

BEST PRACTICES OF THE EQAS PROJECT IN QUESTIONNAIRE SURVEY OF STUDENTS DURING QUALITY ASSURANCE OF EDUCATION

Mikhail Petropavlovskiy^{1*}, Olga Nefedova²

¹Doctor of Engineering Science, Mari State University, RUSSIA, mv2006-68@mail.ru

²Candidate of Engineering Science, Mari State University, RUSSIA, olga-5@inbox.ru

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

The article describes best practices of the EQAS (European Quality Assurance for Students) project, carried out under the Erasmus + Jean Monnet program (599839-EPP-1-2018-1-RU-EPPJMO-PROJECT), on developing questionnaires and conducting a survey of students on the education quality assessment, which can be used during external and internal quality assurance of higher education as part of the university's self-evaluation procedures or public accreditation of study programs.

It provides insight into the issues related to students' assessment of the study program which include assessment of the structure and content of the study program, organization of the educational process, the resources used, and the efficiency of training. Questionnaires were developed based on the analysis of European and Russian approaches to quality assurance in higher education. Of special value are the case studies of the German HEI (Hochschule Osnabrück - University of Applied Sciences), QA agency – Foundation for International Business Administration Accreditation (FIBAA), as well as the National Student Survey (NSS), conducted in Great Britain.

The questionnaire developed in the framework of the project includes 30 questions for assessing the structure and content of the study program, educational and methodological support, logistics, teaching staff, educational process, involvement of students in the study program design, and efficiency of training. Methods for conducting surveys by means of a special Internet application and processing students' responses in order to obtain an overall assessment of the study program are proposed. The results of students' questionnaire survey carried out under the project are presented.

Keywords: internal quality assurance of education, external quality assurance of education, questionnaire survey of students, statistical data analysis, Internet application for questionnaire survey of students.

1 INTRODUCTION

The project European Quality Assurance for Students (EQAS), financed by the program Erasmus + Jean Monnet is aimed at the analysis and distribution of the European best practice of students' involvement in the procedures of education quality assessment and assurance.

Russia is actively engaged in the integration into the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) as part of the Bologna process which seeks to involve students in external and internal quality assurance (EQA and IQA). Student involvement in EQA and IQA is well developed in Europe. All Universities and Quality Assurance Agencies (QAA) involve students in quality assurance procedures.

Currently, in Russia, the participation of students in internal and external quality assurance is in the state of incipient development. Often, university students are not engaged in these procedures. They are interviewed and questioned (once every 6 years) when carrying out external review during state accreditation, however, the application of questionnaire outcomes is not formalized and may hardly affect the decision on accreditation of the study program. In accordance with the Russian legislation on education, the state accreditation procedures cannot include students in expert panels. The agencies carrying out professional and public accreditation of HEIs in Russia use their own procedures. Also, the Russian Union of Youth as a public organization is constantly initiating projects to expand student participation in quality assurance procedures.

The opinion of students is crucial for the provision of more objective solutions when assessing study programs. They are the end consumers of the delivered study programs and can provide an inside view of how the study program is implemented, and how the logistics and quality of the entire educational process are ensured.

2 MATERIALS AND STUDY METHODS

Students' surveys conducted by means of specially developed questionnaires are the main mechanism of students' feedback on their satisfaction by the study program (Horská E., 2015).

Surveys can be carried out both at the level of an educational organization, and at the national level. For example, in German universities, one of the tools of internal quality assurance at universities is a questionnaire survey of students. Within the EQAS project, the experience of the University of Applied Sciences – Hochschule Osnabrück, where questionnaires are used to assess individual lecture courses, seminars, was studied.

The content of the questionnaire for the lecture course assessment includes:

- Questions assessing the learning process (course structure, its correlation with other disciplines, teaching methods, answers to students' questions during classes, appropriateness of assessment materials);
- Questions related to student participation in the learning process (frequency of preparation for classes, completion of all tasks, understanding of the material, participation in discussions, assessment of the student's individual workload);
- Assessment of the practical significance of lectures;
- General assessment (student's satisfaction on a five-point scale).

All questionnaires are processed and based on the findings, recommendations are given on further development of lecture courses and study program modules.

Such work is also important from the point of view of external assessment - for example, one of the indicators of the accreditation agency FIBAA is "Student Assessment". It is used to determine the compliance with the agency's requirements for student participation in the assessment of the study program (FIBAA web site). To meet FIBAA requirements, universities must provide evidence that "Evaluation by the students is carried out on a regular basis and in accordance with a pre-scribed procedure; the outcomes are communicated to the students and provide input for the quality development process" (Assessment Guide..., 2015, p. 31). In addition, Evaluation sheets / survey examples should be included in Appendices to Self-Report of the HEI.

The National Student Survey (NSS) carried out in the UK (NSS website) can serve as an example of student survey conducted at the national level. NSS is an annual study of the graduate students' opinion about the quality of study programs, which has been carried out in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in the United Kingdom since 2005 by a special organization on behalf of the state body - the Office for Student Affairs (OfS).

The questionnaire consists of 27 main questions grouped by:

- The teaching on my course;
- Learning opportunities;
- Assessment and feedback;
- Academic support;

- Organisation and management;
- Learning resources;
- Learning community;
- Student voice (questions evaluating the availability of student-university feedback).

