PHD THESYS

Human Resources from Higher Education:

a new-institutional interpretation

- summary -

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1 Beneficiary of the project POSDRU/159/1.5/S/134650 “Scholarships for predoctoral and postdoctoral fellow young scientists in the fields of political science, Administrative Science, Communication Sciences and Sociology”
This paper has as a goal a sensitive subject for the higher education, the problematic of the teachers’ evaluation. The topic is a delicate one because of the subjectivity with which each individual shall be reported to the evaluative processes but also due to the fact that education is one of the sectors dependent on human capital. Academic staff has a special status offered by the academic autonomy, so it is debatable to what extent can someone from outside judge their behaviour, as it is difficult to answer the question: which interests should universities or the academic staff serve? The complexity of the subject is, however, given by the multitude of perspectives that we have in this study. Staff assessment is one of the six issues that may be subject to an assessment, along with programs, products, processes, performance and proposals (Scriven, 1991, p. 3). Evaluation of human resources can be studied from a behaviourism perspective as application of Psychology by means of assessment of skills, attitudes and values, but also from a sociological perspective, as application of the theories of organizational development. On the other hand, the rules and the evaluation criteria are intensely debated by theories of science education, especially the quality perspective. From a political science perspective, we can analyse the human resources policies as an "assessment oriented analysis" (Teichler, 1998) or an institutional analysis based on political theories.

Also, system resources acquire meaning in relation to its purpose, thus one of the latest and discussed issues related to higher education is the quality assurance. This fact, in addition to a number of specific processes defined within a quality assurance policy, involves the analysis of what may be regarded as qualitatively or desirable within the educational sector. On the other hand, the rules of quality assurance are not independent of other regulations, be they national or institutional level. In this regard, the assessment of human resources in higher education, may be the subject of an analysis of policies given that the evaluation rules comply with the characteristics of public policy instruments (Poister, Streib, 1989; Caudle, 1987 în Peters, 1998, p. 13).

Therefore, in this paper I will analyse the policy instruments governing teacher’s evaluation in Romanian higher education. Specifically, I will try to determine to what extent universities assessment methodologies and legislative rules have a positive impact on the quality of education and try to anticipate their impact on the basis of neo-institutional approach and the institutional logic perspective. Also, "the consequences of the policies and actions of the state and agencies associated with it have on the functioning of universities may be intentional, being consistent to a set of targets previously set, or may be unintentional,
in which case they may prove to be dysfunctional or can be latent functions, unanticipated by the makers that have designed them" (Barometru Asigurării Calității, 2010). Thus, I will analyse the types of evaluative processes through which a teacher goes through-initial self-evaluation/annual, evaluation in order to get employment, a biannual/annual assessment from students, peer evaluation, evaluation by superiors and other evaluations-and I will try to determine if what they are proposing is what is encouraged through incentives. This analysis will be segmented according to the structure of the evaluation of a program put forth by Chen-assessment of the nature of the measures, the identification of the environmental in which the program operates, analysing the results proposed, anticipating the impact, an explanation of the causes and potential generalization of the findings.

The research context is given by the low quality of higher education seized in numerous documents (Council on Romania's National Reform Programme for 2015, the Council for Romania's Convergence Programme 2015, Global Competitiveness Report prepared by the Economic Forum Mondi, Barometer Quality Assurance). Also in the rankings of the Center for World University Rankings, the Shanghai top and Quacquarelli Symonds World University Ranking, Romanian universities occupy modest positions. This position is not surprising given that they are generally based on the recognition of research, particularly the number of articles published in journals in the ISI database Thompson, in journals with impact factor, and the number of citations or awards received at international level (David, 2005) while in Romania research receives less than 1% of GDP and is rarely regarded as a specific attribution of the academic staff.

The purpose of the work is to analyse the ways in which teachers are evaluated/assessed, how they relate to assessments but especially the identification of undesirable effects of human resources assessment and elimination or reduction thereof.

Therefore, based on the new institutional theory, we may wonder if the set of rules which constitute the human resources quality evaluation methodology has the desired impact, namely to increase the quality of education. In this context, the Central presumption of this research is represented by the possibility that the ways of assessing the skills of academic staff from Romanian universities may not be appropriate for the national targets in the sense that it is possible that they will not cause as default an increase of quality in higher education as desired. This implies the other two assumptions which I will try to test, namely that if this system is not related to the main educational needs of the beneficiaries, i.e. students, and to
local socio-economic peculiarities, the teachers will not produce a relevant added value to the context (1), and if the assessment indicators do not capture all relevant aspects that contribute to the quality of education, the assessment systems can cause a number of strategic behaviours which are considering carrying out formal indicators and not an actual increase in the quality of education (2). In other words, if the way in which we assess the human resources is not an appropriate one for the educational goals, the quality of the education system tends to decrease.

In this context, the novelty of this proposed research is trying to build a coherent bridge between new institutional paradigm, paradigm of political phenomena analysis, and the evaluation of human resources in Romanian higher education in order to ensure quality assurance. Thus, a prime target is the testing of the applicability of the theoretical framework for the new-institutionalism analysis of public policy to evaluation sciences.

