Assessment of the professional skills of student inspectors at the end of training In Morocco

Mohamed Essaoudi a*, Raja Lotfi b, Mohammed Talbi c, Mohamed Radid d

a National Center Training’s Inspectors of education (CNFIE), Rabat, Morocco.
b Ecole Normale Supérieure (ENS), Hassan II University, Casablanca, Morocco.
c Research Observatory in Didactic and Teaching University (ORDIPU), Ben M'sik Faculty, Hassan II University, Mohammedia- Casablanca, Morocco.
d Research Observatory in Didactic and Teaching University (ORDIPU), Ben M'sik Faculty, Hassan II University, Mohammedia- Casablanca, Morocco.

Abstract

With a methodology that is both exploratory and qualitative, we present an evaluation of student inspectors’ skills at the end of their training. The assessment of the mastery of skills by students shows that the two categories of cognitive skills and organizational and management skills are best perceived as acquired at the end of training, while personal and attitude skills and andragogical skills are perceived as mastered very little or not mastered. An analysis of the results also reveals the emergence of two skills considered essential for the training of inspectors: coping skills built in action and supervisory skills. Finally, we conclude that the training at the CNFIE † is incomplete, and does not always translate to the responsibilities and duties of inspector education. The training of inspectors is semi-professionalized and barely professionalizing.

Keywords: evaluation, professional skills, professionalization.

1. Introduction

Lately, there has been a significant reform animating many educational systems on different continents. The system in Morocco is no exception. The resonance of the reforms already underway in the Moroccan educational system since 2000 and materializing mainly by adopting the concepts of “professional competence” as the main organizer
of training programmes (Jonnaert, Barrette, Masciotra, & Yaya, 2006) and “integration” as an innovative teaching approach (Roegiers, 2012) has invaded the sphere of training devices of national education.

Today, just observing the labour market indicates the pervasiveness of references to professionalism: employers and the state want to rely on professionals. The education system wants to recruit “pros” of education and training (Le Boterf, 2011). The provision of training for inspectors at the CNFIE cannot be achieved today without registering the strong trend towards professionalization (Lessard, Tardif, & Lahaye, 1991), a trend that means both a more rapid adaptation of training devices to changes in the profession of inspector and an increase in the effectiveness of the training (Wittorski, 2007).

Professionalization of the training of inspectors is at the heart of the concerns of managers and actors in the Moroccan education system. The professionalization of inspection is based, among other things, on the fact that education is a profession composed of professional acts that requires solid training in specific professional skills (Bourdoncle, 2000).

Thus, the training of education inspectors in Morocco has reached a crossroads because it is enrolled in a professionalization dynamic (Paquay, Altet, Charlier, & Perrenoud, 2012), skills development (Perrenoud, 2001; 2011), and the integration of prior learning (Roegiers, 2012).

The professionalization of training at the CNFIE is indispensable, but there are several difficulties in its implementation. One track is to evaluate the relevance of the training, and check the professional skills developed. All researchers agree on the importance of assessing the professional skills of education frameworks. However, this assessment is not carried out, mainly because of a lack of knowledge on how to achieve it.

This methodological difficulty is due to the fact that professional competence is a construct that is not directly observable. Therefore, to evaluate it, we must make inferences from observable and measurable elements. But why should we therefore assess the professional skills?

There are probably several reasons for doing so. The first is that evaluation is an integral part of the education process. As it is necessary to know what trained individuals have achieved at the end of a training process, it is necessary to evaluate them. The second is that the assessment of competence is a fundamental task, because it allows certification that they are able to practise autonomously and efficiently.

The assessment of competence is also used to provide feedback to the actors of the training device. It is in this case a formatted evaluation (Le Boterf, 2010).

In addition, it is possible to assess the quality of training through the evaluation of individuals who have benefited from these programmes. Finally, the evaluation confirms the values and standards of the profession. Indeed, the professions, as regulated systems, have demands and expectations that constitute their values and standards of practice. The presence of these values and the achievement of these standards must be confirmed by the professionals who are beginning their profession.

Even if we know the outline of the development of skills assessment, there are very few studies whose purpose is the assessment of the skills of education inspectors. Several studies have analysed the difficulties inherent in assessing professional skills, such as the study by Valerie Marbach (1999).

The concept of “skills assessment” is increasingly used, but not yet well defined. Despite its vagueness, or variability according to the people who use it, the concept of skills assessment has been imposed in the management literature in general and in the educational literature in particular over the past thirty years.

