

# Registered report protocol: Evaluation of a contextualized teaching evaluation project

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## Abstract

Teacher evaluation can be an underused resource for teaching improvement, as it is reduced to a single questionnaire to be answered by students. The lack of flexibility and adaptability prevents them from developing their potential.

This paper provides a record of the protocol that is being applied in a relation to an educational innovation project that aims to develop a contextualized alternative to the current system of teaching assessment that is being carried out at the University of Malaga (Spain).

For this purpose, an evaluation based on the Contribution Analysis is being carried out (Mayne, 2008). This procedure is based on the project's Theory of Change (Roger, 2014) from which a procedure is established to confirm the causality of the changes observed. The procedure is currently underway and the first partial results are expected by the end of 2021.

The results of the evaluation will make it possible to assess the efficiency of the project, as well as its capacity to solve the problems of questionnaire-based teaching evaluation.

## Resumen

La evaluación docente puede ser un recurso infrautilizado para la mejora de la enseñanza, ya que se reduce a un solo cuestionario para ser respondido por los estudiantes. La falta de flexibilidad y adaptabilidad les impide desarrollar su potencial.

Este artículo proporciona un registro del protocolo que se está aplicando en relación a un proyecto de innovación educativa que tiene como objetivo desarrollar una alternativa contextualizada al actual sistema de evaluación docente que se está llevando a cabo en la Universidad de Málaga (España).

Para ello, se está realizando una evaluación basada en el Análisis de Contribuciones (Mayne, 2008). Este procedimiento se basa en la Teoría del Cambio del proyecto (Roger, 2014) a partir del cual se establece un procedimiento para confirmar la causalidad de los cambios observados. El procedimiento está actualmente en curso y se esperan los primeros resultados parciales para finales de 2021. Los resultados de la evaluación permitirán valorar la eficacia del proyecto, así como su capacidad para resolver los problemas de evaluación docente mediante cuestionarios.

## Introduction

The teaching evaluation is the evaluation of the labour by a docent to teach and produce learning (Díaz et al., 2007). Although the teaching evaluation started in the USA around the 1970s, it was present at European universities very soon (Referencias). Nevertheless, the Bologna Process was the watershed from which, the teaching evaluation rose in Europe definitively.

From the beginning, the teaching evaluation was discussed as highly controversial, because it was perceived as a suspect of incompetence (Hounsell, 2003). Nevertheless, the critics were focused on other questions such as reliability, biasing, student competencies to assess, or accuracy among others too (Gravestock &

Gregor- Greenleaf, 2008). On the other hand, it has been demonstrated the perverse consequences of using the teaching evaluation as resources to arise the success linking to salary (Zuñiga & Joipa, 2007; Silva, 2009).

The teaching activity evaluation of lecturers is part of the institutional evaluation, that aims to improve the higher education quality (Reference Tejedor y Jornet, 2008). In this sense, the majority of Spanish and Latinoamerican universities consulted, claim the evaluation of their lecturers is developed in order to get the excellence (Reference). However, the usual method used is under continuous critics, as several authors have revealed or brought to light (García Garduño, 2014).

University does not get to escape from a point of view reductionist about evaluation. Consequently, it is really hard to run politics and projects where lecturers are involved actively in their own evaluation (Reference, Escudero Pino y Rodríguez, 2010). Teaching evaluation in universities requires a clear and unambiguous regarding what higher education is. Nevertheless, this concept is mediated directly by subjects, their content, and the syllabus structure. On the other hand, not only and unique definition would be valid. Anyway, the teaching quality is closely related to the teaching activity indeed.

The teaching quality is inseparable from teaching activity and this one depends on the teaching context. Context reality is determined by every university, as an organization, and inside of them, by the reality of every School, Faculty, subject feature, including schedules, resources, relations with other subjects, lecturer personal characteristics, student characteristics, etc. Taking into account this context, the teaching evaluation must be addressed as a complex task (Loor Gallegos, Intriago & Guillén, 2017).

As we have remarked previously, it is usual to use questionnaires passed to students in order to gather their opinion regarding several teaching characteristics from their lecturers (Referencias). In fact, the student opinion questionnaire was considered the most empirical-based strategy for high school evaluation (McKeachie, 1996).

