

# *Evaluation of teaching and learning in Higher Education in Macedonia- A study conducted at South East European University, Tetovo*

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## **Abstract**

The quality of teacher life is the primary factor that affects the quality of teaching. This study explores factors that contribute to teachers' feelings of ineffectiveness.

Teachers are faced with a physical, intellectual and psychological threat. School changes affect teachers as individuals but also their abilities to be successful in their profession and to stay in the profession. This study aims to analyze in a theoretical point of view the literature suggestions about the link between burnout, personality characteristics and coping skills.

The literature suggests that there are at least five different categories of values that people may seek to fulfill at work, and in general these values are: 1) material values (such as a comfortable life), 2) achievement related values (such as wisdom, a sense of accomplishment), 3) a sense of purpose, 4) social relationships, 5) maintenance of the self-concept. Teacher burnout is affected by the lack of some values.

Key terms: burnout, coping strategies, personality characteristics, type A.

## **Literature Review**

*The vitality and effectiveness of higher education is of key importance to the future well being of the nation (Ash, 1996, p5.)*

Evaluating teaching and learning in institutions of higher education is becoming a priority of quality assurance. In the era of new technologies and new methods of teaching, the quality of higher education is focused on learners and their learning needs. Many Universities are experimenting with different teaching methods including incorporating learning outcomes in the syllabi in order to enhance student learning relevant to their

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future careers. University teachers are expected to meet the students needs and evaluate their own teaching. “Evaluating teaching concerns learning to teach better and exercising control over the process of learning to teach better”. It is about imaginatively testing our educational ideas in practice” (Ramsden 2003, p.208).

Institutions of higher education nowadays are facing many challenges due to societal changes. With these changes, Universities have to change in order to respond to variety within the student population. “The response of universities to such developments has been, for example, the creation of new subjects, curricula, teaching and learning technologies, conceptions of science and knowledge as well as a fundamental shift of the organizational structure towards corporate bureaucracies” (Bernhardt, 20012, p.20).

These changes have also influenced the South East European University in Tetovo, Macedonia. It was established in 2001 with a mission to respond to the need for educating Albanians in Macedonia. It aims for excellence in teaching. The evaluation of achievements and the implementation of key priorities for improvement and measurement are carried out through Faculty and Departmental Action Plans, validated and monitored by senior managers. The progress of the staff is followed closely and continuously.

Teacher and student self-evaluation is also considered as a very powerful tool to improve teaching and learning. If we teach our students how to do self-evaluation then we can contribute to a better learning. A collaborative product of the CLEAR group, Carol Rolheiser (Ed.) 1996 suggests when combined, goals, effort, achievement, self-judgment, and self-reaction can impact self-confidence in a positive way. In other universities around the world the main sources of feedback are:

- feedback from students (by far the most common source of feedback)
- feedback from teaching colleagues or professional peers
- self-generated feedback, which comprises reflections and observations by an individual, and Incidental feedback as an everyday routine of university teaching without using specific survey technique (Fry, Ketteridge and Marshall, 2003, p. 201)

## **Quality assurance at universities of Cambridge, ETH Zug and SEEU**

The University of Cambridge in England has also developed an extensive program of staff development courses in response to identified needs; attendance is monitored and the scheme is supported locally by school and faculty staff development coordinators, who also offer feedback on the process and procedures. A peer review of teaching scheme operates in some faculties, but levels of implementation vary widely. (<http://www.qaa.ac.uk/InstitutionReports/Reports/Documents/RG373Cambridge.pdf>)

The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich, ETH, uses three instruments to observe the quality of teaching and learning. A student questionnaire is given to third semester students. The questions are related to the lectures they attend and their instructors. The second instrument is another student questionnaire which asks graduates about their career embarkation and the type of employment they sought. Graduates receive this questionnaire together with their diploma. The third instrument is evaluation of a department by an international expert, which is done every six to nine years. The evaluation of a department is further observed by self-evaluation of the department and also strengths and weaknesses in preparing the external evaluation. ([http://subs.emis.de/LNI/Proceedings/Proceedings13/54\\_QualAssurofEducProg.pdf](http://subs.emis.de/LNI/Proceedings/Proceedings13/54_QualAssurofEducProg.pdf)).

The Quality assurance at SEEU is organized effectively. The aim is to support effective staff performance. There are several procedures used to improve the quality of teaching and learning. For academic staff, this is done through procedures such as an annual Learning and Teaching Observation Scheme and the active consideration of students' opinions from the Student Evaluation Survey. All staff is required to take part in the individual Staff Evaluation Process and all these processes are linked to an integrated Staff Development Procedure, which offers internal and external opportunities for professional development and training. All these processes are linked to an integrated Staff Development Procedure, offering internal and external opportunities for professional development and training ([www.seeu.edu.mk](http://www.seeu.edu.mk)).

## **Research Methodology**

The present study aims to explore strengths and weaknesses that teachers at SEEU have in teaching and to make the students aware of the importance of self-assessment in enhancing learning. The study was done in the Spring semester of academic year 2011/2012.

