

Reflecting between evaluation and teaching practice. Re-visions and challenges**Reflexionando entre la evaluación y la práctica docente. Re-visiones y retos**

MARTÍ-REYES, Mireya†* & CERVERA-DELGADO, Cirila

*Universidad de Guanajuato, Department of Education, Mexico.*ID 1st Author: *Mireya, Martí-Reyes* / **ORC ID:** 0000-0001-8959-7541, **CVU CONACYT ID:** 21877ID 1st Co-author: *Cirila, Cervera-Delgado* / **ORC ID:** 0000-0001-8036-838X, **CVU CONACYT ID:** 202496**DOI:** 10.35429/JUM.2021.13.5.21.29

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Abstract

The evaluation and the teaching practice are subjects of great importance in the educational field, and objects of study of research centers and higher education institutions. In this sense, this article shows some reflections as a product of the first phase of research, currently under development, about teacher evaluation in higher education, closely linked to the practices developed by academic staff at this level. educational. The first point that we present is made up of the latest reforms to Article 3 of the Constitution, the maximum normative reference for education in Mexico. Next, a brief overview of the recent history of the evaluation of education is made and its relationship with the much-touted quality is analyzed. A third section is made up of a series of discussions and analysis on teacher evaluation, opening the debate about whether it is worth reconsidering the concept, given that the original purpose of this has been perverted, as we establish in the following subtopic. The conclusive lines call for the urgency of recovering the essence of evaluation, as a means for the improvement and transformation of ourselves, as educators, and of our world, based on our contexts. We accept that if, as a result of the improvement of our practices, we achieve a salary or ladder promotion, welcome; but we make a call to uphold the original meaning of the evaluation.

Teacher evaluation, Teaching practice, Higher Education**Resumen**

La evaluación y la práctica docente son temas de gran trascendencia en el ámbito educativo, y objetos de estudio de centros de investigación e instituciones de educación superior. En este sentido, en el presente artículo se muestran algunas reflexiones como producto de la primera fase de una investigación, actualmente en desarrollo, en torno a la evaluación docente en la educación superior, estrechamente vinculadas a las prácticas que desarrolla el personal académico en este nivel educativo. El primer punto que presentamos lo constituyen las últimas reformas al artículo 3º Constitucional, máximo referente normativo de la educación en México. En seguida, se hace un somero recorrido por la historia -reciente- de la evaluación de la educación y se analiza su relación con la tan traída calidad. Un tercer apartado queda conformado por una serie de discusiones y análisis sobre la evaluación docente, abriendo el debate acerca de si vale la pena reconsiderar el concepto, dado que el original fin de esta se ha pervertido, como lo establecemos en el subtema siguiente. Las líneas conclusivas llaman a la urgencia de recuperar la esencia de la evaluación, como medio para la mejora y la transformación nuestra, como educadores, y de nuestro mundo, a partir de nuestros contextos. Aceptamos que si, como producto de la superación de nuestras prácticas, logramos un ascenso salarial o escalafonario, bienvenida; pero hacemos un llamado a sostener el sentido original de la evaluación.

Evaluación docente, Práctica docente, Educación Superior

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† Researcher contributing as first author.

Introduction

Just as it is impossible to think about education in a neutral way, it is equally impossible to think of a neutral evaluation of it.

[...] If from a progressive point of view, educational practice should be, coherently, a truth-revealing and non-concealing doing, from a reactionary point of view it is not always.

Paulo Freire

To refer to the evaluation in Mexico is to address a "hot" topic, of great importance and current relevance. The first adjective, although perhaps not the most appropriate -from an academic and professional point of view-, does respond to the "heat" that has awakened (and continues to awaken), both in a large part of the teaching profession, at all levels of the National educative system; in parents (divided between annoyance because their children, at certain times, stopped receiving classes, and concern about the results of standardized tests and learning assessments, in general); and, above all, in the authorities of the Ministry of Public Education (SEP), of the defunct National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE) and the current National System for Continuous Improvement of Education, in charge of "conducting studies, research specialized and diagnostic, formative and comprehensive evaluations of the National Educational System" (section IX, subsection a of Article 3 of the Constitution). These organizations, despite being directly linked to the evaluation (and demonstrating the importance it has been given), have not been able to establish an entity that is known and recognized by all the actors involved.

