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Shaping or sharing? QA in a value-driven EHEA

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Short bio:

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Short bio (150 words max):

Dr Nati Cabrera is Academic Director of the Master's degree in Quality Assurance in Higher Education at the Psychology and Educational Sciences Department of the Open University of Catalonia. Having previously worked at Pompeu Fabra University, she joined the university in 1995. Since then, she has held different positions including Director of the Student Services Centre and Director of the Department of Methodology and Educational Innovation. Her field of research focuses on organisational and management models for e-learning, quality assurance, competency-based assessment in higher education, and impact assessment from educational, economic and social perspectives in the field of e-learning. Nati is a member of the Edul@ab research group and has participated in multiple European projects.

Proposal

Title:

Ensuring teaching quality in an online model: a tool to check the quality of teaching design

Abstract:

Having a good Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS) is considered essential in order to respond to the current challenges of universities. Therefore, it is important for these educational institutions to understand their responsibility to have the adequate tools to design, manage, implement and improve their internal quality management system.

Within the framework of the Psychology and Educational Sciences Faculty at the Open University of Catalonia (Universitat Oberta de Catalunya - UOC), this paper presents the example of a tool (COMPROVA) that ensures the quality of the teaching design. The tool has been designed and implemented taking into account international standards in such a way that it could be adapted and used in other educational contexts within the European area.

Text of paper:**1. Introduction**

In recent years, the expansion of higher education has placed Quality Assurance (QA) at the heart of its reform. Quality assurance is a common practice in higher education around the world and can produce significant results within university institutions. For example, it can improve the effectiveness of teaching and learning systems, increase employability, and even improve the management of Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) (Martin, 2018b). The development of QA has been driven by External Quality Assurance (EQA) bodies as a mechanism for control, “accountability” and continuous improvement. And in this context, HEIs have responded to this demand from quality agencies by developing mechanisms for their own Internal Quality Assurance (IQA) (Martin, 2018a).

Institutional accreditation means a change in the international quality assurance scenario. Mainly because it arises with the idea of reducing the volume of external evaluations, reducing the workload for both quality agencies and universities; and in this way, it assumes an evolution and maturation of the institutions in relation to their model of quality assurance. This evolution has as its protagonist the Internal Quality Assurance System (IQAS). An internal system of higher education institutions that aims to ensure quality assurance not only at the institutional level, but also including their training programs (González, García & Triviño, 2014).

In this context, having a good internal quality assurance system is considered essential in order to respond to the current challenges of universities, whether to be accountable, to promote innovation, to plan improvements or to facilitate cooperation with other institutions. This is why it is important for these educational institutions to understand their primary responsibility for having the adequate tools to design, manage, implement and improve their internal quality management system (European University Association, 2005). But: which could be the main processes or procedures that could not be missing in an internal quality system in order to maintain the institutional accreditation and focus on the improvement of the institution itself?

2. Implementation

Within the framework of the Psychology and Educational Sciences Faculty of the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya (UOC) - an online university and therefore governed by a distance education model - **this work presents the example of one of these internal quality assurance procedures based on the administration of a tool (COMPROVA) that ensures the quality of the university courses design before the start of the academic year.** The focus of this tool is on the training action design - in order to ensure all the elements that make the teaching and learning process possible - and on the assessment of its quality (Raffagheli & Cabrera, 2020).

The tool, which has been developed through a co-design process with the teachers themselves to ensure its usefulness and usability, has been designed taking into account the standards of the educational model of the university itself that respond those of online learning according to [AQU](#) (the Catalan University Quality Assurance Agency,) and [ENQA](#) (European Association for Quality Assurance). One of the most outstanding and interesting elements of the tool is that it takes into account those aspects to be evidenced through other existing accreditation processes such as, for example, the monitoring reports of degrees, or the evaluation report for teachers regarding its teaching functions (DOCENTIA).

Therefore the tool, addressed to university teachers, aims to contribute to one of the great challenges of the UOC's new institutional culture: to have a quality system for courses and programs as a strategy

for teaching improvement and for the improvement of the teaching accreditation processes (of the own university and of the AQU). Specifically, the COMPROVA tool allows teachers to demonstrate and evaluate the design of their teaching action.

