

QUALITY ASSURANCE AT SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY

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Abstract

In the recent years the profile of higher education is changing with the mission of universities which has developed and shifted from teaching to learning. For many universities Quality Assurance is becoming a key priority. European Pilot Project for Evaluating Quality in higher Education from 1995 and Council Recommendations of 1998 state: "Member states are recommended to take follow up measures to enable higher education institutions to implement their plans for quality improvement, which may be the result of a quality assessment procedure". By 2003, almost every European country had implemented quality assurance program and by 2010 very few countries in the world did not answer positively to this requirement in education. However, in most of the higher education institutions the idea of quality assurance has provoked anxiety and disagreement.

The aim of this research is to present quality culture and quality assurance process in the South East European University in Tetovo. This University was established in 2001, and in 2012 was ranked as the second university in the Republic of Macedonia. According to The Bologna Guidelines and Standards (2007) 'teachers are the single most important learning resource available to most students', institutions should ensure that academic staff are 'qualified and competent'. With regard to the quality of learning and teaching, SEE University applies three instruments: Student Evaluation, Class Observation and annual staff evaluation. These three instruments serve as a valuable source in the process of academic promotion.

Key words: higher education, quality, observation, teaching, learning

Introduction

South East European University is located in Tetovo, Republic of Macedonia. It was established in October 2001. SEEU is a recognized and accredited autonomous higher education institution which was founded by an agreement between international contributors, the government of the Republic of Macedonia and the local intellectual community. Its initial aim was to offer Albanian population in Macedonia to take part in institutionalized higher education system in their mother tongue, however, this University was open to all.

In the first national ranking of universities in the Republic of Macedonia, in 2012, SEEU was ranked second out of nineteen higher education institutions according to a ranking system conducted by the Shanghai Jiao Tong University in collaboration with the country's Ministry of Education and Science. This ranking was motivating for SEEU's objective of following quality and equal opportunities in higher education. SEEU today concentrates on offering opportunities in high quality research in three languages Albanian, Macedonian and English.

Since quality is at the heart of every process that the University assumes, SEEU is developing a Quality culture by working on both quality assurance and quality management. The University makes every effort for the highest quality in all the faculties and considers quality improvement as collective as well as individual duty.

Quality Assurance

Quality assurance in university level has been adopted by universities around the world and is widely recognized as a fundamental component of every practical educational system.

In developing the new Quality Assurance Framework for higher education, South East European University has shown significant leadership and dedication to cultivating a culture of quality in education. With the implementation of the Framework, South East European University has placed itself in the mainstream of quality assurance in national and international level. 'Quality assurance focuses on academic matters and teaching and learning and links closely with those

services which directly support students, such as the Library, Student Services and Career Center'. (Quality office, SEEU).

To ensure quality, there are implemented active instruments and procedures as: the annual learning and teaching class observation for academic staff, students evaluation survey and individual staff evaluation process.

1. Class Observation

One of the instruments that has been implemented in this university since the academic year 2007/08 is class observation. There is a team of observers in each faculty who observe at least five classes in their faculty per semester, as well as the central observation team who observe classes in the other faculties. At the beginning of each semester the quality office provides the team of observers the following documents required for a proper and successful process:

- 1.The Learning and Teaching Observation Scheme
- 2.Confirmation of Request Form - *to confirm dates of observation in advance*
- 3.Lesson Plan
- 4.Characteristic of Excellence- *to note advice about good practice*
- 5.Observer Feedback Report Form - *to give constructive, detailed feedback to the teacher*
- 6.Co-observation and Support Feedback Form - *written by central observers*
- 7.Use of Language in Providing Feedback - *to confirm objective characteristics of the judgments*
- 8.Teacher Self-Evaluation Form - *to analyze your own performance after the observed class*

There are three stages of class observation procedure:

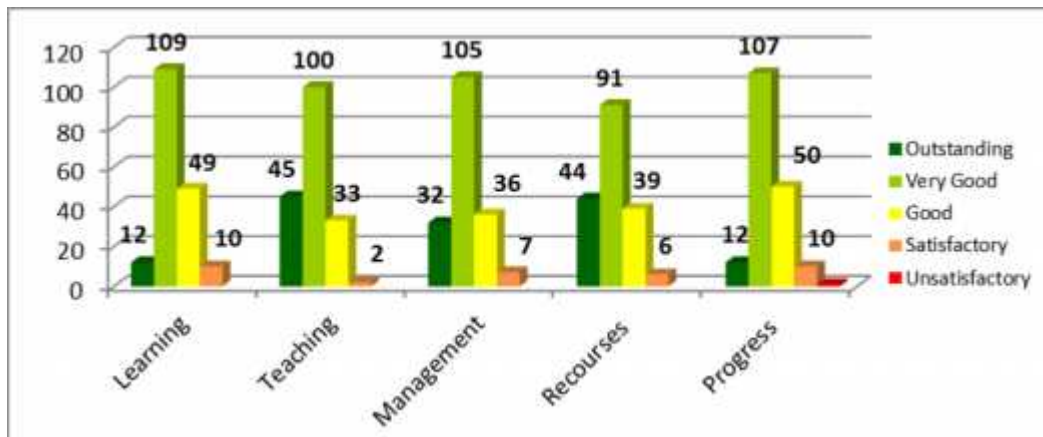
- pre-observation, where the observer and the observed teacher meet to discuss the lesson plan, syllabus and other additional material for the observed class.