This importance of evaluation, in the case of academic staff, is related to teaching practice, another highly relevant concept that constitutes the object of the teaching evaluation applied to teachers, in this case, higher education teachers by the students. This link can be appreciated in what Balderas and Ochoa (2021) express: "teacher evaluation is part of different educational models that, due to their characteristics, become a way to identify weaknesses and strengths related to teaching practice" (p. 109).

In the latest amendment to Article 3 of the Constitution, dedicated to education in Mexico (May 15, 2019), it is established that "male and female teachers are fundamental agents of the educational process and, therefore, their contribution to the social transformation is recognized". Such recognition implies that the work of the teachers is transcendent to achieve the aims of education and to comply with the criterion that: "it will be of excellence, understood as the constant comprehensive improvement that promotes the maximum achievement of student learning, for the development of their critical thinking and the strengthening of ties between the school and the community" (section II, item i).

However, the recognition of the importance of evaluation, as a means to achieve excellence and continuous improvement in education, does not mean that all obstacles have been overcome, much less that work is done with the same intensity and efficiency. with all "evaluable" objects and subjects. Therefore, considering the complexity and breadth of the subject, the objective of this article is to reflect on the evaluation and teaching practice in higher education and, to facilitate its understanding, we will start from a review of some of its milestones, with a historical perspective.

From the methodological point of view, in the first phase of the project (which will be explained mainly in this text), a documentary research was carried out, together with the traditional method of analysis and synthesis, as well as an investigation with a qualitative approach. On the other hand, in the development of the article, some reflections about the concepts addressed, their complexity and how the purposes of the evaluation have been distorted to it.

Finally, and, by way of conclusions, the need to reassess and recover the original meaning of the evaluation is based, the aim of continuous improvement, in line with the ideals set forth in the Political Constitution of the United Mexican States, and the hope of that, despite the fact that there is still a long way to go, the current stage in which we are living allows us to trust that the evaluation will overcome the new challenges and will become a function of a better education, as the Mexican people deserve.

Methodology

The methodological approach of this project has been based on a mixed investigation, with emphasis on a qualitative methodology, conceived from a holistic perspective that is essentially oriented to people in specific settings and is viewed as a whole and not in a fragmented way considering that "in qualitative research one speaks of the need to achieve and ensure obtaining the real and true situation of the people being investigated" (Álvarez-Gayou, 2006, p.31).

On the other hand, a characteristic of educational research is its flexibility since both the questions that are taken as a starting point and the data collection strategies are established and consolidated in the course of the study. Something very significant is that researcher's approach and learn from people in their context, they try to identify with these people, to be understanding, respectful and, in essence, humanists (Álvarez-Gayou, 2006).

In particular, for the first phase of the development of this project (which is reported in this article), the documentary research method was used, understood as the construction of knowledge from sources, as "a way of ensuring the tradition of original thought, and bring it to the present with a hermeneutical reading that favors discussion by making new contributions to scientific development" (Gómez, 2011, p. 230). In recent times, the return to the sources, to the documents that give an account of the original thought or proposals has become a necessity, which allows dialogue with the authors and the construction of new knowledge from the expression, the logic and the arguments offered by reality itself.

Due to the breadth and complexity of the problem in question, the search for documents was oriented, not only to evaluation in general and teacher evaluation in particular, but also to other related and no less important issues such as: teaching practices, teaching practices educational strategies, didactic strategies, curricular evaluation and Information and Communication Technologies (ICT), especially in these times of the Covid-19 pandemic.

For the research, other classical methods such as analysis and synthesis were considered and two more phases were established: The second, for which a questionnaire with multiple-choice questions, mostly, and some open questions, which is in the process of validation was developed. And, the third phase, with interviews with teachers, in order to deepen their considerations regarding evaluation and teaching practices.

Re-visions around the evaluation and quality of education

The purpose is to strengthen the evaluation as an instrument for accountability that allows to improve objectively and achieve the educational quality that the country needs and deserves.

Alliance for the Quality of Education (2008).