The list of indicators of the tool, which as already mentioned is in connection and coherence with other projects and is in relation to the design and planning of the teaching action, evaluates 4 main elements: 1) the lesson planning of the course (through the contents and aspects that it should contain); (2) the learning activities or the learning tasks raised in the context of the course; (3) the learning resources; and (4) the teachers' action plan:

A. About the lesson planning (contents and aspects that should contain)	
The role of the course in the whole curriculum	The lesson planning places the student about where she or he is in the context of the degree, as well as about the correlation and synergy of this course with the other key elements or subjects of the program.
Previous required knowledge	The lesson planning recommends to the student what contents should have been achieved before in order to successfully participate in the course, or which courses or subjects of the same program she or he should have taken previously.
Identification of competencies	This section identifies the soft and specific competencies that students will acquire or develop throughout the course, taken from the official degree resort, and to be rescued in the specific statements of each activity.
Identification of learning objectives	The lesson planning identifies the learning objectives of the course from the teachers point of view.
Identification of the contents	The teaching plan identifies, through modules or areas of knowledge, those key contents that will be worked on within the framework of the course and on which the resources and learning activities or tasks are considered.
Methodology	The teachers of the subject dedicate this section to inform students about the classroom dynamics in the virtual learning environment, the communication and interaction strategies between teachers and students and the type of teaching and learning activities under which teaching action is proposed.
Evaluation model	This section shows a detailed explanation of the weighting in the qualification of the course and the flexibility in the continuous assessment. That is, the key learning activities to pass the course and/or the type of punishment in case of a non-delivered or a suspended learning activity or task.
Reference to plagiarism and originality	The lesson planning devotes one specific part to referring to the meaning of plagiarism and the consequences that the presentation or delivery of a learning activity with a lack of originality can have for students.
Information on the type of feedback (at the general level of the course)	The teacher dedicates a one specific part of the lesson planning to detail the typology and frequency of feedback within the framework of the course as well as the communication spaces or tools through which it will be provided.
Complete calendar (starting date, delivery and qualification of the learning activities)	Through the calendar of each one of the activity statements the educational team commits to inform students on the date of start of each one of these tasks, the date of its delivery and the date of provision of feedback and qualification by the teacher.

Non-sexist use of language	The lesson planning shows a symmetry in the treatment of men and women from the inclusion of the various strategies of the UOC's University Language Service.
B. About the learning activities	
Description of the learning activities or tasks to be performed	The statement of activities identifies the objectives associated with each learning task and the contents related to it, as well as the specific steps to be followed for its elaboration and completion.
Identification of competencies	The statement of activities proposed in the frame of the course details the competencies to be acquired and developed through each activity and the competence development level of the same (1, 2 or 3, for example).
Intended learning outcomes associated with the learning activity or task	Associated with each one of the soft and/or specific competencies selected to acquire and develop in each learning activity (and their competence development level), teachers must detail the learning outcomes. That is, what the student should be able to do once she or he has completed the activity.
Learning resources associated with each activity	Each of the activity statements in the set of the course has linked those learning resources necessary for its successful achievement.
Identification of assessment criteria	In the evaluation section of each activity statement the teacher explains through which assessment criteria - and from which instrument if they exist - the student will be evaluated for that task.
Type of feedback (who, when and in which virtual classroom tool or space)	The statement of each activity of the course provides information to the student in relation to the feedback that will be provided about it (when and where) and whether it will be only a finalist or also during the process of developing the task. In addition, in the event of an increase in the number of agents in the evaluation process - through self-assessment or peer assessment processes - information could be shared in this space.
Non-sexist use of language	The statement of the activities shows a symmetry in the treatment of men and women from including the various strategies of the UOC's University Language Service.
C. About the learning resources	
Selected or validated learning resources in the classroom.	
Learning resources accessible in the classroom (active, well-scanned links, language, etc.).	
Current learning resources.	
Non-sexist use of language (learning resources show a symmetry in the treatment of men and women from including the various strategies of the UOC's University Language Service).	
Publications and bibliography from a gender perspective.	
D. About the teachers' action plan	

Teaching tools available in relation to the design of the course (forum, debate, wiki, etcetera).
Activation and configuration of the plagiarism tool (a specific tool of the university to identify those cases of lack of originality in the delivery of the learning activity or task).
Welcome message from the teachers through the various media and communication tools of the virtual classroom
Non-sexist use of language (through the various communication and media tools in the virtual classroom the teacher agrees to show a symmetry in the treatment of men and women from including the various strategies of the UOC's University Language Service).

Table 1. List of indicators of the COMPROVA tool.

Source: Own elaboration.

The use of the COMPROVA tool is compulsory for all the teachers of the Faculty who must answer it each academic year on a minimum of 2 subjects or courses. The following prioritization criteria have been established for the selection of these two courses:

- That during this period the course is affected by some accreditation process (for example, the monitoring reports of degrees, or the evaluation report for teachers regarding its teaching functions);
- that the course is part of an institutional project of the university that supposes an intervention in its teaching design;
- or that the course is affected by any of the objectives of boths the faculty (for example, the integration of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) or in particular of the gender perspective), or of the teachers as personal teaching professional goals (that is those goals set by the teachers themselves).