Another purpose of this study is the achievement of an analysis of the coherence of teacher assessment from various tertiary education institutions. Also, starting from the observation that the perspectives regarding what should be assessed to find out the quality of educational programs differ, I consider that identifying and analysing the views relating teacher assessment represents the starting point for an empirical analysis thereof. Important to note is the extent to which qualitative issues are the subject of assessments and whether such objectives are related to the activity of the teaching and to the performance criteria after which they are evaluated. Thus, a derivate purpose is a comparative analysis of methodologies for evaluation.

In accordance with the new institutional perspective, the aim of policy analyses is the ability to make predictions. Thus, another objective of this paper is to identify and analyse the effects of current human resources assessment system on the quality of higher education. These effects will be identified from the various reports and studies published recently and will be explained according to the new-institutional assumptions.

Finally, in this paper I propose building an evaluation model containing methods to motivate teachers to carry on an activity which corresponds in terms of quality. Basically, I will try to identify teachers motivations and I will try to remove those elements that stimulate
undesirable academic behaviour. It's a contingent approach on higher education teacher evaluation, as public policy tool.

Given the necessary resources for an exhaustive study of all those 100 universities from Romania, to analyse the internal evaluation methodologies I limit the study to the level of 16 universities. To accomplish this I will take account of the comparative method to classify the indicators for the evaluation of teachers according to four criteria/dimensions: research, teaching, management (administrative involvement in University life) and involvement in society (civic behaviour).

Given the fact that over time, evaluation theories were lacking in solid epistemological fundaments, I will use the new-institutional theoretical design and assumptions, considering that that quality assurance is a political process and that the quality assurance standards serve certain interests. Most social issues are explored with reference to education, offering its importance not only as a system/set of indicators but also as an ideological and political construct. The system objectives are political, therefore, the entire process of assessing is responding to political interests. From here we can infer the relevance of the study of political science. Basically, I will apply the theoretical premises of a specific political science theories in the analysis of the impact of the measures for the assessment of human resources as public policy tools.

Therefore, we can conclude by saying that what is valued is what is achieved ("what gets measures gets done"-Mathinson, 2005, p. 2) regardless of the negative effects that may occur and what is not important or is not valued by indicators, will be left in the backburner. In higher education, competition for resources entails the tendency of universities to draw up policies to attract students (resources), even though they may adversely affect the quality of the educational services provided.

Thus, the marketization brought to the development of performance and public liability assessments, and this led to the development of a corporate-type culture that discourage academic community members to criticize the internal management system. This determines unethical and not honest behaviour which has a negative effect not only for the evaluation but also for the accomplishment of educational objectives undertaken by the institution. For teachers is becoming increasingly difficult to fulfil their responsibilities and performance indicators so that we can expect them to focus on those that can be more easily achieved or to reduce their effort by fulfilling the performance indicators that matter more.
Considering what matters more in teacher evaluations from Romanian universities, namely those indicators which have the largest weighting in periodic evaluations we can expect an increase in the number of publications and an increased competition for research grants. Instead, the interaction with students is just the evaluation carried out by them in the form of a sociological survey. The data capture the subjective opinions of students and their level of satisfaction highlights without any information about the unilateral relationship. The evaluation though keep in mind the views of students about the teachers' performance, disregards their expectations so that the methodologies are not updated in the light of educational needs or aspirations of the different categories/generations of students. The results can not make the difference between a situation where the curriculum has been adapted according to the expectations of students but the objectives have not been met and a situation in which the students have not been consulted and the course objectives were different from them.

Assessments represents a chore for teachers but also for those responsible for the centralization of data as they have a low relevance towards personal goals which is confirmed and teachers interviewed. Lack of goals make these practices a superficial process approached typing by those who evaluate. Even in those situations where there is a follow-up phase and feedback from colleagues or superiors, not all teachers have a positive attitude towards these practices, and does not consider that evaluation contributes to improving their performance or the quality of the educational Act. Teachers' satisfaction is not valued and therefore, there is not a system of increasing motivation to stimulate their performance.

Therefore, I consider that the current evaluation system of teaching from the Romanian Universities does not contribute significantly to raising the quality of the educational Act. It does not increase teachers' motivation to perform whereas is focused on measuring indicators for research, not on those targets which teachers deem most important and do not offer incentives. Through these assessments is not stimulated any attainment of national educational objective relevant for the economic system or to the development of civic cultures. These aspects are rarely found in any rating system and even when we find it, the indicators relating to these, have low importance.

Hence, we can say that the current evaluation system of human resources in higher education does not encourage an increase in the quality of education in the direction wanted by the authorities. Even though the importance of research indicators produced increases in
the number of publications, the quality of the research did not increased as default nor confirmed internationally.

This application of new-institutional assumptions to evaluation theory impose several limitations generated by the fact that Rational Choice Theory denies holism and does not expect to validate its assumptions by empirical research. Also, another limitation of the study is the fact that there were not available all the documents needed in order to have a complex comparative analysis and I had to use only the frequencies and a few ratio. The methodologies were divers as structure and content so it was difficult to identify data to be compared. Another limitation can be considered the individual subjectivity in the data collected from the interviews.

Therefore, an efficient evaluation system of human resources must anticipate the impact, must be coherent, must be consistent with individual goals, must measure progress and results, not just customer satisfaction, must provide incentives and, above all, to contribute to the personal development by providing individualized feedback and development of an evaluation culture.