In Mexico, many agree that evaluation policies are recent. In this development, four periods are distinguished:

1st - Starting in the 1970s, when the first learning evaluations were carried out in primary education. At that time, higher education still depended on the SEP, because, despite the fact that some organizations such as the National Association of Higher Education Institutions (ANUIES) already existed, it was until 1980 that this educational level was achieved, by constitutional decree, it will reach its autonomy. As stated in the Explanatory Memorandum of said decree: "To invoke university autonomy is to point out the possibility that these communities have had for 50 years at the national level to guarantee higher education and offer it within the reach of the people" (DOF, Monday June 9, 1980).

With the essential purpose of promoting evaluation, as a means of improving education, various programs and organizations were established for this purpose. Thus, in 1984 the National System of Researchers was created, the first program aimed at evaluating one of the essential functions of the higher level: research, and the products generated by its development.

2nd - In the 1990s, a broad set of evaluation instruments was implemented with various objectives, among them: "the allocation of incentives to teachers". From this perspective, the Teaching Performance Scholarship Program (1990) emerged, which constitutes the antecedent of the Teaching Personnel Performance Incentive Program (ESDEPED), one of the evaluation systems for higher education teachers that remains in force.

Another important event, and directly related to the Scholarship Program, was the development of the Teaching Career Program in 1994 because both linked the evaluation to economic benefits or salary compensations.

3rd - In 2001, during the government of Vicente Fox, a strategic role was given to the evaluation of education. The following year the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education (INEE) was created, an organization that in 2013, reformed and with new powers (in accordance with the provisions of the amendment to Article 3 of the Constitution of that year, became an autonomous body, with its own patrimony and in charge of coordinating the National Educational Evaluation System), in order to promote the evaluation of the professional teaching service, for the admission, permanence, promotion and recognition of teachers and, in general, of the Mexican Educational System.

4th - With the latest amendment to Article 3 (May 15, 2019) the conception of education in the country has changed. The previous emphases were excluded: on teacher evaluation (considering that it was due more to a labor reform than educational and that the rights of female teachers and male were violated) and on quality, which was eliminated from the text of the Magna Carta. and it was replaced by excellence and continuous improvement. The foregoing is explained in the National Development Plan 2019-2024: "in the past six-year term a misnamed educational reform was carried out, which was actually a labor counter-reform, contrary to the labor rights of teachers" (DOF: 12/07 / 2019).

From the above, it follows that academics, as "evaluable" subjects, still have the responsibility of constantly evaluating how their performance is, and how they are contributing to the fulfillment of the Institutional Mission and Vision and to the achievement of the objective supreme of raising the quality of education.

From this perspective, higher education professors are subjected (invited in the official discourse) to various evaluations, both external and internal. Among the latter, the processes of teacher evaluation and the awarding of categories stand out, as well as the Program of Incentives to the Performance of Teaching Personnel (ESDEPED), which served as the basis for presenting advances in the research project that we are developing.

Reflections on evaluation and teaching practice: rethinking the concepts

If you think about the quality of education in a country, it is inevitable to do so in relation to the quality of its teaching staff. Hence the priority that most educational reforms grants to the strengthening of the teaching profession.

Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI), 2010

Undoubtedly, in the educational field there is consensus regarding the importance of teachers, educators or professors (terms identified as synonyms in the General Law of Education of Mexico), in the teaching and learning processes. And, in this same sense, the need to evaluate, to assess, the ability to teach (or, in recent times, the teaching skills to "make" students learn) is recognized, together with the results of what has been learned by students, to the appreciation of how "prepared they are for life" - considering one of the many pedagogical ideas of José Martí: "Since you live, it is fair that where you teach, you teach to know life" (1999, p.50) -, and what has been the participation of academic staff in this "preparation" and in the quality of this learning.

Generally, "quality evaluation" refers to educational programs and not strictly to the quality of learning, to the quality of knowledge acquired by students and even less, to the quality of teaching practices and performance of teachers as "mediators" in the acquisition of this knowledge and, furthermore, in the achievement of a "comprehensive training", so repeated in institutional missions and in political discourse, and so unreal and "liquid" (following the Zigmunt Bauman's metaphor) in educational practice.

