

Measuring learning quality by Moroccan university students

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Abstract

The evolution of teaching is currently considered a very important task, both from an institutional and a moral viewpoint. The evaluation of such a domain, and its conduct, has been reported by several research studies in the literature. "Who? What? How? Drawing from which references? Which clues? Should the people assessed take part in the process? To what extent should the results be publicized?" (Demailly, 2001). For that reason, we will first draw some guidelines for the evaluation of teaching and try to define its possible objectives. Three main domains may be contemplated: teachers' activity (teaching), the learning process (learning), and the effects of the teaching/learning process. These draw upon an enquiry carried out in three different faculties by our research team.

This study is related to the VOLUBILIS project "Moroccan and European students: a comparative approach", which aims to identify the challenges and expectations of Moroccan students. The purpose of this research is to indicate how students at Hassan II University of Casablanca judge the quality of their studies.

We will be able to show that an evaluation of courses by students is both possible and profitable. As a matter of fact, this enquiry has brought up valuable information about higher education pedagogy that concerns the three fields mentioned earlier, and it also offer some suggestions to generate improvements.

Keywords: evaluation, teaching, students, quality, higher education, ACP.

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1. Introduction

Nowadays, the evaluation of school and university performance by training establishments and their personnel is widely considered as an obligation from the following points of view:

Institutional - for its own regulation, the institution cannot do without the required information,

Moral - it has a duty to be accountable to its citizens, and primarily its users.

However, this necessary assessment is still the subject of a lively debate regarding its issues, its privileged objectives, specific objects, and appropriate methods. As shown in Demailly (2001), the choices are varied, depending on the responses to a plurality of questions: "who?, what?, how?, under what references what advertising results ?" (Demailly, 2001). The debate is both professional and political.

In this debate, the issue of evaluating university education is particularly difficult. According to Danielle Potocki Malicet (Demailly, 2001) this type of evaluation is, so far, set in a slightly open context. This author proposes to distinguish clearly between teacher evaluation, involving individuals as part of a career management, and the evaluation of teaching, on the content of training and success of students in the first place, and on teaching practices and the means to increase the quality and efficiency of the system in the second.

The educational quality of teachers cannot be assessed only through the learning that they make possible, with the overall dimension of teaching content being one aspect of the problem of teaching practice. Two major areas of investigation are therefore unavoidable: those of "teaching" (organization of and conducting educational activities), and "learning" (receiving education by students in their learning activities). In other words: how do we teach in universities; and how do we learn (under what conditions and with what difficulty)?

This invitation to conduct investigations in both fields of teaching and learning is consistent with the idea expressed by Dejean (Dejean, 2002). If the quality of the training of students depends on the provision of teachers, it also relies on students' activity in their own training. An evaluation of teaching that would focus on the provision of teachers would not make much sense, since the final quality also depends on the activity that the students deployed" (Dejean, 2002).

However, wanting to summarize this assessment, by characterizing the judgments made by the students on the quality of their education, requires prior consideration of the very intention to assess the quality of training on the relevant routes of an assessment of learning, and the place that can handle direct questioning of students in such an assessment.

Evaluation of education quality

The term quality is particularly ambiguous. As noted by Vial (Vial, 2001) the first meaning of this term is related to a certain ideology of nature. Quality is the essence of being in a substantialist perspective. Since a quality is then seen as an essential dimension, one is tempted to design quality itself as a substance present or not at the bottom of every being. In this case, the word (quality) takes itself as a "designated object in a tautological circle whose meaning remains obscure and magic" (Vial, 2001). Then, we run the risk of slicing quality in a value judgment, without having questioned the foundations of this judgement. Speaking of quality judgement, we will take care not to fall victim to an essentialist illusion that would have us believe that quality is the substantial feature of some studies. Any judgement of quality is relative to: perspective, questioning, and expectations. This is what makes the evaluation process difficult to implement.

To evaluate is to decide on the acceptability of a reality by reference to specific expectations. This dimension of judgement then prohibits the assessment to be a simple analysis of reality. The first problem for the evaluator is to clarify the criteria on whose behalf the reality will be appreciated (by formulating a value judgment) rather than simply by an estimated default measure (Hadji, 1992). What do we expect of a university education? This is a preliminary question to be answered in evaluating university education without falling into the tautological circle of quality.

A university, as part of its responsibilities, is assigned the obligation to form an opinion about the quality of education in the institution (Valois, 1999). What can be the role and place of the actors/students in this process of building an evaluative opinion?

