

EVALUATION OF LEARNING OUTCOMES IN MASTERS DEGREE. THE PERCEPTION OF THE COORDINATORS

**Joaquín-Lorenzo Burguera, María-del-Henar Pérez-Herrero, Marta Virgós-Sánchez,
José Miguel Arias-Blanco, & Natalia Rodríguez-Muñiz**
Department of Education Sciences, University of Oviedo (Spain)

Abstract

One of the main challenges that university professors have to face is evaluating the students' learning outcomes. The aim of this research is to identify different elements of the evaluation practices of the university master's degree in Social and Legal Sciences at the University of Oviedo (Spain) from the point of view of the people responsible for coordination. The research has been proposed as a survey study, through an in-depth and semi-structured individual interview, carried out through the Teams platform with seven coordinators of four master's degrees in Education and three in Economics. The qualitative analysis of the responses linked to the category analyzed in this communication, "evaluation", has followed an inductive procedure. 280 discursive fragments have been analyzed, emerging eleven subcategories: technology, participation, satisfaction, feedback, teacher training, coherence, coordinator training, purpose, means, evaluation tasks and instruments and tools. The results report that there is a lack of student participation in the evaluation processes in the master's subjects. Furthermore, the coordinators indicate that the feedback provided to students using technology is essential to contribute to their learning process. Likewise, they state that the evaluation is carried out through group work, which promotes skills linked to teamwork. All of them express the need for specific training on evaluation to be able to implement new strategies that improve the quality of evaluation practice. In conclusion, it should be noted that it is necessary to promote the participation of students in the evaluation processes to proceed with a paradigm shift that replaces the conception of evaluation as a verification of knowledge with the concept of evaluation as a tool for students to learn.

Keywords: *Learning outcomes, evaluation, coordinators, perception, master degree.*

1. Introduction and objectives

University teachers have many challenges to face. One of them is the assessment of the students' learning outcomes. Even today, evaluation is still understood as the mere verification of the level of knowledge achieved, so that it can be certified (learning evaluation). The evaluation must overcome this approach and even the one that maintains that the evaluation is carried out to learn (supported by the feedback that must be provided to the students), to consider evaluation as learning, understood as taking advantage of and relevant use of feedback to be able to apply what has been learned to other learning contexts and situations (Ibarra and Rodríguez, 2019).

The different legislation that comes from the European Higher Education Area and the National Agency for Quality Assessment and Accreditation (ANECA) in Spain shows, among other aspects, that the study plans of master's degrees must include detailed information on the competencies and evaluation systems to be used to evaluate student learning. This aims to ensure that the training and skills level achieved by the students corresponds to what is established in the degree reports (Aneca, 2021).

This is the reason why learning outcomes take on special relevance in the articulation of study plans as indicated in laws and regulations. On the one hand, due to what is indicated in RD 822/2021, which establishes the organization of university education in Spain and, on the other hand, due to what the Qualifications Framework indicates regarding the definition of learning outcomes ("description of what people in the learning process should know, understand or be able to do at the end of a training cycle" (Aneca, 2022).

The definition of learning outcomes and the incorporation of students into evaluation systems require a significant conceptual rethinking of the term "evaluation" (Boud, 2020). Furthermore, the relevance of learning outcomes has been highlighted in the Incheon Declaration (UNESCO, 2015) and the

2030 Agenda for sustainable development (United Nations, 2015), among others. If at the end of the 20th century interest was focused on the validity and reliability of evaluation processes, today the challenge is on the sustainability and justice of evaluation as bases and objectives for educational excellence. This will only be possible if the evaluation provides all actors in the educational process with the relevant information necessary to make fair decisions that favor lifelong learning. Therefore, it will be necessary to incorporate innovations in the evaluation that is based on the principles of sustainability, in addition to ensuring its validity and reliability (Boud & Soler, 2016), justice (McArthur, 2019) and empowerment (Ibarra-Sáiz & Rodríguez-Gómez, 2020). In this context, the FLOASS Project (RTI2018-093630-B-I00) was designed. Its general objective is to analyze how the evaluation of learning outcomes is carried out in university master's degrees in social and legal sciences knowledge branch. The purpose is to design a framework of action for the evaluation of learning outcomes. This work is derived from that project, which focuses on identifying different elements of the evaluation in university master's degrees in Social and Legal Sciences at the University of Oviedo (Spain) from the point of view of the people responsible for their coordination.