However, professional competence remains elusive and ambiguous because of its fragility resulting from the difference between its strong stakes and its low level of definition (Le Boterf, 2010). It is always virtual because it is simply a standardized set of practice knowledge (De Ketele, 2008).
Given these characteristics, and in a professionalization process, we are mainly interested in the dual principle of the assessment of skills of student inspectors and professional training, trying to identify new forms of professional skills necessary for the training of education inspectors in Morocco.

1. Context

2. Observation
The main observation to note is the closure of the CNFIE between 1999 and 2008. Indeed, even though the CNFIE was created in 1967, it was marked by a cessation of training during this period due to saturation in the number of inspectors. In addition, the current training programme, despite being updated, retains traces of its past. It is organized, for the most part, around a vertical declination programme that is considered too rigid (Jolibert & Lombard, 2008).

Thus, in the absence of core competencies for inspectors of education (Le Boterf, 2007), the assessment of skills remains difficult (Sorel & Wittorski, 2005). The CNFIE seeks to break with this programme and its disciplinary logic (Allal, 2001). The knowledge used in the training device is not always specific to the inspection profession.

3. Goal
The purpose of this study is to evaluate, on the one hand, the professional skills of student inspectors at the end of their training at the CNFIE and, on the other, to verify the existence of other skills necessary to their professional training.

4. Relevance of the study
The relevance of our study is threefold. First, this is a first attempt to assess the CNFIE training following its recent restructuring. Second, our study is the third kind in the history of the CNFIE since its inception in 1967. Finally, our study is a draft or project to develop the training of inspectors of education.

5. Method
5.1 Document analysis
Our approach focused primarily on the preliminary analysis of the history of assessment skills education in several countries, namely France, Belgium and Canada. It then focused on the analysis of institutional documents on human resources education in Morocco and documents of the national training centre for education inspectors (Decree No. 2.08.521 dated 18 December 2008 relating to the reorganization of the CNFIE, COSEF report, inspection reports, etc.).

5.2 Questionnaire

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† The Charter of Education and Training 2000–2010 is a kind of strategy to reform the Moroccan education system following the recommendations of the Special Commission of Education and Training (COSEF) established in 1999.
‡ The Emergency Plan 2009–2012, as its name suggests, is a palliative programme to correct the reforms initiated that have not yet been successful or whose implementation is slow compared with the pre-established deadlines.
** The Najah programme consists of 4 major areas and 23 projects. The projects mentioned above, 15 and 16 are respectively related to the skills building of education staff (P15) and the strengthening of supervision, monitoring, and evaluation of teaching staff (P16).
†† COSEF: Board of education training
From a nominal group technique (NGT) applied to a group of experienced inspectors (A: n = 12) with more than 10 years’ experience in this field, representing five disciplines of education (Table 1), one hundred items were generated and grouped into five broad categories of competencies according to the technique of thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2001).

Table 1: Characteristics of experienced inspectors for NGT

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Subjects</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Experience</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Disciplines (05)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Mean age = 42.6 years</td>
<td>More than 10 years’ experience</td>
<td>2 female 10 male</td>
<td>French, mathematics, life and earth sciences, physical education and sport, primary education</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

On the basis of these skill categories (Table 2), a questionnaire (consisting of closed and open items) was developed, validated by a group of expert trainers at the CNFIE (B: n = 06) who had to decide on the relevance and clarity of each statement, and then administered to a group of student inspectors (C: n = 90), representing five sections, at the end of their initial training at the CNFIE Rabat (Table 3), to assess their perception of their mastery of these skills (Tresanini, 2006).

Table 2: Explanation of the five categories of professional skills identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Categories</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Cognitive skills</td>
<td>Mastery of knowledge: concepts, theoretical, and methodological basis ... technical supervision ...</td>
<td>Conceptual</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Management skills</td>
<td>Ability to organize, plan, facilitate, coordinate, administer, supervise, and monitor tasks related to the job of inspector ...</td>
<td>Proactive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Relationship and communication skills</td>
<td>Ability to establish a professional relationship based on information and communication, mastery, management, and sustainability of the relationship ...</td>
<td>Interactive or inter-personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal and attitude skills</td>
<td>Development of positive attitudes to inspectors’ work, development of personality traits favourable to exercising the profession ...</td>
<td>Intro-active or intra-personal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andragogical skills</td>
<td>Capacity for self-mastery and co-training between peers, mastering reflective practice and action, development of critical thinking ...</td>
<td>Retroactive or reflexive</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaire addressed mainly the assessment of the academic and practical training received at the CNFIE. A questionnaire completed by the students is the most common way to assess the training received (Abrami & d’Apollonia, 1990; Marsh, 1987; Van der Maren, 2008; Van Hulle & Lenoir, 2005).