However, this does not mean that teachers are not evaluated, but rather that it is very difficult to "measure" the results of the quality of their training action. Therefore, it is necessary to state that teachers in Mexico are subjected to internal evaluations - or those carried out by the Higher Education Institutions (IES) themselves - and external evaluations in which organizations and programs established for this purpose such as PRODEP (Programa for the Professional Development of Teachers for the higher type, formerly PROMEP, promoted by the Ministry of Public Education) and the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACyT) through the National System of Researchers (SNI).

Although in the official discourse both types of evaluations and, in general, all those that are carried out, have the objective of "contributing to improve the Quality of education", (article 7 of the Law of the National Institute for the Evaluation of Education, LINEE), and special emphasis has been made: previously, on the 2013-2018 National Development Plan through Goal III "Mexico with Quality Education" which, within the Lines of Action, "Strategy 3.1.1. Establishing a system of teacher professionalization that promotes the training, selection, updating and evaluation of teaching staff and technical-pedagogical support" proposes "stimulating institutional programs to improve teaching staff, teaching performance and research [...] "(underlined is ours), in practice they are more directly connected, on the one hand: to the indicators considered as the main international rankings, fundamentally related to the academic production of teachers and researchers in higher education; and, on the other hand, to incentive systems for teachers, with different levels, linked to economic benefits or salary compensation, according to the results of the evaluations carried out.

It should be noted that the new General Education Law, indirectly, considers evaluating, through the Planning and Evaluation Committees of each School Technical Council, "which will be in charge of formulating a continuous improvement program that contemplates, an integral manner, [...] training and teaching practices" (Article 109).

With regard to teaching practice (without the intention of delving into this article and, only to define it, due to its relationship with evaluation), it constitutes a highly complex concept, fundamentally because it is linked to people who have a pedagogical relationship: some in function of teaching others identified as "learners", in a classroom context or outside of it, although, in reality, everyone learns since it is a practice that exists only in relation to the practice of students.

For some researchers, teaching practice refers to a set of actions, facts or events that are carried out in interaction with another set of similar events among which what is established as "educational" occurs. However, not all teaching practices meet the original objective or can be considered as educational because they lack the necessary involvement of the subjects (or one of them), the required voluntary interaction between them, or the interweaving and disarticulation of some of the components that are needed to achieve their "educativity" (Galván, Ibarra, van Dijk & Lozano, 2016).

Other scholars start from the idea that one should not speak of educational practice but rather of educational practices (plural), although they coincide in its conception as a set of actions and operations articulated in a certain way, characterized in that it is deployed intentionally (intentionality), systematic (objectivity) and continuous. Likewise, it is necessary to consider the degree of awareness of these actions, especially if they are to be properly educational (Bazdresh, 2000).

Regarding the components of these practices, six sets of constituent elements are conceived:

The context (social, historical, cultural) of the practice; the subjectivity of the participants (students, teachers, directors, managers, authorities, subordinates); the intersubjectivity between the participants, the content in question (especially its scientific or technical rationality); the model or form and articulated situation used consciously or not by the teacher (director, supervisor ...) to present the content, and the characteristics of the cognitive process (or to understand) actually built in the pedagogical relationship (Bazdresh, 2000, p. 48).

On the other hand, the relativity of the very concept of quality of education must also be considered, taking into account the proposals of great pedagogues such as Paulo Freire, who dedicated several of his works to these aspects of "education and quality":

Precisely because there is no substantive quality [...], a quality of which it is said: this is quality, we have to approach the concept and inquire about what we are talking about. It is precisely then when we perceive that there are qualities and qualities [...], that is, value that we attribute to beings, to things, to educational practice (2001, pp. 46-47).

All this leads us to ask ourselves several questions and, above all, to question the real impact that these external evaluations have on teachers, and those carried out internally by the institutions, in raising quality.

Evaluation for improvement? Per-versions of the concept

Another line of our reflections is oriented towards IMPROVEMENT (thus, with capital letters) as the essential beginning and the last end of the evaluation. We consider this definition of evaluation as the most genuine and close to its essence. However, throughout its recent history, these laudable purposes have taken other directions. The original version has deviated, leading to what we consider to be some per-versions of the concept.