-class observation, where the observer and co-observer visit a class and stay for 50 min.

-post observation, where again the observer meets the observed teacher to discuss the feedback of the observed class.

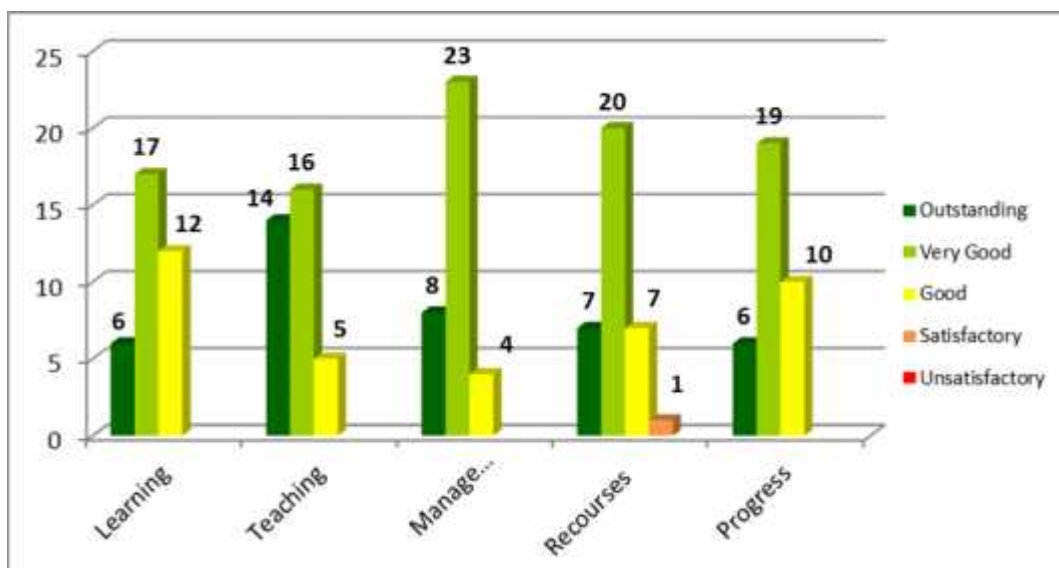
With the process of observation, the observers have separate feedback forms for the observer and the co-observer, where they have to pay attention to five components: learning, teaching, class management, resources and the progress.

After each Academic year, the Quality office gives a detailed report about the process in University level expanding it to each faculty separately. Here are two illustrations of these reports from the academic year 2011/12.



SEE University Learning and Teaching Profile 2011-12

(Valid observations = 184 minus 2 reports not received and 1 not valid, 1 observer not present at the observation = 180)



Learning and Teaching Profile 2011-12, Faculty of Languages, Cultures and Communication (total observations with data=35)

2. Student evaluation survey

The second active instrument to ensure quality in South East European University is students evaluation survey. As with the observation process, this instrument is implemented each semester and all the students have to give answers to the questions that are divided into four sections: questions for the course, the teacher, general questions and questions for the students.

- Here is one of the questions for the course:

1. The level of the course was:

- A) excellent
- B) about right
- C) too complex and high level
- D) too basic and low level
- E) no comment

- Questions for the teacher:

1. The usage of teaching methods and techniques by the teacher was:

- A) very good/excellent
- B) good/very good
- C) sufficient
- D) insufficient
- E) no comment

- General questions:

1. Which of the components listed below would most improve the quality of the course?

- A) suitability of the classroom
- B) equipment and resources in the classroom
- C) different scheduling
- D) the balance of lectures and practical hours
- E) number of students in the class

- Questions for the students:

1. The amount of time I studied outside the class was:

- A) more than 8 hours a week
- B) between 3 and 8 hours a week
- C) less than 3 hours a week
- D) I have not studied outside the class
- E) no comment

After each semester, all the teaching staff is informed with a statistical interpretation of the results from the student's evaluation report. Here is presented sample of this report:

		Numbers					Percentage					Average Grade		
		A	B	C	D	E	A%	B%	C%	D%	E%	Individual	Faculty	SEEU
1.	The level of the course was:	9	5	0	0	0	64.29%	35.71%	0%	0%	0%	3.64	3.50	3.43

3. Individual staff evaluation process

This process aims to evaluate individual staff performance on an annual basis and to recognize achievement. Each staff member should summarize the achievements during the last academic year as well focus on future plans and aims for further improvement and development. The Individual Staff Evaluation form is divided into four sections: Section A, which needs to be completed by the member of staff; Section B, completed by the dean; Section C, completed by the rector and finally, Section D which is completed by the University Board. Each staff member completes Section A where there are included questions about: teaching duties, details of research carried out during the year, details of any administrative or management duties carried out during the year, details of any conferences or training attended, any special duty or responsibility undertaken in the service of the University, summary of your key achievements during the year.

Completed forms and any supporting evidence are kept in a dossier for each member of staff by the Human Resource Office. This is available for individual members of staff to see, on request, according to data protection guidelines. The aim of these procedures is to support continuous development and provide information for the processes of contract renewal and promotion.

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