

THE ROLE OF QUALITY IN ACHIEVING PERFORMANCE AT THE SCHOOL LEVEL

PhD student Daniela VITAN^a

„1 Decembrie 1918” University of Alba – Iulia, 510009, Romania
daniela.vitan@uab.ro

Abstract

The performance of pre-university educational institutions is reflected by the results that are achieved. These results largely depend on the quality of the educational process which should aim at creating favorable conditions for the progress of each student by providing educational programs that meet the needs of stakeholders (students, parents, teachers, employers, society, etc.). The quality of pre-university education takes into account the degree of effectiveness of the educational offer, the human, material and financial resources which are involved, the effects disseminated in the society. This paper presents quality as a defining element of school performance, factors and generating effects, ways to improve performance through a proper management of the educational system and process, but also through its adequate regulation at the national level and permanent adaptation of requirements of competencies in relation to the dynamics of the labor market, of the information technologies, of the evolution of the professions, etc.

Key words: performance; progress; quality; pre-university education; quality principles; quality descriptors; results

JEL Classification: A21

I. INTRODUCTION

Education is one of the most complex activities, due to the subjective and objective elements which are involved, due to its specificity as a process and as a phenomenon (Barbu, 2010:17), for which finalities must be established, followed by the analysis and optimization of their achievement.

As a result of an increasing development in all fields, pre-university educational institutions face a series of challenges that require changes concerning the quality of the educational act and in what manner performance may be rendered. Lately, there is an increasing need to modernize pre-university education in order to be successful, to respond to the challenges in the field and to face the changes on account of the globalization process.

Currently, the major objective of the pre-university educational process on the path to modernization is closely related to the concept of quality, which seeks to bring education at an international level, implementing and applying the system of management based on quality for both the system and the educational process. Obviously, achieving this desideratum has a favorable effect on performance.

II. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research means using a methodical and systematic process when studying certain topics of real interest in order to accumulate new knowledge and improve both one's own and other people's knowledge. In order to carry out research in terms of effectiveness and efficiency, we must acquire new knowledge in the chosen field of research.

In this sense, we opted to present the perceptions of quality, as well as the ways in which it can contribute to achieve performance in schools, by reviewing the literature in the field of education and pre-university management, and the legislation outlining the standards, the indicators and the performance criteria for this sector of activity.

III. INFORMATIVE VALENCES REGARDING QUALITY

„Quality in education aims at creating favorable conditions for each student's progress” (Cucos, 2009: 74). Sallis believes that the notion of quality incubates two aspects: measuring the level of conformity for a product or service (in our case educational services) with a predetermined standard and the orientation towards continuous improvement and organizational transformation reflected at the level of pre-university educational institutions by motivating teachers to undergo a student-centered educational approach (Sallis, 2002:13).

Law no. 87/2006 that approves the Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 on ensuring the quality of education, defines quality as „a set of characteristics of a study program and its provider, through which the

expectations of the beneficiaries are accomplished, as well as the quality standards”. Quality in education is linked to the values and expectations of user groups: participants in the education process, employers and society. A qualitative education consists in the possibility given to pre-university educational institutions to offer education programs in accordance with the announced standards. The orientation of the educational system towards quality implies the unitary use of several elements, namely: criteria, indicators, standards, etc.

The quality of the Romanian pre-university education is given by the values promoted in the society but also at the level of the institution, by the educational strategy and policy that exist at all levels (local, regional and national), by situational factors, but also by those related to context and last but not least by the evolution of this concept which is seen more and more differently over time.

Quality has been considered a priority for pre-university education only recently, although in all areas this concept has had an important role. Thus, the degree of development of a society is reflected not only by economic indicators but also by indicators related to the quality of education and school, namely: how learning is organized, the performance which is expected, the quality of the educational activity but also how this education is spread in the society. As in any field of activity, also in education, people are the ones who produce quality and give value to things. Quality is not established by normative acts nor is it imposed hierarchically. It is an attribute of a job well done, it is defined by the way in which the current and future needs of the beneficiaries’ education are met and it is regulated through the medium of the community and the labor market. Its parameters are modeled according to the evolution of the society, the communities and the individuals.