In addition to the level assessment, the questionnaire also contains open-ended questions to obtain additional information from students. Upon the decision of the University student questionnaires can include questions of choice related to careers, work placements, etc. The survey results are published and used to keep future students informed when choosing programs and HEIs for training.

Russian experience in developing questionnaires and conducting student surveys can also be noted in the framework of the Tempus PACAgro project (Petropavlovskiy, 2016, p. 682). The research was initiated to work out the elements of professional public accreditation of agricultural programs in the Russian Federation.

The EQAS project was aimed at the study of European approaches, including the above mentioned, and on their basis a questionnaire for students was developed. The questionnaire was designed taking into account the following principles:

- The opportunity to get the opinion of as many students as possible (for this purpose, a special Internet application for questioning was developed: <http://eqas.ru/eqas/%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%ba%d0%b5%d1%82%d0%b5%d1%80%d0%b8%d0%b2%d0%b0%d0%bd%d0%b8%d0%b5/>);
- The need to get various aspects of the study program delivery be assessed with the possibility of their further analysis during internal and external education quality assurance;
- The questionnaire should not be too large.

In total, it includes the questions to assess:

- Structure and content of the study program - 2;
- Teaching and learning support –3;
- Logistics - 3;
- The faculty - 6;
- Educational process –6;
- Involvement of students in the study program development- 1;
- Learning outcomes –7,

and 2 questions related to general assessment of the program.

The technology of the questionnaire procedure using the developed Internet application includes the following steps:

- Providing students with login and password to enter the Internet application;
- Connecting each student to the Internet application by password for completing the questionnaire;
- Analytical processing of the obtained results in terms of individual study programs, faculties and the university as a whole.

In course of the project implementation, students of the Mari State University took part in the questionnaire survey which resulted in valuable information on individual indicators, as well as in assessment of the overall students' satisfaction.

The statistical processing of data showed that more than 60% of students are not involved in the discussion of their study program with university representatives, including 20% of students who are not at all familiar with the content of training. At the same time, 90% of students, to different extents, linked the knowledge and skills they receive with their future professional activities. The work of teachers, as well as the availability of learning resources (instructional and methodological literature, computers and software, information resources) was highly appreciated - more than 70% of positive answers to relevant questions. In general, about 90% of students are satisfied with their studies in the chosen study program (Fig. 1).

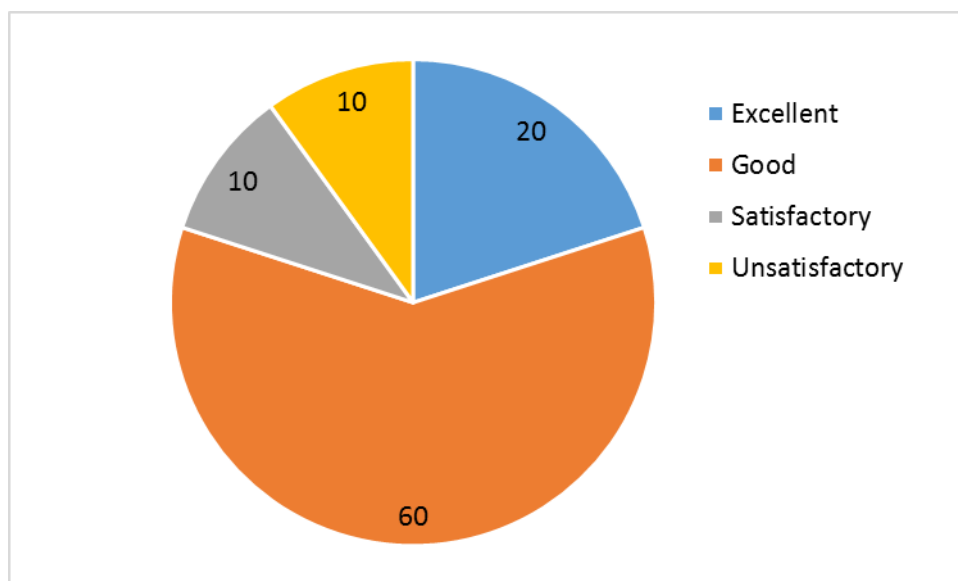


Fig. 1. Results of the answers to the question «How would you assess your learning outcomes in general?»

3 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of the European best practices in carrying out student surveys showed the significance of the obtained information for ensuring quality education. The survey should be conducted on a regular basis and involve as many stakeholders as possible. Thus, in the UK in 2019, more than 330 thousand students took part in NSS - 72% of the total number of graduate students (NSS web site).

The questionnaire survey conducted within the EQAS project demonstrated both the technical capabilities of undergoing a survey by a large group of students and the content-related value of the information received.

In order to ensure the objectivity of the obtained information, it is necessary to:

- Eliminate the influence of the university administration on students;
- Explain to students the goals of the questionnaire, the significance of the feedback obtained by its results.
- Encourage students not only to participate in the questionnaire, but also to make a responsible choice of answers.

4 CONCLUSIONS

The developed questionnaire for interviewing students on the assessment of the education quality and the Internet resource can be used in other HEIs as part of the internal education quality assurance system. The proposed method can also be scaled to the entire system of higher education in Russia as an external quality assurance tool for state or professional public accreditation. When carrying out professional accreditation, the questionnaire can be enlarged with reference to the scope of education.

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