The valuation of the indicators of the COMPROVA tool listed through Table 1 is "Yes" or "No" and once the teacher has completed the 4 blocks and has sent the questionnaire receives an automated email in which she or he can consult an automated feedback of the different unresolved sections (that is, marked with a "No") with tips, recommendations or resources to be able to work and improve that item in the next semester or semesters. In this way, the tool not only has the function of "check" but also of reflection through this interactive part that allows the faculty members to improve their teaching action design.

Specifically, for its use university teachers must carry out the following actions:

1. Fill in the different information fields about the course that they are checking (and in which degree belongs to) and also about how many other courses they have to teach that semester.
2. Answer the different questions in the questionnaire in relation to the 4 blocks. In addition, at the end of each block there is an open space for annotations for internal use by teachers (for example, proposals for improvement of the teaching action noted for each item).
3. Once the 4 blocks have been completed and the questionnaire has been sent, the teacher receives an email and by clicking on "show the score" she or he can receive the formative feedback on the different sections.

3. Methodology

For the evaluation of the tool, a satisfaction and perception open questionnaire (with open and closed questions) was administered to all the university teachers of the Psychology and Educational Sciences Faculty (59) during the academic year 2020/21 and from which 21 answers were obtained. More than half of those who responded to the questionnaire had already used the tool to assess their teaching design quality (61.9%), the majority on two, three or four subjects (66.7%). Those teachers who had not used the COMPROVA indicated that it had either been due to a lack of planning or mainly due to a lack of time.

The administration of the instrument was carried out using Google Forms. The analysis of the results presented below is based on the most frequent answers and those with the maximum potential of application in practice. That is to say those answers that provided information on, on the one hand, the limitations of the tool and, on the other hand, about proposals for improvement.

4. Results

The results show that the majority of the teachers decided to use the tool simply because of the indication of the department (85.7%). Although, half of the teachers said that they had done it to ensure the minimum requirements in the design of their teaching (47.6%) or because they thought it was an interesting tool for improving their teaching (47.6%).

According to the same teaching staff, the maximum potential of the COMPROVA was its ability to improve the planning of future designs and the planning of teaching activities (61.9%), although they considered that the timing of the administration had not been appropriate (64.2%). Even so, more than half of the teachers considered that the amount of work involved in using this tool was adequate (66.6%). In addition, more than half of the participants assured that the use of the tool could lead to an improvement in the set of subjects or courses of the faculty (57.1%) since it allows “to ensure that the subject has the minimum teaching requirements” (71.4%) and (in some cases) “to improve some elements of the training proposal or of the training plan” (28.6%).

In addition, and as a result of the analysis of the qualitative data of the questionnaire, in the following table the strengths and weaknesses of the COMPROVA tool proposed by teachers are listed:

Strong points	Elements for improvement
The consistency with other quality assurance systems (internal and external).	The need to be able to consult the history of responses throughout the semesters by teachers.
The interaction it allows through the automated feedback provided to teachers.	The lack of a direct student participation - although to fill the different fields of the tool it is necessary to take into account the students' satisfaction surveys as they are one of the main evidences for which the teacher can consider redesigning the course -.
The resources that are shared through the automated feedback and in line with the finalist goal of improving the quality of training design of every course (such as resources on competency-based education, active methodologies, gender perspective, etcetera).	The need to have a text on how to use the tool to be significant and useful in other existing accreditation systems, such as the DOCENTIA (UOC's internal quality assurance system for the teacher evaluation).
The notes section allows teachers to take notes and collect evidence on the quality of the course (even if you have to delegate teaching to another teacher).	The possibility of proposing the COMPROVA tool through a Likert Scale and evolving it in this sense (similar to the rubric instrument).

Table 2. Evaluation of the COMPROVA tool and future elements of improvement.

Source: Own elaboration.

5. Conclusions

Taking into account the results obtained so far, there is a need to make a deeper qualitative analysis of this internal process of evaluation of teaching action and its impact on teaching of the UOC's Psychology and Educational Sciences Faculty. Some actions have been initiated in this regard, such as, for example, 3 co-design sessions to collect the perception of teachers during the administration of COMPROVA since its inception 3 years ago and through which 150 courses or subjects quality of teaching design have already been checked and collected.

Educational quality should be a procedure of continuous improvement to be integrated into all the processes of the university, including the design of teaching. This proposal aims to improve this important part of teaching (the design) that is often hidden behind outcome indicators, just focusing on the learning and teaching process itself. The tool that has been designed and implemented takes into

account international standards in such a way that it could be adapted and used in other educational contexts within the European area. And given the context it is also a very important step forward in the design of online training actions and the preservation of their quality.

Discussion questions for the session:

Which are the keys for the design and implementation of an institutional model for evaluating the quality of the training design?

Could the implementation of the COMPROVA teaching design evaluation tool respond to a strategy aimed at generating confidence among teachers in the system since its implementation revises the standards already established through it?

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