Adapting to students’ age, their learning styles, their needs, their future prospects or society values are also elements of quality in the field of education. These elements together with the integration of democratic values and principles, rights and obligations, accountability, involvement of the school, parents and students contribute to the achievement of a quality pre-university education. An important role in achieving quality education is played by teachers who, by using student-centered learning, contribute to finding out information regarding student’s abilities and inclinations towards certain areas, being at the same time a method in which the teacher provides information that corresponds to the student’s needs. Also, a quality education aims at a multilateral development of the student, the formation of a personality, the modernization of pre-university education, the construction of quality school libraries, as well as the creation of quality education conditions for gifted children. It is ensured through planning and effective achievement of the expected learning outcomes, monitoring, internal and external evaluation of the results as well as their continuous improvement.

Restoration of quality in pre-university education can be achieved through the effort made by it in order to achieve students’ progress compared to the previous level. This is possible by adapting curricula and content to the students’ possibilities as well as by adapting it to the values of the society. A quality education aims to ensure the conditions for a good, complete and useful development of students. In education, quality presents a variety of values such as: humanism, democracy, moral and intellectual autonomy, the quality of human relations, etc. In order for a pre-university educational institution to be efficient in terms of quality, it must meet several criteria: to communicate and transmit culture, to satisfy the needs and interests of students and to respond to social needs. All these presume a quality education, whose principles are presented in the following Figure:

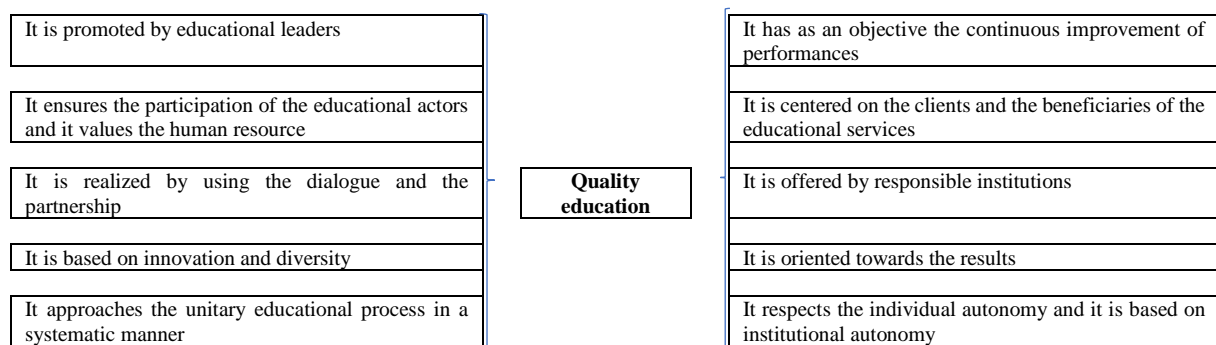


Figure 1 – Principles of a quality education in Romania

Source: Iosifescu, Dogaru, Blaga, Crivineanu, Danet, Kacso-Bodo, Mihaila, Paraschiva and Serban, 2017

The performance indicators used in quality assessment have to be relevant (they reflect the results upon which the school exerts its influence), informative, visible, quantitatively and qualitatively measurable, accessible and easy to understand, effective and maintaining the satisfaction of the stakeholders. The results obtained at the level of pre-university educational institutions by teachers and students divide these institutions into two categories: high-performing and less high-performing, quality assessment being based on the learning outcomes.

Quality can be verified at the level of school institutions by internal self-evaluation of the results or by external evaluation.

The self-evaluation is performed by a commission within the educational institution composed of teachers, parents and students but also representatives of the local council and the external evaluation is performed by a commission accredited in this regard, namely by RAQAPE (Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-University Education) composed of 15 members (experts and teachers in pre-university education), who are appointed for a period of 4 years. The self-evaluation of the pre-university teaching staff consists in completing some sheets that present certain criteria and on the basis of which a score is awarded. The maximum score obtained is 100 and the criteria aim at measuring teachers' involvement at school level, preparation of school documents, compliance with the school curriculum, differentiated assessment of students, involvement in educational projects, transparency and other criteria..