Study Objectives:

- To identify teachers' strengths and weakness in teaching
- To identify students' difficulties in learning
- To make students aware of self-evaluation
- To show the benefits of teacher and student self-evaluation

## **Participants**

150 students were included in the study as well as 20 professors teaching in all five faculties: Business, Law, Computer Sciences, Public Administration and Languages, Cultures and Communications. Student participants had different ethnic backgrounds (Albanians, Macedonians, Turks and Roma.) Their age ranged from 19-22. Teacher participants have either MA or PhD degree.

## **Instruments**

The study uses three different instruments to collect data: the student self-assessment questionnaire, the teacher self-assessment questionnaire and feedback from classroom observations obtained from the Quality Assurance Office at SEEU. The first instrument aims to find out student responses for their own learning. The teacher self-assessment questionnaire aims to identify teachers' instructional practices and their strength and weaknesses in teaching. Finally, the study presents reports from classroom observations at SEE, two from last year and one from last semester.

## **Results**

### **Teacher self-assessment questionnaire**

The results obtained from the teacher self-assessment questionnaire clearly indicate that teachers have some very good practices. Regarding the statement "I use technology in teaching" 13 teachers always use it, 6 teachers often use it and 1 teacher never. Regarding the statement "I give my students a chance to discuss different learning issues" 11 teachers often do this as a practice, 5 teachers sometimes do it and 4 teachers never do it. For item "I use different teaching materials," 18 teachers responded that they always did it and 2

teachers often do it. 18 teachers always use LIBRI in teaching and only 2 teachers rarely use it. On the other hand, regarding the statement “I use grading rubrics to assess my student writing” only 7 teachers always use them. The last item of the questionnaire asked the teachers to identify their strengths and weaknesses in teaching. Finally, the last item asked the teachers to write down their strengths and weaknesses in teaching. The following are the strengths identified by the teachers, participants in the study.

- Objectivity in assessing students’ punctuality
- Using technology in teaching
- Making students think critically through different activities
- Allow enough time for students to do the exercises
- Creating and using different authentic materials
- Careful lesson planning trying to respond to diverse needs
- Positive approach in the classroom
- Encourage students to ask questions
- Consider each class as a new challenge
- Encouraging students to read and discuss their ideas

The weaknesses are:

- Paying less attention to poor students
- Encouraging students to attend the classes regularly
- High expectations from my students
- Not being able to use interactive teaching methods in most classes
- Choosing discussion topics
- Close monitoring of student learning
- Trying to cover too much in one class
- Time management
- Striving for perfection

### **Student self-assessment questionnaire**

The student self-assessment questionnaire aims to find out student responses for their own learning. The questionnaire was completed by 150 students who are studying at different faculties at SEEU. Tables 1 show the results obtained.

	<i>Always</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Rarely</i>	<i>Never</i>
1.I write down my learning difficulties	/	/	/	10%	90%
2.I reflect on things that we have learned in the class	/	/	10%	45%	45%
3.I prefer to get feedback from my teacher	35%	20%	30%	15%	/
4.I prefer to get feedback from my peers	15%	10%	25%	30%	20%
5.I learn new things when the teacher uses visuals in the class	50%	40%	10%	/	/

6. I prefer working in groups	35%	25%	15%	15%	/
7.I can learn a lot from power point slides	60%	15%	15%	10%	
8. I learn more when the teacher gives examples	30%	30%	20%	20%	/
9.I prefer to take notes in the class	40%	40%	5%	/	15%
10. I enjoy participating in class discussions	25%	30%	10%	15%	20%
11.I keep a record of all my assignments		15%	30%		65%
12.I keep a portfolio to evaluate my own writing	5%	15%	20%	20%	40%
13.I think about changing my way of learning	/	10%	25%	35%	30%
14. I feel confident when I write a paper	20%	20%	20%	20%	20%
15.When I have a problem, I try to solve it by myself	20%	20%	5%	25%	30%
16.I check LIBRI regularly	/	30%	30%	30%	10%
17.I learn better when the teacher asks us questions	/	25%	35%	35%	5%
18.I think that I am being evaluated positively	15%	40%	35%	10%	/
19.I do my homework regularly	55%	30%	15%	/	/
20. I like to work on a project	10%	15%	30%	40%	15%

Table 1: Results of the student self-assessment questionnaire

The results of the student questionnaire show that we should encourage our students to reflect on their own learning because majority of them (90%) never write down their learning difficulties nor reflect on their learning experiences (45%). I strongly believe that self - assessment help students to improve their performance and become better learners.

### **Reports from two observation reports**

This is the fourth year of full implementation for all teaching staff in accordance with the University's strategic aim of teaching excellence according to Bologna. Deans/ Directors continued to be the responsible lead persons in their Faculty/Centre, in liaison with the Quality Assurance and Management Office which provided institution wide organization, 'central' observers and strategic monitoring.