2. Method

The research has been carried out at the University of Oviedo in order to know the state of the art of the evaluation of learning outcomes in university master's degrees in social and legal sciences. The research has been proposed as a survey study, through individual in-depth and semi-structured interviews with seven coordinators of four master's degrees in Education and three in Economics. (Table 1, collects the identifying data of the university master's degrees in Social and Legal Sciences that have been analyzed).

Table 1. Master's degrees in the Social and Legal Sciences of the University of Oviedo in the fields of Education and Economics.

| Code | Master | Field |
|-------------|---|--------------|
| 4315628 | Master's Degree in Research and Innovation in Early Childhood and Primary Education | Education |
| 4312885 | Master's Degree in Integrated Teaching of English Language and Content: Early Childhood and Primary Education | Education |
| 4310552 | Master's Degree in Socio-educational Intervention and Research | Education |
| 4310551 | Master's Degree in Teacher Training for Compulsory Secondary Education, Baccalaureate and Vocational Training | Education |
| 4312881 | Master's Degree in Tourism Management and Planning | Economics |
| 4315569 | Master's Degree in Information Systems and Accounting Analysis | Economics |
| 4312951 | Master's Degree in Business Administration and Management | Economics |

The interviews were carried out using MS-Teams, which allowed them to be recorded in audio and video. The interviews with the coordinators have focused on the aspects detailed in Table 2.

Table 2. Content of the interviews with coordinators.

| Interview topics |
|---|
| Identification data |
| Concept and knowledge about evaluation |
| Coordination. Management of teaching guides |
| Evaluation: characteristics |
| Student participation |
| Teacher training |

To analyze the information collected, the recordings were transcribed with the responses and comments of the informants in an appropriate support for their coding. The transcripts and the rest of the information related to the people and each university master's degree were analyzed using the MAXQDA qualitative data analysis program (v.20). The qualitative analysis of the responses linked to the "Evaluation" category has followed an inductive procedure to analyze 280 discursive fragments. Eleven subcategories have emerged from the analysis: tecnology (TEC), participation (PAR), satisfaction (SAT), feedback (RET), teacher training (FPR), coherence (COH), coordinator training (FCO), purpose (FIN), products (MEV), evaluation tasks (TAE) and instruments and tools (IEV). Table 3 shows the profile of the informants.

Table 3. Characteristics of the informants.

| Characteristics of the informants | |
|---|--|
| 7 interviewed (4 Education, 3 Economics) | |
| 6 women y 1 man | |
| Experience average: 10 years | |
| Coordination experience average: 5 years | |
| Experience as a Master's teacher: 9 years | |

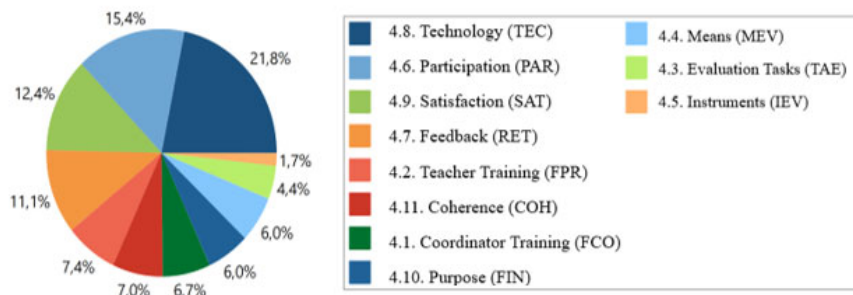
3. Results

The results shown focus on the “Evaluation” category, which accumulates 280 discursive fragments that have been organized into eleven subcategories following a thematic criterion (Table 4 and Graph 1).

