Impact Analysis of Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Methodology, Design and Results

Harald Scheuthle & Theodor Leiber
evalag (Evaluation Agency Baden-Württemberg), Mannheim, Germany

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Impact of external QA

- More than two decades of external QA
- EQA is expected to have an impact on study programmes and institutions
- HEIs complain about high evaluation workload and need effective and efficient QA procedures (e.g., massification; economy measures in HE; national and global competition)

- BUT: Only few (ex-post) impact analyses of EQA
  - No systematic simultaneous analyses
  - Questionnaires and interviews
  - Focus on institutional leadership
Why do we need impact analyses?

• Assessment **whether** EQA has an impact on HEIs
• Assessment **which** impact EQA has on HEIs
• Assessment whether impact is **intended or non-intended**
• Assessment **how** EQA impacts HEIs
• Assessment **which part** of an EQA has an impact

→ Insights for the strategic and systematic improvement of EQA procedures
→ Insights for new methods and instruments of QA agencies
# Expected impact of EQA

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>before</th>
<th>during</th>
<th>after</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>criteria</td>
<td>adjustment</td>
<td>reflection</td>
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<td>self-evaluation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>reflection</td>
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<td>exchange with peers</td>
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<td></td>
<td>reflection</td>
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<td>assessment report</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>reflection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>formal decision</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>adjustment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Methodological options for impact analysis

- Experimental design – repeatability
  - Unfeasible for impact analysis of QA in HEIs
- Control group design – define control system (with intervention vs. without intervention)
  - Unfeasible for impact analysis of QA in HEIs
- Before-after comparison design – compare system after intervention with system before intervention
- Ex-post analysis – gather information and assess system after QA procedures has ended
Social action model

EQA  ?  Institutional change

Preferences  Actions

Institution
Macro level

Actor
Micro level

Social action model based on Coleman’s boat (Coleman 1990)
Methodological elements of an impact analysis

• Before-after comparison design
  – Allows to analyse if and when an impact has been achieved

• Standardised surveys with different target groups (academic staff, students, QA staff)
  – Allows to analyse preferences, actions and institutional change

• In-depth interviews with key actors
  – Allows to analyse causal mechanisms

• Document analysis/observations
  – Allows to analyse actions and institutional change
IMPALA Project

• “Impact Analysis of External Quality Assurance Processes in Higher Education Institutions”
  http://www.evalag.de/impala

• Project funded by the European Commission in the Lifelong Learning Programme

• Eight main project partners: four agencies and four HEIs in four countries
  – Finland: FINEEC & Jyväskylä University of Applied Sciences
  – Germany: evalag & University of Stuttgart
  – Romania: ARACIS & Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest
  – Spain: AQU Catalunya & Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
IMPALA Project partners

- JAMK University of Applied Sciences
- FINEEC
- University of Stuttgart
- ARACIS
- Technical University of Civil Engineering Bucharest
- Universitat Autònoma de Barcelona
- AQU Catalunya
IMPALA research design

**EQA procedure**

**Baseline study**

Before procedure
- Online questionnaire
- In-depth interviews
- Document analysis/observations

**Midline study**

During procedure
- Online questionnaire
- In-depth interviews
- Document analysis/observations

**Endline study**

After procedure
- Online questionnaire
- In-depth interviews
- Document analysis/observations

Comparison of base-, mid- and endline study

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**IMPALA research design**

- **EQA criteria**
- **EQA procedure**
  - Interventions, e.g. self-assessment, site-visit, report

**Causal process for change**

- Change in preferences, actions and institutional change

**Status quo** before EQA

**Baseline study**

**Midline study**

**Endline study**

**Status after EQA**

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IMPALA objectives

• Design of a generic methodology for impact analysis, that can be applied by all agencies

• Application and test of the methodology in four case studies in the four partner HEIs
  – Different EQA procedures
  – Different national settings
IMPALA case studies

- Finland: international EURACE programme accreditation
- Germany: internal programme review process
- Romania: national institutional audit and programme accreditation
- Spain: national programme accreditation
IMPALA project status

• Methodology has been developed
• European conference seminar has been held
• Baseline study online questionnaire has been completed
  Midline study is expected for Summer 2015
• Two papers have been published
• Journal special issue is in preparation (“Impact Evaluation of QA in HE. Exploring Stakeholder Perspectives between Methodology, Policy and Practice”)
IMPALA preliminary results (base-line study)

• Online questionnaire asks for
  – Preferences (attitudes), actions and institional change (observations)
  – Observed change in the last year
  – Reasons for change
• Objective is to compare base-, mid-, and endline study
• Stakeholders asked
  – Students
  – Academic staff
  – QA staff
  – Leadership
IMPALA online questionnaire

- Questionnaire Items
  - Course type in study programme
  - QA instruments used in programme
  - Competence-oriented assessment
  - Discussions of study programme
  - Attitude towards internal QA
  - Attitude towards external QA
  - Perceived attitude of leadership towards QA
  - Observed impact and cost/benefit of QA

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IMPALA sample results

How often do teachers of your study programme meet in order to discuss the further development of the study programme?

- Less than once a year
- At least once a year
- At least once every three months

Have you in the last year seen a change with respect to the frequency of teachers' meetings for further developing the study programme?

- Yes, the meetings became more frequent
- No, no changes
- Yes, the meetings became less frequent

Who or what initiated the change?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Initiative</th>
<th>Frequency of responses</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>RO</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- students</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- teaching staff</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- HEI management</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External QA (e.g., accreditation)</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>Internal QA (e.g., surveys)</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Legal requirements</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>External Stakeholders</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ES</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>0</td>
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In general, what is your attitude towards external quality assurance and quality development in learning and teaching?

- Negative
- Neutral
- Positive

Has your attitude towards external quality assurance and quality development in learning and teaching changed in the last year?

- Yes, in a positive direction (more approval)
- No, no change in my attitude
- Yes, in a negative direction (less approval)

What has changed your attitude towards external quality assurance?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Frequency of responses</th>
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<th>ES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Internal procedures of quality assurance</td>
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<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>External procedures of quality assurance</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taking note of peer reports</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Do the procedures of quality assurance and quality development in learning and teaching which are carried out in your HEI, have effects which are observable for you?

- No
- Yes

In your view, have these effects changed in the last year?

- Yes, in a positive direction (increasing effectivity)
- No, no change
- Yes, in a negative direction (decreasing effectivity)
Conclusions

• Impact analysis (of QA in HE) is complex
• IMPALA methodology seems to be promising
• Baseline data of case studies demonstrate that
  – General attitudes towards EQA reported by stakeholders seem to be markedly different in different countries (e.g., more positive in Finland and Romania as compared to Germany and Spain)
  – (E)QA effects observed by stakeholders recently are not at all classified as negative
• Further research is necessary
• IMPALA project is continued

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