Although there are numerous instruments for teaching evaluations (e.g. SET) many universities develop their own instruments for teaching evaluation (Gravestock & Gregor- Greenleaf, 2008). It is remarkable that University Quality Units have a huge effort to improve teaching evaluation. However, the majority of them have been limited to change the questionnaire only. This is not the way to boost the needed transformation that teaching evaluation requires (Referencias).

In sum, although the opinion student questionnaires have been considered obsolete (Aquino, Garza, Minami, & Fabila, 2006), more than a few University Evaluation Units keep using them as the only instrument to the teaching evaluation. As consequence, it is evident a lack of contextualization in teaching evaluation regarding subjects, school, students, and lecturers features.

The University of Málaga is an example of those where the teaching evaluation is based on a questionnaire almost entirely. Therefore, the previous problems commented on are reproduced here. In order to elaborate a more contextualized alternative, a team of lecturers from the University of Málaga developed an educational innovation project whose objects were the following:

- Put forward a proposal of more contextualized teaching evaluation, arising from debates and analysis by stakeholders.
- This proposal had to comply with using more than one data-gathering instrument, taking into consideration several data sources and applying several analysis techniques.
- To apply it into subjects, fitting it to the reality of those.

To reach all these aims, the project was divided into three phases:

- Phase A. It consists of setting up a debate forum has been set up. This forum is conformed of lecturers, students, and external teaching evaluation experts. This forum has the aim of analyzing different alternatives for teaching evaluation, making a decision about what will be developed. In this sense, the forum has to take into account the previous criteria for any alternatives: be more flexible, fitting, and contextualized.

- Phase B. Training the participants in this procedure.
- Phase C. To applicate this new procedure of teaching evaluation. It will be done during classes period. Because of the University of Malaga classes are divided into two semesters, this phase will be developed only into one of them.

The theory of change (Rogers, 2014) could be summarized as follows. Initially, the teaching evaluation at the University of Málaga is based on a questionnaire applied to students. It does not take into consideration the reality of the classroom: differences between subjects (content, semester, needed resources, etc.), students features (course, age, learning styles, etc.), grade characteristics, etc. In this project, there are a group of XX lecturers and XX students working on it for two years (since the project was approved in November of 2019). The process of evaluation is supported by the impact evaluation approach (Gertlerd, Martínez, Premand, Rawilings & Vermeersch, 2017). During the project process, there are developing periodical meetings where are faced the topics of interest. The first phase of the project involves debates regarding what new evaluation methodology select. After the decision is made, the methodology will be applied for six months by part of the project members. The third phase involves the analysis and reporting. Besides, the evaluation is considered as a transversal phase. As indicators during the process, will be taken the number of meetings (one every three months at least), the number of attendees members (90% of members at least) and the number of subjects evaluated with the new system (80% of subjects involved in the project al least). Eventually, the project will have reached a teaching evaluation alternative and it will be considered more contextualized and flexible than the current one, satisfying the weakness of the current procedure. In order to evaluate this outcome, the opinion and consideration from the project members will be taken into account, using minutes documental evidence for. Later, it is expected to receive requested from other lecturers and university staff in order to generalize the system, although not before one year. An indicator of this could be the number of requests and what university department.

Into the Theory of Change, meetings and debates are coherent with focus group methodology. This approach is being used for a long time, demonstrating to be really useful in social researching (Kruger, 2005). On the other, this project has three main threats: a possible lack of commitment by participants, and the impossibility of developing by any contextual circumstances (e.g. covid and the interruption of classes) and finally, that the project is less efficient than expected (fig. 1).