Table 4. Discourse fragments analyzed in the subcategories that make up the “Evaluation” category.

| | Discursive fragments | % |
|----------------------------------|----------------------|-------|
| 4.8. Technology (TEC) | 65 | 21,81 |
| 4.6. Participation (PAR) | 46 | 15,44 |
| 4.9. Satisfaction (SAT) | 37 | 12,42 |
| 4.7. Feedback (RET) | 33 | 11,07 |
| 4.2. Teacher training (FPR) | 22 | 7,38 |
| 4.11. Coherence (COH) | 21 | 7,05 |
| 4.1. Coordinator training (FCO) | 20 | 6,71 |
| 4.10. Purpose (FIN) | 18 | 6,04 |
| 4.4. Products (MEV) | 18 | 6,04 |
| 4.3. Evaluation tasks (TAE) | 13 | 4,36 |
| 4.5. Instruments and tools (IEV) | 5 | 1,68 |

Graph 1. Percentage of discursive fragments analyzed in the “Evaluation” subcategories.



A lot of dispersion has been found in the comments in relation to the discursive fragments on “Evaluation”. The highest percentage of comments refer to the use of technology in the evaluation process (21.81%). The coordinators say that it is necessary to incorporate digital tools for the monitoring and evaluation of students, as was done during the time of the Covid-19 pandemic. A lower percentage refers to the participation of students in the evaluation process (15.44%). Furthermore, the master's coordinators point out that students rarely participate in their own evaluation processes. Although they indicate that some teachers develop evaluation practices that actively involve students (self-assessments or peer evaluations). But basically teachers are who carry out the evaluation of the learning and skills acquired by the students. The opinions and perceptions of the coordinators reflect the transparency of the evaluation process carried out by the teaching staff, but they demand time and space for students to get involved in these processes. “[...] Students must be involved, they must know what they are going to be evaluated on, it must be transparent, it must be clear, they must know what to expect. [...]” (UNIOVI_EDU_M4310551_COORD_5).

However, another coordinator emphasizes that some strategies were already in use: "Because there are indeed aspects that were already used before, but sometimes the immediacy with which we assess, for example, those oral presentations by students that are usually valued immediately by the

teacher in the same way they occur, well, many times it gives us room for a more measured approach" (UNIOVI_EDU_M4312885_COORD_7). This allows, as one coordinator points out, the introduction of other assessment approaches: *"Even so that self-assessment processes can occur, the student can assess what they have done afterward; that peer assessment processes can occur, [...]"* (UNIOVI_EDU_M4312885_COORD_7).

Teacher and students satisfaction with the evaluative practices is another topic that arises in coordinator comments (12.42%). In connection with this, feedback accumulates 11.07% of the comments. Thus, coordinators express that students receive useful information for improving their learning outcomes at the end of an evaluation task (assignments, exams, classroom practices, etc.). They indicate that these processes reinforce student learning and promote their involvement in the subject's development. *"I consider feedback to be fundamental. It's a perception I have about assessment, [...]. The purpose is for that learning to be demonstrated through that feedback, and I do know that there are teachers who are implementing it."* (UNIOVI_EDU_M4315628_2).

Regarding teacher and master coordinators' training, the comments (14.09) reflect the lack of training plans in evaluation by institutions, with teachers managing their own training. They believe that specific training will contribute to the improvement of evaluative practices, implementing new tools and assessment methods. *"Although the faculty, in general, is trained, I think current training, occasional refreshers, I think that would be good for everyone. In that sense, it wouldn't hurt if all of us occasionally took a training course to update ourselves. Especially, that, new strategies, new evaluation methodologies that might sound familiar but since we've never used them and they intimidate us a bit, we don't dive in, and maybe we're always staying a bit in the same place"* (UNIOVI_EDU_M4310552_COORD_6). A coordinator adds: *"I do think that more specific training on the evaluation of learning outcomes would be very beneficial for teachers"* (UNIOVI_EDU_M4315628_COORD_2).

About assessment tasks, resources, and instruments, 12.08% of the comments address the various activities that students undertake to achieve learning outcomes and the tools used by evaluators to systematize assessments. Coordinators emphasize the subcategory "Assignments," primarily carried out in groups to attain a competency (teamwork) highly demanded in the professional field and outlined in all program specifications. Only in some subjects are individual assignments given. This response aligns with their perception, based on their experience as program coordinators, that in all subjects, even when part of the assessment involves an exam, continuous assessment carries more weight. However, this is not without limitations, as sometimes students feel overwhelmed by the numerous assignments: *"The master's program doesn't rely much on exams; in fact, exams are an exception and are only used in very specific subjects. Assessment is mainly done through continuous assessment, task submissions, participation in forums, group work. What we do have are guidelines to, in a way, coordinate and allow students to carry out all that work in an organized and continuous manner, so that all the assignments are not concentrated at a specific point in the course, and the rest of the time students are idle"* (UNIOVI_EDU_M4310552_COORD_6).