Quality at the level of the educational system is seen as a set of characteristics which are specific to the educational program through which quality standards are met as well as the expectations of the beneficiaries. This quality is constantly improving, with institutions having to implement management and quality assurance systems. The areas that are taken into consideration in quality assurance are: the capacity of the institution to achieve its objectives in the educational program, human and financial resources mobilized for students to achieve good results in the learning process and quality management consisting of structures and practices through which educational services are continuously improved and thus the quality of the pre-university educational system is also improved.

The human and financial resources used to achieve good learning outcomes reflect the educational effectiveness of pre-university educational institutions. Thus, this effectiveness depends on several factors: the formulation of objectives, the existence of internal evaluation procedures, the existence of syllabus, the curricula, the teaching methods, the assessment techniques and criteria, teacher training, the existence of financial resources and learning facilities, the existence of partnerships with the local community and not only, complying with the school syllabus, the existence of a concordance between internal and external evaluation of students, ensuring the protection and safety of students, the school documents to be prepared according to legal regulations, quality to be evaluated based on the following criteria: pass rate for exams and school year, absenteeism rate, dropout rate, results at Olympics and competitions, participation in fairs and exhibitions, scholarships, etc. and the quality of the teaching staff to be reflected through qualifications, improvements and performances achieved.

The implementation of quality strategies in these three areas is the task of the head of the pre-university educational institution and the Commission for Evaluation and Quality Assurance (CEQA) which may be composed of 3-9 members, including a representative of parents and representatives of the local council, and which presents yearly an activity report on the internal evaluation of the quality of education.

Government Decision no. 1534/2008 on the approval of reference standards and performance indicators for evaluating and ensuring quality in pre-university education presents the areas and the performance indicators at the level of pre-university educational institutions.

The field „Institutional capacity” has the following performance indicators: the structure of projective documents, the internal organization of the institution, the functioning of the internal and external communication system, the internal functioning of the educational institution, the functioning of the information management system, the endowment with educational means and auxiliaries, the use of school documents, etc.

The field “Educational effectiveness” presents as performance indicators: promotion of the educational offer, design and realization of the curriculum, the evaluation of curricular and extracurricular performances, the scientific and methodical activity of teachers, establishment and budget execution at school level.

The performance indicators for the field „Quality Management” are: the existence and application of self-assessment procedures, internal quality assessment, professional development of the staff, review of the educational offer, evaluation of teachers' activity, constituting a database at the level of pre-university educational institution, setting up and functioning of the quality assessment commissions.

From the aspects presented above we can deduce the following conclusion: the quality evaluation can be done through three elements: self-evaluation, internal evaluation and external evaluation. The quality of pre-university education takes into account the degree of effectiveness of the educational offer and refers to achieving the required standards as well as obtaining excellent results of the participants in the learning process and is manifested by self-assessment based on pre-established standards in all instructional processes. to ensure that the educational offer meets the quality requirements.

Quality control means a series of activities carried out to maintain standards and meet quality requirements. Thus, pre-university educational institutions must provide professional qualifications to a certain standard that allows them to adapt to the labor market. Quality in pre-university education targets three categories of users: those who participate in the learning process, employers and society, the emphasis being on improving the quality of the education and the training process. The quality of the educational process can be characterized by the response that everyone can actually give to requirements such as: say what you do; do what you say; prove what you did; describe your quality system; make this system work; analyze; optimize; implement; control; correct the elements of the system; certify the system... and do not ignore the fact that each system is unique (see <https://tribunainvatamantului.ro>).

Concerns for professional education and training have been manifested at European level and are related to employment, the correspondence between supply and demand. Quality is ensured through actions of elaboration, planning and implementation of some study programs which offer the beneficiaries the confidence that the education provided is carried out having in mind quality standards.

A quality education implies the following: the criteria, the reference standards, performance indicators and qualifications, and as processes that underlie quality we find: planning the expected learning outcomes, monitoring them, internal and external evaluation of learning outcomes, and also the continuous improvement of learning outcomes.

