stimulate the quality and development of the education system.

An interesting comparison can be made by analyzing the answers to the last statement relative to the fact that teachers’ evaluation could be motivating teachers. The teachers from Romania are in either partial or complete agreement with the statement according to which the evaluation process motivates teachers’ career development (80%), while only 37% of the ones in Spain perceive evaluation as motivating. This difference may be caused by the absence of an integrated system of evaluation in the Spanish education. Below is the representation of the obtained percentages:
Figure 3. The differences between perceptions upon evaluation from Romanian and Spanish teachers

The differences between these perceptions are statistically representative. Thus the value of $t(303) = 3.734$, $p = 0.000$), respectively $t(420) = 8.511$, $p = 0.000$) demonstrates the difference between teachers’ perceptions in the two countries. In this respect it would be interesting to make a differentiated analysis on what the teachers in the two countries consider to be motivating in the evaluation process; the analysis could also be extended to a sample from several countries. The differences in terms of the respondents’ age are not significant regarding the motivating function of the evaluation. Both the teachers under the age of 41 and the more experienced ones find evaluation just as motivating.

As far as the opinions relative to the educational policies in terms of evaluation are concerned, the respondents’ opinions differ.

The Romanian respondents find the educational policies in the field of evaluation much more adequate, well organized and efficient than the teachers from Spain who do not appreciate these policies to the same extent. By applying Independent Sample T-Test we obtained significant differences between teachers’ perceptions in the two countries. The value of $t(420) = 7.653$, $p = 0.000$), respectively $t(420) = 5.433$, $p = 0.000$) demonstrate the large discrepancy between teachers’ perception.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Are adequate, well organized and efficient</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>7.653</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>0.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>8.359</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Are in keeping with the nature of the school</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>5.433</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>0.015</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>5.777</td>
<td>312</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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Regarding the item relative to the recommended modalities and criteria of evaluation, teachers consider that the evaluation modalities and criteria must be communicated to the teachers beforehand.
Figure 4. The modalities and criteria for evaluation to be known about teachers

The results regarding what authority should set these criteria (at a national level, a local level, or the institutional level) are particularly interesting. We noticed that there are significant differences between the average values of the Romanian and the Spanish teachers regarding the perception of the evaluation criteria establishing. By applying the Independent Sample T-Test we obtained significant differences between the Romanian and Spanish perception towards the authority which should establish these criteria.

Table 2. Results of the Independent Sample t Test on the variables relative to the evaluation criteria and the country of origin

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variables</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Should be established at a national level</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>3.90</td>
<td>6.069</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>2.99</td>
<td>6.133</td>
<td>276</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should be established at a local or institutional level</td>
<td>283</td>
<td>3.16</td>
<td>-3.639</td>
<td>417</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>136</td>
<td>3.75</td>
<td>3.834</td>
<td>305</td>
<td>0.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Romanian teachers want that these criteria of evaluation should be established at a national level and not at the school or local level in a much larger proportion. This high number of Romanian teachers may consider that these evaluations could be done subjectively, so resorting to an external evaluation would be gaining in objectivity. The same results were also obtained in other surveys carried out in Romania or Italy (Clipa, O., Ignat A.A, Stanciu, M. 2008, p. 838).

2.3. Conclusions and recommendations

The results obtained from the statistical analysis outline the general picture of the teacher evaluation process, as seen by the secondary teachers in the two European countries when it comes to selecting what competences should be evaluated in teachers’ case. We noticed that the evaluation process is dependant on several factors such as: age of the respondents, the teaching system, number of years of teaching experience. A series of researchers in this field reached the same type of results (Kauchak, Peterson & Driscoll, 1985, Colby, Bradshaw, & Joyner, 2002, Clipa, 2011, Masari & Anghel, 2012).

Particularly relevant for teacher evaluation and for the use of the European teaching portfolio is introducing teachers to the culture of being evaluated from their very initial training (Ingvarson & Chadbourne, 1997; Stan, 2014, p.191). Their awareness about the fact that the evaluation criteria should be varied (Boyd, 1989; Loup, Garland, Ellett, & Rugutt, 1996, Clipa, 2014) should also be raised. The competences to be evaluated should be carefully selected according to the evaluation purposes and to its impact on the teachers. All the obtained data help us build a
system of teacher evaluation and improve its quality.

References