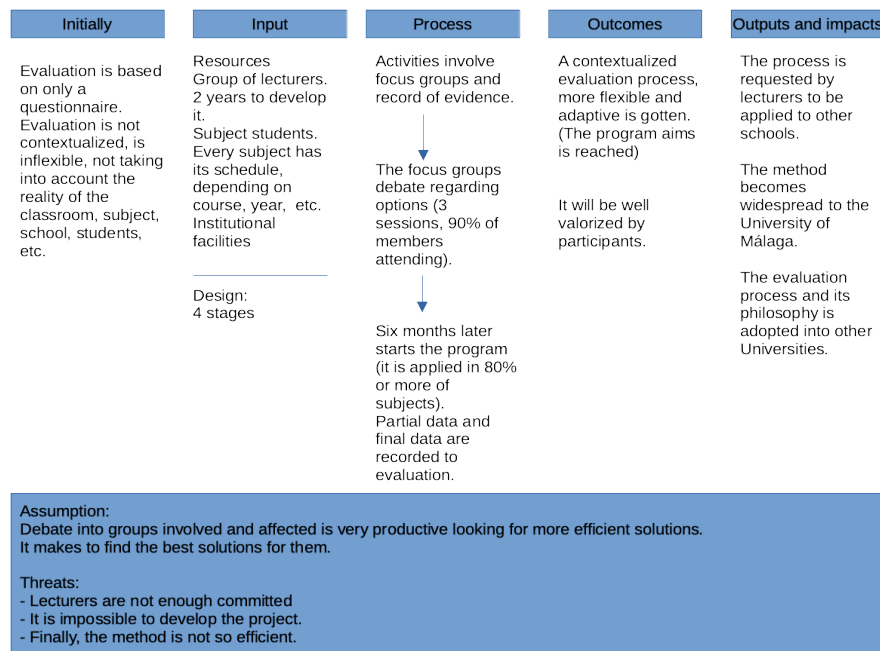


Figure 1: The causal chain project

On the other hand, the project has included the evaluation of itself as a transversal process. The aim of this evaluation is to gather enough evidence regarding the educational innovation project development. In fact, a formative evaluation is proposed, implying a continuous monitorization of it, allowing to reorientate the action depending on the follow-up results. The aim of this article is to register the evaluation protocol that will be developed and end up after the project will be done.

## Method

### Design and key questions

The evaluation is being developed according to the contribution analysis approach (Mayne, 2008) basing on the Theory of Change of the project. Regarding the scope, the evaluation is focused on the degree of compliance with the project targets. That is:

- What extent the project has found an alternative teaching evaluation process more contextualized and flexible than the current process at the University of Málaga.
- What extent it is from the lecturer and students debate.
- What extent it uses various gathering data instruments and different analysis techniques.
- How useful it is for lecturers, students, and for the institution indeed.

In a coherent way, the purpose of the evaluation is to analyze the goodness of the project, its usefulness, and the degree of compliance of its goals. In this sense, the initially intended evaluation users and stakeholders are:

- The project team project (see annex): the project coordinator, lecturers and collaborators.
- The other University of Málaga lecturers.
- The University of Málaga quality department.

The results from the evaluation will be useful for the project coordinators to know what extent the partial results will be reaching, monitoring the developing, making decisions about changes or adaptations if need, and analyzing the outcomes, the degree of compliance, fails and success, and planning new ways of continuity. Another highlight consequence is the chance to export this new methodology of teaching evaluation to other universities. In the same way, the evaluation could be useful for lecturers to change their perception about how useful the teaching evaluation could become.

Taking into account the scope of this evaluation, the main key questions proposed are the following:

- Is the project relevant to current university needs?
- What is the project design quality?
- What are the barriers to reach the project aims?
- How valuable will be the results to stakeholders?
- Does the project produce the intended results in the short, medium and long term?
- If so, for whom, to what extent and in what circumstances?
- What unintended results – positive and negative – does the intervention produce?
- If so, how do these occur?
- What extent are the project using the available resources to achieve the best results to participants and university community?

In accordance with OECD-DAC (1991, 2008) this evaluation observes the following principles:

- Impartiality and independence. In order to contribute to the credibility of evaluation and avoiding bias in findings.
- Credibility. To ensure transparency, the evaluation will be as open as possible with findings made widely available.
- Usefulness. The effort of the evaluation team is targeted to reach relevant and useful results for whole stakeholders.
- Collaborative. All participating parties will be involved in the evaluation process.

## Indicators and instruments

Taking into consideration the Theory of Change of this project, the indicator to monitor its development are:

- Number of meetings. They will be one per quarter. Besides, the project designers set that meeting will have 90% of attendees at least.
- At least 80% of subjects by lecturers involved in the project will be evaluated with the new method
- The assessment of the whole project by participants.
- That the new method became requested by other lecturers or university staff in a time period upper one year.

Minutes and documents from meetings will be taking into consideration to get data for indicators. At the same time, other instruments could be used, such as interviews or scales, if need.

Another important element is the objectivity of the project evaluation process. In this sense, it will be formed a group of external experts. The role of this will be to analyze the evaluation and inform respect the validity, utility, and make a collective and consensual judgement regarding the evaluation.