According to Dejean (Dejean, 2002) "Having the opinion of the students, it makes you think!". Students are certainly subjective, but we cannot do without the perspective of primary stakeholders, those who benefit from the educational service in question, in evaluating the benefits (De Ketele, 1986).

2. Method

2.1. Participants

The surveyed population consists of students from the third year of university. Our sample consisted of 350 students, representing several disciplines: literature, science and economics.

Table 1. Gender Distribution

	literary	Sciences	Economy	Total
Female	64	103	64	231
Male	40	64	15	119
Total	104	167	79	350

2.2. Measures

The questionnaire was organized in 7 themes. The analysis focuses on education/training; judgements are made on the quality of courses and studies.

2.3. Procedure

The survey was conducted in November 2011. After the questionnaires had been distributed to the students, the questionnaires were then distributed to teachers in each discipline. The questionnaires were collected by the researchers in March and December 2012.

2.4. Analysis

After data collection (June 2013), we used SPSS software for data processing and analysis.

3. Assessment made on characteristics and dimensions of the process education / training

Students were invited to comment on four items on some possible features of their "main discipline" - Strong requirements? Structured Studies? Clear knowledge of what is expected for examinations? Research/teaching relationships?

Table2. Assessment of variations of two main features of the discipline, according to the sector in universities (scale from 0 = not at all, to 6 = very strongly). Average of response.

	Literary	Sciences	Economy
High demands?	2.77	2.99	3.07
Well-designed studies?	3.66	3.11	3.16
Knowledge expected for examinations?	2.95	2.56	2.85
Research/teaching relationships?	3.3	3.16	2.94

At the university, students think that the studies are structured and there is a relationship between teaching and research. However, students find that their discipline is not much characterized by high demands or a clear understanding of the expectations for exams, significantly, the studies are structured and there is a strong relationship between research and education.

Averages are generally positive and similar in all disciplines, except for those concerning the structured studies. Here, students of literature are significantly above science students. In these answers we note that there is no difference between female and male students.

Table 3. Judgements concerning the conditions for university studies (scale 0 = not at all, to 6 = very strongly).

	Average of response		
	Literary	Sciences	Economy
Competition among students?	3.44	3.39	2.79
Good relationships between students/teachers	4.27	3.67	3.26
Disadvantaged student	3.32	2.19	2.44
Overcrowding of classes and seminars	2.68	3.2	3.99
Need for intensive work	4.07	4.5	4.4

At the university, the judgement of the students regarding the conditions of studies is generally above average for the majority of questions. Study conditions seem to be marked by two major differences: those related to the need for intensive studies and relationships between students and teachers.

Female students judge more favourably than male students relationships between students and teachers, and they willingly assert the necessity to study intensely (4.50; 3.94). However, they do not see, more than male students, disadvantages for themselves.

4. On facing good or bad situations in education

Regarding "education and teaching", one question asked about certain teaching situations that the students had been facing. Their answers shed light on how they perceived the work of teachers. They ranged from 0 (never) to 6 (always).

The students' responses show that the rate of cancelled classes and the rate of overlap between optional and compulsory classes are below average (2.21 and 1.81). It may also be noted that the cancellation rate and course overlapping varies by sector, except that literature students reported that courses are often cancelled.

Table 4. Cancellation and duplication of courses in universities (scale of 0 = never to 6 = always). Average response

	Literary	Sciences	Economy
Classes cancelled	1,99	2,23	2,54
Overlap between optional and compulsory courses	2,03	1,71	1,64

Eight other proposed situations present positive aspects of the teaching activity.

Table 5. Judgements on the following teaching situations (Scale of 0 = never, to 6 = always). Average response

	Literary	Sciences	Economy
Council do you mean if necessary	3,56	2,61	2,59
Course well prepared	4,28	3,13	3,40
Explanation of examination results	3,32	2,04	1,38
Consideration of student suggestions	3,56	2,37	1,94
We talk about his research	2,95	2,52	2,65
Help with writing	3,15	2,34	1,85
Covered programme	3,43	2,76	2,52
Examples of practical applications	3,99	3,24	3,38

Through this question we observe what kind of education policy seem legitimate students to a fairly general, these situations appear moderately positive encountered in universities.

In universities, the answers vary significantly dies for 6 items. The fate of the students of science and Economy seems more unfavorable compared to literary students for these items: advice in case of need; teachers prepared their courses; explanation of examination results; consideration of student suggestions; using teachers for writing; all courses in the programme are covered.