Table 3: Number and profile of respondents to the questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>Professional Profile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student inspectors of financial and equipment services</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ex-managers in economic services 5 years of service minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student inspectors of French</td>
<td>12</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Our questionnaire consists of three parts. The first presents the 37 statements deemed the most relevant and clear within the 5 categories. The respondents (Table 4) had to reply using a Likert scale of four levels for each item. The second part contains information on the students (section, age, gender, status, number years of service, etc.). Finally, in the third part, the students were asked to comment freely on the assessment practices of teaching, courses, and coaching, and then make suggestions for improvement if necessary.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Student inspectors of philosophy</th>
<th>08</th>
<th>Ex-teacher in levels of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Student inspectors of life and earth sciences</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>and having corresponding 4 years’ experience minimum</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student inspectors of primary schools</td>
<td>32</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5.3 Data processing

There are several forms of analysis. The approach chosen here is rather eclectic and uses various means. This choice is based on the fact that the assessment of professional skills occurs in various ways (evaluation of training programmes, assessment of professional practices, student assessment, etc.) and that our intentions are directed towards their identification and their degree of mastery rather than their theoretical explanation, as proposed by Landry (1992), for example.

Thus, the data were analysed by the technique of thematic content analysis (Bardin, 2001), and statistically processed by different software (Sphinx Lexica 2000, Excel-tri). Content analysis grouped all the statements that are similar in meaning into categories. It can discover, by a rigorous analysis of texts, the meaning of the messages contained in the questionnaire. Content analysis is preferred because it can treat, in a methodical way, data that have a certain degree of depth and complexity.

6. Results

The analysis and processing of the data collected showed that: (Figure 1)

- Cognitive skills (CS) are best viewed from the viewpoint of acquisition and mastery by student inspectors in their training with a rate of 82.23% agreement;
- Management and organizational skills (MOS) follow in second place with a rate of agreement of 69.89%;
- Andragogical skills (AS) are placed in third position with 18%;
- Interpersonal and communicational skills (ICS) come next with a rate of 52.40%;
- Personal and attitude skills (PAS) are mastered little or not at all by student inspectors in training (29.14%).

Our study also allowed the emergence of other skills deemed essential for the inspector training: coping skills built in action and transferable from one situation to another and active skills of supervision.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nature of competences</th>
<th>CS</th>
<th>MOS</th>
<th>ICS</th>
<th>PAS</th>
<th>AS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Percentage</td>
<td>82.23</td>
<td>69.89</td>
<td>52.4</td>
<td>29.14</td>
<td>18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7. Discussion

The results of this research ultimately exceeded the original intentions, aimed, firstly, at an assessment of student inspectors’ professional skills at the end of training and, secondly, at an exploration of the skills “potential” required for their training. These results highlight the importance of the factors that should be considered in future training plans, including modules for the “andragogical skills” and “personal and attitude skills” that are severely lacking in the current training device.

The revelation of the skill of adaptation built into the action is fully consistent with the approach (Parlier, 1996), which focuses more on environmental determinants and the concept of adaptation to the context and uncertainty. Adaptation is in relation to oneself, to situations, and to changes in the profession of inspector. Professional competence has a value for inspectors if it allows rapid adaptation to changes in the area of education and to the variety of tasks that characterize the profession. This skill can be developed by incorporating it into the training process with some experimentation and sessions of trial and error.

Similarly, the competence of supervision, deemed useful by the students, responds to the main task of the inspector: “to supervise”. It has a dimension that is both formative and trainer (Deliivre, 2002), based on a process of exchange to operate a reflexive analysis of practice. Competence of supervision can generate three main supervisory styles – didactic, democratic, and experimental (Villeneuve, 1994) – or, respectively, in terms of roles – expert, colleague, and therapist (Pilard, 2002).

7.1 Three basic skills

Our study results strongly confirm the importance of three categories of skills in our training device: cognitive skills, management and organizational skills, and interpersonal skills.

The highest score of perceived mastery of cognitive skills corroborates the cognitive dimension that emphasizes academic knowledge mobilized by the individual to respond to a complex professional situation (Varela, 1989). Cognition is defined here in terms of the acquisition, storage, processing, and use of information. In this respect, cognitive skills are the bedrock of any transversal skill. This is the first level in the scale of classes of competencies described by Boterf Guy (2007).