4. Discussion and conclusions

This paper shows results on the degree of use that teachers make of different strategies, media and tools to obtain information that allows evaluating the learning outcomes of students. The results show the perceptions of the coordinators of the university master's degrees in social and legal sciences at the University of Oviedo. The results focus only on the analysis of one of the categories ("Evaluation") emerged from the qualitative analysis process of the responses provided by the coordinators in interviews. Therefore, it remains to contrast these results with those obtained in other different branches of knowledge (sciences, and in other master's degrees from this university and from other Spanish universities).

The results achieved in this study indicate that teachers must continue training in evaluation matters. Only in this way can the excessive caution that teachers continue to show regarding the use of different means to evaluate students be reversed; Likewise, it is necessary for students to be involved to a greater degree and with greater decision in the processes of evaluating their competency levels, which are reflected in the learning outcomes; For this, it will be mandatory to guide students towards other approaches and attitudes towards evaluation. For the evaluation of learning results, student participation is essential. All of this leads to the conclusion that the process of evaluating students' learning outcomes requires their active participation and this entails a significant paradigm shift.

Acknowledgments

Paper presented as dissemination of results of the FLOASS Project - Learning outcomes and analytics in higher education: a framework of action from sustainable evaluation, financed by the Ministry of Science (Spain), Innovation and Universities in the State Oriented R&D&I Program to the Challenges of Society and the European Regional Development Fund (Ref. RTI2018-093630-B-100).

References

- Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación – ANECA (2021). *Guía de apoyo para la elaboración de la memoria de verificación de títulos universitarios oficiales*. <https://www.aneca.es/Programas-de-evaluacion/>
- Agencia Nacional de Evaluación de la Calidad y Acreditación – ANECA (2022). *Resultados de aprendizaje y procedimientos de aseguramiento de la evaluación, certificación y acreditación de enseñanzas e instituciones*. Conforme al RD 640/2021 y al RD 822/2021. https://www.aneca.es/documents/20123/81865/220106_Informe_RA-V3.pdf/
- Boud, D. (2020). Retos en la reforma de la evaluación en educación superior: una mirada desde la lejanía. *Revista Electrónica de Investigación y Evaluación Educativa*, 26(1), art. M3. <https://doi.org/10.7203/relieve.26.1.17088>
- Boud, D., & Soler, R. (2016). Sustainable assessment revisited. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 41(3), 400-413. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02602938.2015.1018133>
- Ibarra-Sáiz, M. S., & Rodríguez-Gómez, G. (2019). Una evaluación como aprendizaje. In J. Paricio-Royo, A. Fernández & I. Fernández (Eds.), *Cartografía de la buena docencia universitaria. Un marco para el desarrollo del profesorado basado en la investigación* (pp. 175-196). Narcea.
- Ibarra-Sáiz, M. S., & Rodríguez-Gómez, G. (2020). Aprendiendo a evaluar para aprender en la educación superior. *Revista Iberoamericana de Evaluación Educativa*, 13(1), 5-8.
- McArthur, J. (2019). *La evaluación: Una cuestión de Justicia Social. Perspectiva crítica y prácticas adecuadas*. Narcea.
- United Nations (2015, September 25). *La Asamblea General adopta la Agenda 2030 para el Desarrollo Sostenible*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/es/2015/09/la-asamblea-general-adopta-la-agenda-2030-para-el-desarrollo-sostenible/>
- Real Decreto 822/2021, de 28 de septiembre, por el que se establece la organización de las enseñanzas universitarias y del procedimiento de aseguramiento de su calidad.
- UNESCO (2015). Educación 2030: Declaración de Incheon y Marco de Acción para la realización del Objetivo de Desarrollo Sostenible 4: Garantizar una educación inclusiva y equitativa de calidad y promover oportunidades de aprendizaje permanente para todos. Retrieved from https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000245656_spa