Are students consistent when they answer several questions on the same theme? For one item they were invited to make a judgment on "the help and advice of teachers". Compare their answers with those made on the basis of the following proposition: "if necessary, the teaching staff advised me".

Table 6. Two series of judgements on the help and advice of teachers (Scale of 0 = never, to 6 = always).

	Average response		
	Literary	Sciences	Economy
Frequency of advice if needed	3,56	2,61	2,59
Judgement on help and advice	3,71	3,26	3,21

We see that the fluctuations in the mean practically follow the same curves for the two items. Thus, one can thus speak of consistency in judgement. Judgement on help and guidance is significantly higher than frequency of advice if needed. We also note that judgment on help and guidance of science and Eco-management students is more unfavourable compared to mailbox students.

5. Judgments on the quality of courses

The quality of teaching and course offerings are, in general, not particularly appreciated by students. Another question can refine this impression with focus on courses taken during the semester.

Table 7. Judgment on the pedagogical work of teachers, "Do the following statements apply to courses you take this semester?" (% of responses).

		Literary	Sciences	Economy
Educational objectives clearly defined	Rare	33,0%	45,8%	34,8%
	Some	40,9%	41,7%	33,4%
	Frequent	26,1%	12,5%	31,8%
Understandable and relevant courses	Rare	20,7%	34,1%	26,5%
	Some	41,3%	49,6%	54,4%
	Frequent	38,0%	16,3%	19,1%
Teachers ensure that the course is understood	Rare	23,5%	38,2%	30,9%
	Some	35,3%	31,7%	38,2%
	Frequent	41,2%	30,1%	30,9%
Teachers provide examples	Rare	20,7%	26,4%	16,4%
	Some	20,7%	32,3%	37,3%
	Frequent	58,6%	41,3%	46,3%
Interesting and motivating teachers	Rare	26,9%	25,8%	23,5%
	Some	21,0%	45,0%	44,1%
	Frequent	52,1%	29,2%	32,4%
Teachers provide summaries	Rare	36,2%	50,0%	41,9%
	Some	25,0%	28,7%	27,5%
	Frequent	38,8%	21,3%	30,6%

We note that the judgments of the students are more or less balanced between the two criteria of evaluation, which are rare and common (*understandable and relevant courses*, and *teachers ensure that the course is understood*). However, students express a favourable judgment for "*teachers provide examples*" (almost half of the students) and "*interesting and motivating teachers*" (only a quarter of the students are totally dissatisfied). We also note the dissatisfaction of 2 out of 5 students in two areas: *educational objectives clearly defined*, and *teachers provide summaries*.

The introduction of the factor discipline presents new significant variations depending on discipline except "*The teachers ensure that the course is included understood*. We observe that science students express an unfavourable judgement in the majority of their responses, except for "*interesting and motivating teachers*." This is unlike literary students, who have a significantly higher level of satisfaction in all areas, except for clearly defined educational goals.

Table 8. Judgment on the pedagogical work of teachers, "do the following statements apply to courses you take this semester?" (% of responses).

		Literary	Sciences	Economy
Relationships of courses with other disciplines	Rare	29,3%	41,0%	26,1%
	Some	24,1%	37,7%	52,2%
	Frequent	46,6%	21,3%	21,7%
Practical relevance of the topics discussed and demonstrated	Rare	28,6%	50,4%	35,8%
	Some	30,3%	27,3%	34,3%
	Frequent	41,1%	22,3%	29,9%
Explanation of what will be the subject of the review	Rare	32,7%	29,5%	37,9%
	Some	33,7%	36,9%	30,3%
	Frequent	33,6%	33,6%	31,8%
Valuation scientific approach	Rare	31,0%	43,8%	26,2%
	Some	21,0%	29,8%	27,6%
	Frequent	48,0%	26,4%	46,2%
Application of research methods	Rare	27,6%	53,3%	37,9%
	Some	32,4%	26,2%	31,1%
	Frequent	40,0%	20,5%	31,0%

We note that the judgments of students on *relationships with other disciplines*; and *explanation of what will be the subject of the review*, are more or less balanced between the two criteria of evaluation rare and common (one third for each). However, we find that the students have an unfavourable judgment (2 students out of 5) for "*the practical interest of the subjects demonstrated*" and "*the application of research methods*."

We observe significant differences between disciplines on all items except "*explanation of what will be the subject of the review*". Literature students express a favourable judgment in the majority of their responses. This is unlike science students who have a significantly lower level of satisfaction in all areas, except *clearly defined educational objectives* and *teachers ensure that the course is understood*.