Management and organizational skills are related to elements built around knowledge and individual or collective skills through coordination (St. Aman & Renard, 2003; Wernerfelt, 1989). They determine the quality of the implementation of basic skills (Le Plat, 1995). They are necessary for the deployment of all the core competencies developed in training. The development of organizational competence for students does not necessarily imply the acquisition of disciplinary knowledge, as it might seem, but it can also result from a better articulation of the existing individual skills. This dynamic combination of skills involves the multiplication and renewal of professional experience.

In contrast, for the relational competence and communication skills, the focus is on the relational rather than the technical aspect (Combes, 2002). In order to evolve positively, inspectors of education need to develop, among others, their capabilities of relationship, action, reaction, and interaction, to establish the relationship of trust, support clear and constructive communication, and ultimately maintain communication, through supervision and inspection activities.

However, the content of this relational competence is described in terms of behavioural skills, communication and contact skills, which seem very difficult to analyse and assess (Paradeise & Lichtenberger, 2001). It will therefore be necessary to consider reengineering the training in order to develop these types of skills in our device.
7.2 Personal and attitude skills

On the other hand, personal and attitude skills have been mastered very little by training students. They reflect the lack of training modules on coaching and personal development. Developing a competence requires the mobilization of various substrates: abilities, knowledge, and attitudes especially. They are currently absent from the current training device. Inserting personal development as an object of training at the CNFIE would guarantee its professional development (Marcel, 2006).

7.3 “Andragogy, not pedagogy”

If andragogical skills were perceived less in terms of control among students, it may be because they are trained for children (Knowles, 1990). Teaching an adult, according to Paquay, Altet, Charlier, and Perrenoud (2004), means helping to build skills and working on the mobilization and transfer of resources. In fact, an adult does not learn as a child or a teenager does. It is not possible to transpose traditional school methods to adults. Adult learners need more autonomy. They bring their experiences to the training situation. They prefer to use an approach focused on problem solving rather than receiving knowledge.

On the other hand, an adult learns if he understands and feels free and confident, if he is recognized and valued, hence the need to mobilize resources for background design and develop teaching strategies for adults based on self-learning, collaboration, autonomy, and initiative. This small referential, discussed above, is the “heart competencies” (Hamel & Prahalad, 1990) in the profession of inspector. It includes five categories of skills that determine professional development (Peretti, 2004).

However, these skills can be formalized in the training device, and then translated into tasks and evaluation indicators through the approach of referentialization (Figari, 1994) to understand them better and integrate them into training.

8. Conclusion

In this exploratory and qualitative study on the professional skills of student inspectors, our results far exceed our research intentions at the start.

First, of the five categories of skills tested, two (personal and attitude skills and andragogical skills) are respectively mastered little and not mastered at all by students. Then followed the revelation that coping skills and supervisory skills are now required as essential aspects of the skills profile of the education inspector.

At the end of our study, we conclude that the training of inspectors at the CNFIE Rabat is semi-professionalized and barely professionalizing. Otherwise, we can say that the training of inspectors at the centre aims towards professionalization. The training centre is still institutional and cares only about the implementation of prescribed training programmes, regardless of the personal and professional training of student inspectors.

To develop the professional skills required for the good achievement of the tasks of the inspector, the training must pass from the strict sense of standard programmes predetermined by the texts to the construction of educational approaches oriented generally by the objectives of the study cycle, adapted to the diversity of students, levels, and the material conditions of work. The training should be designed according to a competency-based approach that seeks training that is integrative, experiential, conscious, interactive, developmental, and transferable (Landry, 1991). Training should be standardized; it purports to give the most appropriate response for each situation type, but rather seeks resources and tools to analyse a large variety of situations involving supervision and inspection.
9. Limits and perspectives

This research remains fruitful because it offers a new perspective on the process of assessment of the professional skills of inspectors of education. It serves as a mechanism to regulate the training of inspectors or as a means to make it more professional.

The questionnaire used, if properly developed, can actually become a source of important information but is not necessarily sufficient to make a judgement on the quality of training provided.

In addition, other means, such as an analysis of training materials and the content of modules, observation in class, and a portfolio, can be used later to complement the information provided by students (Detroz, 2008; Seldin, 1993; Tardif, 2006; Thivierge & Bernard, 1996).

Our methodological approach based on the assessment of professional competence by students may contain at least the risk of under- or overestimation of the perception of mastery of skills by students. We can still doubt the competence of students to judge training fairly and appropriately. Hence, there is the possibility of confronting our results through “triangulation” with other forms of assessment, such as assessing their skills in real work (in vivo).

References