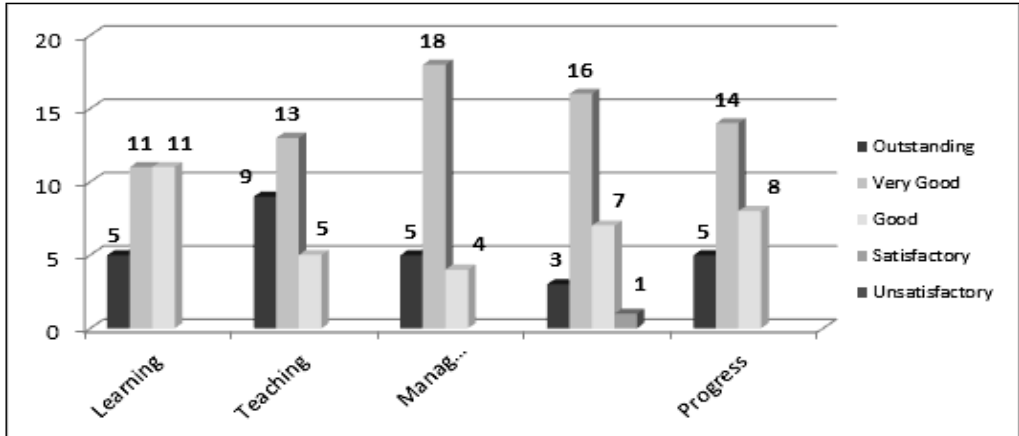


Figure 1: Observation report for the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications (Quality Assurance and Management Office, February 2011)

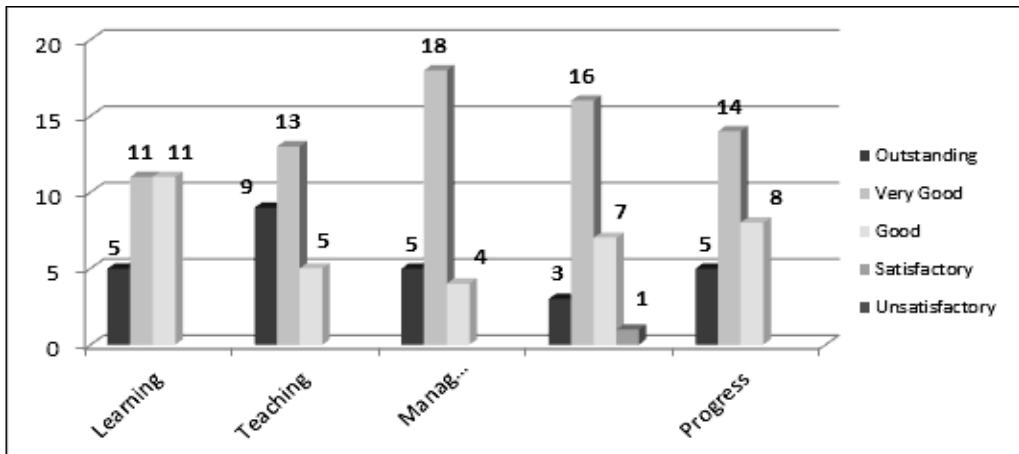


Figure 2: Observation report for the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications (Quality Assurance and Management Office, February 2010)

Comparing Figures 1 and 2 illustrates that there was an improvement in the teaching and learning processes at the Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communications. The improvement is observed in learning, management, the use of resources and progress. It can be concluded that classroom observations can help teachers in improving their teaching. Observations are used in many institutions because “It offers practical guidance and detailed insight, supporting enhanced understanding of how observation is used, in what contexts and for what purposes, and its potential value as a tool for enhancing teaching and learning”(O’Leary, 2013, para.1). Three new developments were introduced in Fall Semester 2011 and they are ‘unannounced’ which means that the teachers are not informed before. Observations by the Rector and members of the Senior Executive Team; ‘monitoring’ of feedback meetings and preliminary work on developing a competency

framework with criteria. These had the aim of enhancing our teaching quality, supporting staff in developing their skills and making full use of the procedure (Quality Assurance and Management Office, SEEU February 2012).

## **Conclusion**

Based on the study results, self-assessment can reveal teachers' and students' personal attributes, values, teaching skills, learning interests and how these factors influence decision-making process in the classroom. We should encourage our students to reflect on their own learning because majority of them (90%) never write down their learning difficulties nor reflect (45%). I strongly believe that self - assessment help students to improve their performance and become better learners. For teachers, self-assessment can help to identify their weakness and change the way they teach. Teaching should be continuously monitored and renewed in order to ensure that teaching, course objectives and learning outcomes are up-to-date (Chan, 2010). In addition, self-evaluation guidelines should be developed in order to raise the quality of teaching at SEEU. They will definitely serve as tools to systematically collect information and reflect on teaching practices and support professional developments. For students on the other hand, they can help teachers determine their learning needs and raise students' awareness of learning. The study recommends that self-evaluation should be a part of internal evaluation at SEEU along with other existing elements which have proven to be very effective in increasing quality in teaching and learning. I strongly believe that SEEU has the capacity to become an elite University because it strives for the highest quality in every faculty and department and sees quality improvement as both an individual and collective responsibility.

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