

Self-evaluation of Higher Education Colleges — The Case of Israel

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Abstract: The issue of quality has become lately the key element of assessing performance in higher education throughout the world. In order to increase efficiency, continuous improvement and promotion of teamwork, the checking and assessment of quality in higher education has become of paramount importance. There are a number of ways of assessing quality in the higher education: 1) using outside the organization experts, 2) peers evaluation, 3) students' evaluation, 4) self-evaluation, and a combination of these.

This paper presents the process of evaluation of higher education in Israeli colleges. This is a requirement by the Council of Higher Education (CHE) that supervises the standards and controls the quality of delivery through its Quality Assurance Division. This is done via a "Self-evaluation Process", through which every department/faculty in each college is evaluated every 5 years or so, on a number of parameters. The study presents and discusses these parameters of evaluation and presents the main elements in the process of self-evaluation, problems, strengths and weaknesses, that are part of this process. It further enables to compare this method to other methods of evaluation of higher education in other countries. In addition, it presents the benefits of the self-evaluation approach, to the individual institution and its staff (academic, managerial and support).

Key words: higher education, performance, self-evaluation

1. Introduction

The evaluation of academic institutions has become recently absolutely necessary. The academic world is highly competitive and measuring performance provides the ability to reveal the strengths and weaknesses of an organization, and indicate where resources need to be allocated, changes that need to be made and where reorganization may be needed.

This paper presents the process of evaluation of higher education in business and management colleges in Israel. The higher education system in Israel has undergone major changes in the last 25 years or so. The tertiary education in business studies/management is operated through the 8 old and well established universities that have total academic independence and are (mainly) funded by the Government, and some 24 Colleges of Higher Education that are usually privately funded or only partially and indirectly funded by the state. The Colleges are allowed to offer only BA and MBA/MA/MSc. degrees, and are not allowed to offer Ph.D.

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1.1 Programs

All the Colleges are under the academic supervision and control of the Council of Higher Education (CHE), who controls the quality of delivery through its Quality Assurance Division. This is done through a process called “The Self-evaluation”, (discussed below), through which each college has to report every 5 years or so, on a number of parameters, as indicated below.

2. Literature and Theory

Whilst there are a number of alternative methods for evaluating performance of organizations (Meidan, 1981), in academia, the evaluation cannot be based solely on financial criteria. In addition, as there are a variety of different stakeholders (or “interested parties”), such as: students, staff, colleges’ management, employers, students’ parents who often pay the students’ fees, etc., it is necessary to take into consideration all these factors. Consequently, the number of parameters evaluated refer to all these interested parties, or stakeholders and include: studies curriculum assessment, evaluation of study programs (by students and separately by visiting/adjunct lecturers), problems in specific areas of specialization, students’ comments and reactions to the quality of tuition provided, quality of support and management staff, human resources, infrastructures (i.e., computer laboratories, accessibility, recreation areas,) cafeterias, students’ facilities, etc.

The issue of evaluation of higher education has received a lot of attention and research in the academia in the last decade. For example, there are a number of journals that do research and are dedicated entirely to this subject area, as follows (Bleske-Rechek A. & Michels K., 2010):

a) Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education is an established international peer-reviewed journal, whose purpose is to advance understanding of assessment and evaluation practices, related to students learning and to staff and institutional development.

b) Assessment in Education: Principles Policy and Practice. This journal focuses on issues of assessment, performance indicators and studies of achievement.

c) Assessment Update focuses on higher education assessment, including student learning outcomes and faculty instruction.

d) Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability. This is an international journal that investigates the practices, theories and functions of high educational evaluation.

e) Practical Assessment, Research and Evaluation (PARE). This is an online journal that provides access to refereed articles that can have an impact on assessment and evaluation of teaching.

In this respect, one should mention that this subject area of education evaluation, is considered of a major importance. So much so, that a “Center of Teaching and Learning”, has been established at the University of Minnesota, in Minneapolis, USA. This center could be accessed via teachlrn@umn.edu. There are additional centers for evaluating and developing techniques of excellence in teaching, such as CETLA(Center for Excellence in Teaching, Learning and Assessment) at Howard University, San Francisco, California¹. Table 1 presents some of the main journals that deal with issues of higher education objectives and how to evaluate its performance.

¹ <http://www.cetla.howard.edu>.