The quality of the learning programs is ensured by quality management which is characterized by effectiveness in curriculum development, it is involved in developing and ensuring the quality of learning programs, it concludes effective partnerships and of course it knows the needs of the internal and external stakeholders.

The quality of the pre-university educational system also takes into account the learning areas that must be adequately equipped in order to respond to the individual and collective needs of students and allow the active participation of all students.

Also, a very important aspect in achieving quality in pre-university education is the syllabus that must be designed to meet the needs of the stakeholders: first of all the students, then business and the community.

The main function of a school is to transform the “inputs” (students, teachers, knowledge and cultural values, financial resources, etc.) in the desired “outputs”(the results of school education, educated people with new information and knowledge, new values, other cultural elements, even products and money). What is noticeable is that the whole structure is based on education achieved through projection, organization, control.

IV. QUALITY DESCRIPTORS AT THE SCHOOLS’

It seems that “we have a major problem in terms of the quality of education provided at the pre-university level. The causes of this situation are complex, and the means of intervention are diverse (evaluation of educational services with emphasis on their purpose, identification of the real contribution the school has on students’ progress, realize a benchmarking between schools, stimulating the involvement of parents and local authorities, intervention for an education adapted to the characteristics of the school, promotion of social inclusion. The pre-university educational system is still a hybrid that oscillates between the desideratum of decentralization and centralism regarding school management.

Improving the quality of education is a continuous approach that involves a philosophy focused on the student and his integral development. The indicators and the descriptors of performance from the perspective of quality assurance of pre-university educational institutions are summarized in Table 1, thus:

Table 1. Quality descriptors on educational subdomains

No.	Subdomains	Quality descriptors
1.	Institutional self-evaluation	- Having its own self-evaluation manual
2.	Quality management in the organization	- Certifying the quality management system according to the well-known national and international models; - Participating in national and international excellency networks or good practices; - The participation of the pre-university educational institutions to national or European quality or excellence awards; - The existence of counseling and consulting centres for graduates; - The existence of individual programs for professional and personal development for all the employers of a pre-university educational unit; - The financial support for the participation of teachers and management in master’s and doctoral programs or in training and professional development programs in the country or abroad.
3.	Periodical review of the school offer	- Using benchmarking (comparing with good practices in the field) for the optimization of the school offer; - Promoting a policy for a protection of the environment.
4.	Optimization of the procedures regarding learning evaluation	- Promoting a customized evaluation by emphasizing the progress of each individual and by avoiding the comparison with other educables; - Using the results of the evaluation for a customized activity of development for the performances of the gifted educables; - Financial support for the participation of students to competitions, regional, national and international contests.

No.	Subdomains	Quality descriptors
5.	Evaluation of the teaching staff	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The existence of the evaluation criteria for the teaching staff in relation to the fructification of their participation in research programs at local, national or international level; - The existence of the evaluation criteria for the teaching staff in relation to the fructification of their participation in partnership programs at national or international level; - The introduction of a system of periodic inter-evaluation of the teaching staff; - Increasing the number of the teaching staff involved in international exchanges.
6.	Optimization of the educational resources	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The existence of facilities in the pre-university educational institution which help the production of educational resources adapted to their own needs;
7.	Building and updating the database	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring access to specialized databases (examples: teaching methods and procedures, assessment tools, etc.)
8.	Ensuring access to information for people and institutions that are interested;	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Ensuring the access of educable and parties to information about other educational units at local, regional or national level that offer study programs, specializations, professional qualifications identical or similar; - The existence of a specialized public relations structure in the organizational chart of the pre-university educational unit and of the staff specially employed for the public relations activity; - The systematic presence of the educational offer of the school unit in the media.
9.	The functioning of the responsible structures regarding internal evaluation of quality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The existence and the functioning of a thematic group to improve quality in certain domains of school life („quality circles”)

Source: Cucos, 2009

Although the legislation and the methodologies for ensuring a quality education in Romania are developed in accordance with European and world trends in the field, Romanian school institutions are far from structuring a specific culture (Cucos, 2009:87).