As it could be not otherwise, data and information will be collected with the express permission of participants. The evaluation data will be stored and maintained by the evaluation team coordination following the current regulations about personal data escrow. The data will be used only for purposes set out in the

project, that includes academical purposes. In this regard, data from evaluation could be used in academical meetings, scientific workshops, academical papers, and other dissemination academical and scientific methods, always ensuring anonymity.

### **Roles and responsibilities in the evaluation**

The evaluation is the responsibility of all member of the project (see annexe) where the coordinators are the signer of this article. The evaluation data will be collected by the team members, although, people trained for that purpose will be enrolled if necessary.

After analysing data, the reports will be written by coordinators. They will be turned into public by the coordinators, in several ways: the project blog, specific brief report for mass-media, University of Málaga Education School social networks, meetings, etc.

Eventually, any stakeholders interested in the evaluation and their results can contact with the coordinators in order to ask for information about.

### **Plan and time**

The project was launched throughout the 2019-20 academic year. Due to the Covid situation, its initial plan was delayed for a semester. In the first semester of the 2020-21 academic year, group work is carried out to define the new teaching evaluation methodology. During the second semester of the 2020-21 academic year (January to June 2021) the application will be carried out in the subjects that are available, depending on the academic situation. For the second half of the first semester of the academic year 2021-22, the final results of the evaluation are expected.

### **Conclusions**

We live at a turning of the teaching paradigm, mainly in Higher Education. During the last months, lecturers have been dealing with social demands from institutions, as well as syllabus and technology challenges along the pandemia. In this vein, it is a need to think about how to face so accelerate changing avoiding the reductionism and teacher's malaise either. We observe astonished how many researching proposals reach our emails, besides assessments and educational evaluation in pandemia time based only on questionnaires. Having said that, evaluations based on questionnaires can not become the only method to embed improvements or making decisions regarding lecturer careers.

Teaching evaluation is a powerful key for mediation and awareness into the Educational System. In this project, using the Theory of Change as a referent, we are conscious about how important the impact of this evaluation approach could have, mainly in the case of accountability and public scrutiny, among others. The teaching evaluation quality is used as criteria to facilitate, or not, the promotion into the teaching career, or, to analyze critically the lecturers' potentialities and weaknesses themselves.

Using the teaching evaluation in different areas, for different aims, including monetary incentives, or highlighting social recognition and status could generate suspicion, distrust, and misunderstanding among lecturers. In this sense, agencies, public administration, managers, so on, are really concerned and bet for a teaching evaluation of quality as an indisputable factor in the educational system warranty.

In this sense, not only the evaluative process control is externalized at companies and private or independent institutions, but we can discover models encouraging student participation to assess the teaching activity too, filling any kind of questionnaires, and appraisal scales. Although we do not rule out these instruments and devices, this project of innovation assumes the relevance of the self-evaluation, internal audit, and self-critic from the group itself into a democratic framework, looking for sustainable alternatives, more empathic,

and with more projection, as intra as inter institutions. Evenly, it is highlighted that teaching quality evaluation needs to be focused on specific projects, initiatives, or actions and not only on merely individual or comparative factors. Besides, in this case, the appraisal is not from the final result of a traditional questionnaire, but it is used inclusive evaluative designs which let analyze more coherent and balanced project developments, at the same time that causal attribution is sought in a cooperative way.

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## **Annex**

### **The project member**

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Dolores Casquero

Eduardo Elósegui

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María J. Luque

Esther Mena

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Eugenia Fdz.

Francisco J. García

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### **Subjects**

Aprender y enseñar en la Universidad. 60 alumnos.

Bases metodológicas de la investigación educativa. 60 alumnos.

Diagnóstico en Educación. 60 alumnos.

Didáctica. 60 alumnos.

Formación y desarrollo profesional. 60 alumnos.

Gestión y liderazgo pedagógico en las organizaciones. 60 alumnos.

Métodos de investigación en Educación. 60 alumnos.

Orientación profesional. 60 alumnos.

Orientación educativa. 60 alumnos.

Programas de orientación personal y profesional. 60 alumnos.

Técnicas e instrumentos de diagnóstico. 60 alumnos.

Teoría de la Educación. 60 alumnos.



Recursos didácticos y tecnológicos en Educación. 60 alumnos.

Gestión y control de la calidad en las organizaciones. 60 alumnos.

Sociología de la Educación. 60 alumnos.