

# **Impact Evaluation of Quality Assurance in Higher Education. Theory, Methodology and Design**

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# Impact Evaluation of QA in HE: What You Have and What You Need

- **Two decades of QA in HE, still extending and intensifying**
- **QA is one of the pillars of the EHEA → systematic check of valuableness of QA important**
- **Various stakeholders of HEIs strive for research-informed quality policy and integrative strategic governance**

**“Causation is one of the most important and contentious issues in social science. Any aspiration for a better social world, whether they concern the alleviation of inequities or the promotion of wealth, must explicitly or implicitly rely on beliefs about the causes and effects of government policies, social institutions, norms, or other phenomena that fall within the purview of social science” (Steel 2011, p. 288).**

- In view of that, **something important largely missing:**  
**Methodologically more comprehensive and empirically more reliable knowledge about effects and mechanisms of action of QA measures**

# Impact Evaluation of QA in HE: What You Have and What You Need

- **What constitutes incompleteness of our understanding of QA in HE?**
  - **Systematic impact studies of QA in HE are rare** (field is “under-theorised and under-researched”)
  - **Spectrum of possible methodological options is not exploited:** previous impact analyses **restricted to *ex-post* scenarios** (mainly based on after-procedure judgements by selected informants and participants)
  - Experience of various **stakeholders not adequately captured** in impact studies so far, among them **students and teachers** (of particular, but not exclusive relevance in **learning and teaching**)

## Methodological Principles and Challenges

- Any impact evaluation should **identify (actual) effects of interventions (causes) applied with orientation towards goals (intended effects)**
  - Which effects should be achieved at which time by which intervention? By which ways might the interventions be effective, i.e., which causal (social) mechanisms are at play?
  - Which non-intended effects and which intended and non-intended side-effect(s) could occur? Which of these are positive or negative with respect to the overall goals of the intervention?
- **Four principles of theory-based impact evaluation**
  - Devising the Causal Network
  - Factual and Counterfactual Causal Analysis
  - Understanding the Context
  - Methodological Pluralism (mixed methods approach)

## Basic Methodological Dimensions

Practically **impossible** for impact analysis of (E)QA in HEIs

- **Experimental design** (i.e., repeatable ceteris-paribus interventions) – “ceteris-paribus” cannot be fulfilled
  - **Control group design (with-without comparison design)**  
– in practice, no control systems for HEIs available (e.g., high complexity; very specific, individual profiles)
- **No** (explicit systematic) **counterfactual** available (i.e., no answer to “What would have happened had the intervention not taken place”?)

## Basic Methodological Dimensions

Appropriate / to be used

- **BEFORE-AFTER COMPARISON DESIGN**

**Methods of impact analysis repeatedly applied** after certain developmental steps (**a.c.d.s.**), incl. **baseline** study

- **Ex-post analysis** – suffers, however, from memorisation problems and relegation to ex-post available data

# Basic Methodological Dimensions

## BEFORE-AFTER COMPARISON

### Assessments of QA effects by participants

- **Standardised** (online) **surveys** with **target groups** (e.g., individuals involved, staff, students etc.) – **complete acquisition** (c.a.)
- (**Intensive** in-depth) **Interviews** with **target groups** (e.g., representatives of the management, faculty etc.) – **c.a.**
- **Participant observation** (e.g., in status seminars, final presentations)
- **“Observations”** (in the broad sense) (e.g., informal background knowledge and conversations with involved individuals and groups)

# QUESTIONS – Impact Evaluation of QA and Improving Learning in Education

- How would you **define “cause” and “effect”** (applicable in social science settings)?
- What are **difficulties/obstacles of before-after comparisons**? How could they be managed?



# QUESTIONS – Impact Evaluation of QA and Improving Learning in Education

- What are relevant **dimensions, indicators, operational measures** of **quality** features in **L&T** that could/should be improved by (HEI-external or -internal) QA?
  - Which **impact of QA on improving-learning-in-education** would you be (most) interested in or could you imagine?
  - Could you formulate **impact survey questions** capturing this?
  - Could you hypothesise corresponding **causal social mechanisms**?

# QUESTIONS – Impact Evaluation of QA and Improving Learning in Education

- Do you see the relevance, need and prospects of **impact evaluations** in “**your area**”? Please explicate.
- **How** would you **apply the methodology** proposed?

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