An educational system is considered effective only insofar as it ensures continuous access to education and training, it provides openness to the work environment, encouraging companies to become more involved in education and training (Barbu, 2013:26). We consider relevant at least the following quality indicators for the activity of any educational unit in Romania (which could be taken into account when granting funding, beyond the quantitative and subjective dimension, in our opinion, of the standard cost per student):

- the percentage of graduates who passed the baccalaureate exam;
- the percentage of graduates who continue their studies in tertiary education;
- the percentage of graduates employed in the profession / specialty for which they have trained, within one year from the date of graduation.

Obviously, for each of these indicators, the predefined limits are needed, in relation to the strategic orientations at national level in the field of education. The consideration and the transparency of these indicators would establish competitive criteria generating quality and performance.

V. CONCLUSION

Performance at pre-university level is relevant through the quality of the services that are offered, the results that are obtained and it is in accordance with the expectations of the students, parents and society, with the realization of educational projects and the way in which the objectives which were set are achieved or exceeded. Also, an important role in quality assurance at pre-university level is played by teachers in their attempt to adapt education to students' age, their learning styles, their needs, their future prospects or society's values but also by using student-centered learning. The quality of the study programs, the use of adequately equipped learning spaces, students' multilateral development but also the modernization of pre-university education are key aspects of a quality education.

There are a series of quality descriptors on educational subfields at the level of pre-university educational institutions such as: institutional self-evaluation, quality management, school offer review, teacher evaluation, access to educational resources, building and updating the database. In order to talk about performance at pre – university level, we must take into account a numbers of factors as: prioritizing quality, clarity of objectives, motivation and participation of stakeholders, rational use of resources and educational elements, continuous adaptation of processes to results.

Quality must be achieved through actions that prevent problems occurrence / non-conformities, not through “curative” actions of detection, correction or solution. In order to ensure quality and implicitly performance, it is necessary to be oriented towards the final product of the educational system: the educated man, by promoting the

constructive exchange of ideas, mentalities, attitudes and proactive behaviors, by prioritizing qualitative objectives, etc.

VI. ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work is supported by project POCU 125040, entitled "Development of the tertiary university education to support the economic growth - PROGRESSIO", co-financed by the European Social Fund under the Human Capital Operational Program 2014 - 2020.

REFERENCES

1. Barbu, L. (2010). *Quality Management in Pre-university Education*. Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae Publishing House, Galati, Romania. Retrieved April 25, 2020 from: http://bibliotecascolara.ro/Liliana_Barbu/Managementul_calitatii_Barbu_Liliana.pdf.
2. Cucuș, C. (coord.). (2009). *Psycho-Pedagogy*. Polirom Publishing House, Iași, Romania, 74, 87;
3. Iosifescu, C. Ș., Dogaru, M., Blaga, V., Crivineanu, F., Danet, S., Kacso-Bodo, G.,M., Mihaila, C.,V., Paraschiva, G.,A.,Serban, M. (2017). *Quality in the Romanian Schools by Standards and Reference Standards. General Guide*. Retrieved April 25, 2020 from https://www.isj.sv.edu.ro/images/Docs/Domenii/Asigurarea%20calitatii/2017/Calitate_in_scoala_-_ghid_general_1.pdf. Sallis, E. (2002). *Total Quality Management in Education, 3rd edition*. Kogan Page Ltd., London, 13.
4. Ensuring Quality in Education, a Path to Success in School (2015) . Retrieved April 24, 2020 from: <https://tribunainvatamantului.ro/2015/04/02/asigurarea-calitatii-in-Invatamant-un-drum-sigur-spre-succesul-scolar>.
5. ***Law no. 87/2006 regarding the approval of Government Emergency Ordinance no. 75/2005 concerning the provision of quality in education, published in Romania's Official Monitor no. 34/ 2006.
6. ***Government Decision no. 1534/2008 regarding the approval of the reference standards for the performance indicators in order to ensure evaluation and quality in pre-university education published in Romania's Official Monitor no. 822/2008.