Table 1 The Main Journals that Deal with the Evaluation of Higher Education

Journals titles	Main evaluation issues and objectives
Assessment & evaluation in higher education	1. To advance understanding of assessments and evaluation practices. 2. Students learning 3. Staff and institutional development
Assessment and education: principles, policy and practice	1. Performance indicators in education 2. Studies of achievements
Assessment update	1. Higher education assessment 2. Faculty instructions 3. Students' learning outcomes
Education assessments, evaluation and accountability	1. Investigate practices, theories and functions of higher education evaluation
Practical assessment, research and evaluation (PARE)	1. Provide refereed articles that may have an impact on teaching evaluation (this is an online journal)

3. The Self-evaluation Process — Main Aspects

In various countries, the evaluation of higher education, differs according to the main purpose of the evaluation, as follows:

(1) Often the principal objective of the evaluation is to evaluate academic staff. When that happens, it may affect the issue on how are colleagues viewed by their peers. These views and opinions may have negative influences on collegiality (Buller J., 2013 , Faculty Focus)

(2) Another issue is how students assess the quality of teaching offered by the academic staff. In this respect, it is important to refer to who and how many students do evaluate/comment on the staff evaluation form. The argument being that if students are happy with the Lecturer, more students are likely to participate (and evaluate positively) that particular lecturer (Weimer M., 2012, Faculty Focus).

(3) Assessing what students want from a course. Students' evaluations do obviously affect tenure and/or staff's promotions. This should also be taken into consideration when embarking on higher education evaluations (Clement M., 2012, Faculty Focus).

(4) Performance is assessed not just in terms of students' evaluations of individual lecturers, although this is a critical parameter in the evaluation procedure, but also in terms of the lecturer's contribution to the departmental administration and his/her individual research and refereed publications. Often, being a "team player" in the department, is also taken into consideration (Buller J., 2011, Faculty Focus).

Most of the developed countries today do operate a system of monitoring the quality of their higher education. This is necessary and prerequisite, as the higher learning institutions face a number of challenges as they strive to fulfill their roles in society. It should be remembered that there are different levels of increased autonomy, increased competition for staff and students, declining resources entering into higher education budgets and globalization. Institutions require additional capabilities to manage changes in the face of these challenges.

This is generally achieved by the colleges, either through the ability to develop their strategic leadership and capacity to manage change, or via the evaluation — by market forces of the quality of education offered by the College to its students.

In Europe and indeed in other countries too, there is a systematic process of higher education evaluation that takes place as part of the IEP (Institutional Evaluation Program) activities. Created in 1994, IEP is an independent membership service of the European University Association (EUA) and at the same time, member of ENQA (European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education). IEP objective is to ensure that institutions of

Higher Education gain maximum benefit from a comprehensive evaluation by a team of higher education leaders.

Table 2 The Objectives of Higher Education Evaluation — Advantages and Limitations

The main objective of the evaluation	Main advantage(s)	Main limitation(s)	Author(s)
Evaluate academic staff	How staff is viewed by academic peers	May have negative influences on collegiality	Buller, 2013
Assessment of quality of teaching	How students evaluate teaching staff	Students that are un happy, are unlikely to participate in evaluation	Weimer, 2012
Students main expectations from the course	Could affect teaching staff tenure and promotion	Effect negatively staff promotion or tenure	Clement, 2012
Staff contribution to research, publications and department administration	Which staff are “team players”	Which staff members are not “part of the team”	Buller, 2011

The evaluation teams of IEP have carried out over 450 evaluations (and/or follow up evaluations), in some 45 countries worldwide. These evaluations are normally commissioned by various ministries and NGOs².

In Israel, the evaluation of higher education is under the supervision of Council for Higher Education (CHE), that is part of the Israeli Ministry of Education. The process of evaluation has 3 stages:

(1) Self-evaluation, performed by a team of professors of the college that is to be evaluated, according to a well structured questionnaire; The outcome, which is a Self-Evaluation Report — is written in English — and is submitted then to an international panel of experts from the same fields of study;

(2) Evaluation of the Self-Evaluation Report by the International Committee of experts, includes an one day visit at the College and this after the Report is read and discussed by the Committee. The membership of the International Committee is drawn from amongst distinguished Professors at leading universities in North America and Europe, in the same area of expertise as the subject areas of the college under evaluation. All the discussions, reports, questions, etc. are being conducted in the English language. During the visit, the International Committee meets with teams representing the 5 types of stakeholders, whose view are sought to enable to evaluate the college: a) full time academic staff; b) Part-time/adjunct academic staff; c) students; d) alumni; e) administrative, support and managerial staff.

(3) Following the visit, the International Committee submits a Feedback Report on its visit and its conclusions on how the College could improve its performance. This Report may require a reply (or not) from the evaluated College, and could be used as a base for comparison for the next evaluation, in 5 years time. If there is a reply, it normally includes an indication of what the college intends to do in order to implement the recommendations (if any) that were suggested by the International Committee. What resources will be invested, in what form and on what time scale.

4. How the Self-evaluation Process Is Implemented

The CHE (Council for Higher Education) who is responsible for implementing the evaluation process, is informing the individual college that it has passed now some 5 years from the last evaluation exercise (or from the college establishment) and it is now time for the college to be evaluated.