The first definition of evaluation as improvement can be synthesized in the position of Paulo Freire, for whom "The evaluation of practice is an important and indispensable factor for the training of the educator" (2005, p. 14).

From this initial synonymy, it was soon passed to evaluation as an instrument for salary improvement, one of the most heartfelt per-versions, and launched by neoliberal policies to make teachers' incomes competitive, granting rewards as they were. being the results of their evaluations. The truth is that the competitive salary was switched to competition - not always loyal - among the teaching community itself. The evaluation was distorted when it was associated with salary "benefits", and, even worse (in basic education), by not losing the level once reached, it could have stimulated the accommodation of some and demotivation in others.

Inevitably, the opposite result of gratification is the punishment (real or intangible) of evaluation. Thus, evaluation becomes synonymous with sanctioning, depriving, threatening (even losing one's job), if it is not presented, it is not approved, it is not improved. This is one of the per-versions that does not help to improve anything.

As regards higher education, the Teaching Personnel Performance Incentive Program (ESDEPED) has become an equally "perverse" mechanism. There, the competition seems to be from the teachers with the Institution, which seeks to take care of the never enough economic resources and designs increasingly higher indicators to obtain the levels of stimulus. In most institutions of higher education (IHE), the evaluation is carried out annually, and in each one it is possible to participate, improve, or lose the level obtained in the previous time. Every year, then, an evaluation must be presented, and the bonuses obtained are not integrated into the salary, as is the case in basic education.

Precisely in higher education, another of the per-versions of evaluation is to take it as competition between colleagues and peers. The end was very good: that those who evaluated had a perfect knowledge of the area; mistrust (surely arising from empirical indicators) has now led the invited evaluators to make a declaration of not having conflicts of interest with those evaluated.

Some lines for future conclusions and new challenges

Considering the great complexity of the evaluation and teaching practices, the diversity of constituent elements and of interactions with these and with other related aspects, the limitations that a very general study implies, based on a documentary review, must be recognized; and, in addition, it is worth mentioning that the practices refer primarily to the teaching part, which is more closely related to teaching, to the performance of the teachers in the classroom and in the school environment.

Among the challenges to be highlighted, it is urgent to recover the original meaning of evaluation as an assessment, as giving value. Perhaps for this, it is necessary to review the concepts, aims, means and techniques of educational evaluation in general and teacher evaluation specifically. As Popham (1990) advises: "Evaluating is an activity inherent to all intentional human activity, so it must be systematic and its objective is to determine the value of something."

Accepting and acting in accordance with the above implies reprogramming, rectifying, taking a qualitative leap that serves as a starting point for a new "re-valued assessment" by all the protagonists. It is to bestow a sense of far more scope than immediate results and ephemeral recognition. We can once again hear the educator of educators, Paulo Freire, when he said that evaluating is "verifying if the practice is leading us to the realization of the dream for which we are practicing" (2005, p.14).

Although, in theory, it is clear that "proposals to improve the situation of teachers must be based on contextual and comprehensive approaches, which take into account all the factors that contribute to facilitating the work of teachers" (OEI, 2010, 134), much remains to be done to recover the essence of the evaluation, which is IMPROVE; It is necessary to build and build that necessary, genuine, laudable and legitimate bridge between the evaluation and continuous improvement of people, performance, profession, and education. Because, finally, "You cannot improve the educational action of teachers without achieving, at the same time, higher levels of quality in the operation of schools" (OEI, 2010, 134).

As it corresponds to the evaluation of teaching performance, "it is about concentrating national efforts in achieving a profound educational transformation through which today's Mexicans take the destiny of the nation in their hands and achieve the realization for future generations of a Mexico that achieves what it proposes" (National Development Plan 2007-2012). It would be naive to expect that improved education will transform an entire social system as unequal as the Mexican one, but we agree that "[without education] this transformation will not occur" (Freire, 2005, p.59).

Thus, in that same dream and very hope of transforming the world, our world, educators are called to take evaluation as the tool to improve ourselves, day by day. If the results of these practices lead us to obtain a salary improvement, welcome; but we cannot lose ourselves in the belief that this (perverted) end of education is an end in itself. Education is much higher ideals and sights.

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