The integration of the discipline factor presents significantly new variations except for "*being understandable and relevant*," depending on the discipline. We also observe that science students express a favourable judgement in the majority of their responses, except for "*interesting and motivating teachers*." This is unlike literary students who have a significantly higher level of satisfaction in all areas.

6. Personal progressions recorded

The questionnaire given to students allows an understanding of the judgements students made on the quality of their studies, and to perceive certain effects of the teaching/learning process in terms of areas of progress. Certainly, it would be possible to link these "perceptions" with the results noted during testing, evaluation or examination. These strive to objectively estimate the effects of university education (but this would imply measures before and after the transition to college, and to estimate the "value added" by them)."

One question asked students to indicate how their education helped them progress in 12 areas. These can be grouped into three broad categories: the intellectual and surgical field; the field of social and communicative skills; and the field of personal development. For each item, the answers could range from 0 to 6. We observe the averages.

Table 9. Perceived effects in terms of operative intellectual progression (Scale of 0 = not at all, 6 = strongly helped). Average response

	Literary	Sciences	Economy
Specific to the discipline	3,49	3,81	3,15
Outgoing knowledge of the discipline, interdisciplinary	3,25	2,90	2,92
Intellectual abilities	3,86	3,51	2,82
Methodology, work techniques	3,63	3,21	3,28
Practical skills, references to the profession	3,02	2,92	2,97
Personal research capacity	4,43	4,27	3,27

Students find strong growth in the areas of "*ability to lead, by itself, a research work*", and moderately in "*specific to the discipline*"; "*intellectual capacity (logical mind, methodical)*"; and "*methodology, work techniques*." However, they feel significantly less progress in "*outgoing knowledge of the discipline, interdisciplinary and practical skills, references to the profession and practice*."

We do not notice a big distinction between the sectors, except Eco-Management students who feel the least progress compared to other sectors in the areas of "*intellectual capacity (logical mind, methodical)*" and "*capacity personal research*".

Gender introduces a significant difference only for "specific to the discipline," for which women are paid do you mean make more "progress than men.

Table 10. Areas of perceived progress (social skills and common field (Scale of 0 = not at all, 6 = strongly helped). Average response.

	Literary	Sciences	Economy
Language skills in communication	4,00	2,94	3,17
Capacity for teamwork	3,99	3,93	3,14
Sense of responsibility	4,45	4,44	3,51

It is observed that students feel significantly positive effects of an improvement in their *sense of responsibility*, followed by their *capacity for teamwork* and finally *language skills in communication*. However, this satisfaction seems less palpable among science students in language skills in communication, and moderately high dear students of Eco-management, which also feel less help from their sense of responsibility.

Table 11. Areas of perceived progress (personal development of the field) (Scale of 0 = not at all, 6 = strongly helped). Average answers.

	Literary	Sciences	Economy
General culture	3,95	3,31	3,38
Autonomy and independence	3,98	3,60	3,27
Critical mind	3,89	3,72	2,84

We see the effect of personal development is perceived, but without a large amplitude or differences between the items. However, we note well the difference if we add the discipline factor, which has significant influence for both areas. For general knowledge, this effect is more clearly felt in two sectors: literature, where it peaked, and science, where it reaches its minimum. For critical thinking, the most strongly felt effect is still with the literature students, and most weakly felt in Eco-management.

7. Discussion

The survey provides useful information on how students judge their studies, both regarding the lessons they are taught and certain characteristics of their disciplines, or some of the conditions of studies, in particular, social or relational order. This is directly related to formulating judgments, or by sharing feelings or impressions regarding difficulties encountered, or the perceived effects of these teachings. Here, we propose here to quickly such "judgments" pronounced on studies in four great views: assessment made on characteristics and dimensions of the education/training process; the second judgment forms on the quality of courses recently Personal progressions recorded.

Our results indicate that the majority of students have an unfavourable judgement of the quality of their studies and teaching. The judgement of students from the conditions of studies is generally above average on most issues. However, the judgment of students varies from one discipline to another. We note that the quality of teaching and the course offerings are generally not really appreciated by students. In general, prior to enrolment, students are not uninformed about the content of their course. It seems as if these students had joined in the devaluation of phenomena related titles in the labour market. It is interesting to measure these phenomena, which seem to generate two types of behaviour. First, switching to a design university further reduced its function of contribution to personal development, even though the social positions of the market would not recognize these acquisitions. Second, the development of a vision that seems to question the university's attractiveness. In doing so, these students also raise the issue of the degree of real investment in education (Fernex & Lima, 2005) 10.

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