A formal document (or Questionnaire) including some 15 chapters with specific questions, is sent to the Head (or President of the College). The college is aware that it has to comply with this process of evaluation if it

² <http://www.eua.be/iep/Home.aspx>.

wishes to keep its license and official recognition by CHE. The Questionnaire includes the following sections:

(1) The Institution

A brief summary requiring a description of the institution and its development in the last 5 years; the name and location of the campuses, faculties and departments; the number of students studying the various degrees offered.

(2) The Organizational Structure

The description and a chart of the institution organizational structure, inclusive of the names of senior academic and administrative positions.

(3) Study Programs

Goals, structure and scope of the study programs, by faculty/departments

(4) Mission statement.

Mission statement and the strategic plan of the Faculty/department under evaluation.

(5) Committees organization

The various Committees, how are they organized and operated.

(6) The study program structure

The study program structure, specialization tracks, the courses included, their syllabi/content, and credits.

(7) Planning, managing and collaboration

The bodies responsible for planning and managing the study program and how these operate; The relationships with other non academic bodies (e.g., manufacturers association) and how these influence the study programs; The extent of collaboration with other departments within/outside the institution; future development plans: what are these and how they were decided?

(8) The strengths and weaknesses

The strengths and weaknesses of the existing programs.

(9) Teaching

How the department evaluates its teaching? How the department deals with negative findings? How the department foster excellence in teaching? Are excellent teachers rewarded? How?

What methods are employed to improve the quality of teaching?

(10) Learning Outcomes

What are the programs intended learning outcomes (LO)? How are these set?

What are the measures used to measure the LO? What are the methods of examinations? Who grades the exams and how feedback is passed on to students? What methods are employed to grade assignments? What feedback apart from grades is passed on to students? To what extent the methods applied to measure the LO, achieved their objectives?

(11) Students

What are the entry requirements? The drop-out rate in each year? The reasons for the drop-out? What academic counseling is offered? Is there work placement on offer? How the college deals with students' complaints? Financial support schemes on offer? Contacts with alumni? How many students continue their studies?

(12) Faculty

Areas of specialty/disciplines. Rules and criteria for promotion/tenure/dismissals/appointment. How is full-employment defined? How many contact hours are required? What are the plans for future requirement?

(13) Technical and Administrative Staff

The number of staff and their job descriptions; the type of support provided; the strengths and weaknesses of teaching staff/technical staff/administrative staff?

(14) Research

Strengths and weaknesses of research undertaken; Research funds obtained from all sources; Research infrastructure (labs, special equipment); Research thesis supervision; Papers/books published.

(15) Consultancies and Membership of Learned Societies

The focus of all the evaluation process is: The goals of the faculty and the college that is evaluated, the manner in which these goals have been achieved, as perceived by each of the 5 groups of stakeholders mentioned above.

5. Conclusions

Usually, colleges find the process of self-evaluation extremely beneficial to them, as it enables the identification of strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats, in various spheres of activities, that were not thought about before this exercise. In addition, it enables the College management to identify parties that are not fully satisfied with the current processes and activities and it enables the College to rectify and/or improve on these aspects .

Faculties and departments have to be evaluated in order to determine whether the extent of students' learning outcomes, correspond to the intended learning outcomes (LO). Most of the developed countries, (from Sweden to Taiwan, from the UK to Israel), do employ a system of evaluation of higher education that is generally similar to the one described here. It is normally based on qualitative descriptors that could be generally grouped under 3 headings or forms of knowledge:

Knowledge and understanding

Competence and skills

Judgment and approach

The opinions that count are those of: a) current students; b) alumni and in certain countries, e.g., Sweden, also c) employers³. The evaluation panel, that performs the evaluation, normally recommends the evaluation of a program on a 3 level scale, providing also the grounds for each evaluation/recommendation:

- Vey high quality
- High quality
- Inadequate quality

Those that are assessed as having “inadequate quality” will be reviewed again within a year. Subsequently, the accreditation (or license) to award a particular qualification, may be revoked if the performance has not been improved.

Colleges are afraid of this process of evaluation, as the regulatory national bodies that are in charge of higher education may publicize the “ranking” of the various institutions. Therefore, a lot of effort and attention is given to the process of evaluation, despite the fact that rankings are normally not published. In certain countries, institutions that attain a “very high quality” evaluation could receive incentives or extra funding increments from

³ See the parameters laid down by the Swedish National Agency for Higher Education, <http://english.uka.se/qualityassurance/thequalityofhighereducationprogrammes>.

the relevant educational authority.

The process of evaluation is a “self-evaluation” one, because the college is doing the job itself by looking inside, following a set of questions that were designed by the CHE. These questions and issues are applied to all the evaluated institutions. The answers provided in the Report are double checked and assessed by the International Committee of academics in their visits at the College and through the separate and confidential meetings that they have with students, alumni, and visiting teaching staff.

Finally, the colleges themselves find the self-evaluation exercise extremely valuable as a tool for planning, monitoring and improving performance, both of the academic features of their programs as well as the technical and physical aspects of the institutions.

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