

Unit 4: Assessment and evaluation of quality – *Galya Mateva*

4.1 Quality systems: types and methods of assessment and evaluation

4.2 Quality systems: evaluation and assessment procedures

4.3 Benchmarking and validation

Summary of Unit 4

The unit discusses aspects of evaluation and assessment of quality processes in education. Part one starts by differentiating between the two concepts. In most cases evaluation is concerned with the effectiveness and efficiency of educational processes, programmes and materials. Assessment usually measures the degree of achievement of individual learners or institutions and often relates its results to test norms and sets of criteria.

The understanding of the two concepts is further clarified by presenting basic types of evaluation and assessment and relating them to various educational contexts. Special attention is paid to the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages where proficiency assessment, namely assessment of students' linguistic and communicative competence in real-life situations, is of paramount importance. Self-assessment is given a priority status in relation to the European Language Portfolio and its wider applications.

Assessment is also highlighted in the context of appraising staff performance (appraisal systems) in quality-driven institutions.

Part two deals with types of evaluation procedures which guarantee quality. It concentrates on aspects of quality assurance and quality control and the ways these are implemented in language institutions across Europe.

The third part explores benchmarking as a quality management tool in a wider social context. After defining benchmarking on a personal and professional level, different types of benchmarking are exemplified, highlighting the need to apply a variety of approaches for enhanced and competitive performance.

In conclusion, some general indicators of quality performance are briefly reviewed.

Unit 4

Assessment and evaluation are central to setting up and implementing quality systems. Schools and institutions developing a quality approach will have ways of assessing the individual aspects of the school's work (like performance in tests), and of carrying out more overall evaluation of the whole operation, using the assessment of the different features.

4.1 Quality systems: types and methods of assessment and evaluation

Is there a need to differentiate between assessment and evaluation in educational contexts?

In English "to evaluate" and "to assess" are used, yet in other European languages there is only one word with the basic meaning of "value" or "evaluate".

"Assessment" and "evaluation" are terms sometimes used interchangeably and sometimes to denote two different processes, albeit closely related to each other. When correctly applied they provide tools and procedures for measuring the quality of educational services.

The verbs "to assess" and "to evaluate" often collocate with words such as: "skills", "ability", "effectiveness", "materials", "programmes", "projects", "plans", "competence", "performance", "aptitude", "institution" and "satisfaction".

■ Evaluate: effectiveness, institutions, projects, programmes, materials;

■ Assess: competence, skills, abilities, performance, aptitude.

Do these word combinations provide useful clues to some differences between the two terms? To what extent do they overlap?

Evaluation, used in quality management contexts, is usually referred to as a three-dimensional process. Firstly, it defines what areas will be assessed, secondly, it points to ways of collecting and analysing data and, thirdly, it provides well-systematised information used for decision making



How about your language? Do you have one term or several for "assess" and "evaluate"?



Which of these nouns are more frequently combined with "assess" and which with "evaluate"?

and developmental purposes by educational institutions. Evaluation is a process which deals with information received as a result of different assessment procedures, therefore, it is often assumed to be a wider concept than assessment. Evaluation can be done internally (using the institution's own expertise) and externally (making use of the services of outside experts). In most cases one evaluates the effectiveness and efficiency of various educational processes, projects, materials and programmes, of the system as a whole.

Assessment deals with separate components of the system. It usually measures the degree of achievement of individuals or institutions. For example, one typically assesses the skills, competencies, abilities of individual learners. More often than not, assessment relates its results and methods of investigation to test norms and sets of criteria. Assessment is an integral part of any evaluation procedure.

When evaluating and assessing quality language learning programmes, the following focus points need to be considered:

- Are our short and long-term planning procedures effective?
- What is the degree of achievement of our objectives?
- How far are all staff involved in quality processes?
- Are we responding suitably to our students' needs?
- Are we using quality materials and learning aids?
- Is our working environment stimulating and staff friendly?
- Are our teaching methods effective and student friendly?



*Do you evaluate your educational programmes on a regular basis?
How do you do it?*

Which of the focus points do you consider priorities at the moment in your own institution?

Types of evaluation processes

Institutions need to use a range of different approaches to evaluation. A wisely selected combination of these is likely to guarantee correct judgment, guiding recommendations and conclusions. To measure the quality of educational services one has to consider the short and long-term developments in an institution, the orientation of activities towards well-established standards as well as clients' needs.

Some language schools and departments across Europe prefer regular, informal evaluation processes which provide quick feedback and readjustments. Others opt for more structured, longitudinal investigations of student and teacher performance which may result in more radical changes. In some countries there are long standing traditions for external evaluations whereas in others, evaluation is done mostly internally.

Evaluation is formative when it is applied with the purpose of improving the functioning of an activity. For example, the process of introducing new teaching materials or aids would require formative evaluation done at different stages of the trial. Summative evaluations, on the other hand, are used in order to compare the effectiveness of different approaches in achieving a particular goal. Their intention is to formulate a judgment about the positive and negative aspects of educational phenomena. Evaluation procedures can focus on the products achieved (for example, test results) or on various processes (for example, designing and implementing different syllabus types).



Which of these types of evaluation do you apply/would you apply to evaluate the effectiveness of teaching in your school?

Formative evaluation	Summative evaluation
Longitudinal evaluation	Cross-sectional evaluation
External evaluation	Internal evaluation
Process-oriented evaluation	Outcome-oriented evaluation
Standard-oriented evaluation	Client-oriented evaluation

Methods of evaluation

Having chosen the type or rather types of evaluation processes, one has to decide on the optimal combination of methods for an evaluative investigation. More holistic, naturalistic and subjective methods like observations, journals, portfolios, case study analyses are combined with statistical and testing procedures to yield valid and reliable results. The first group of methods (also termed qualitative) can provide a wealth of information, a variety of facts from multiple sources and angles which, after thorough analysis, can lead to deeper insight into different educational processes. On the other hand, numerical data and rigid statistical procedures (referred to as quantitative methods) can add precision and validate data received through observations, unstructured interviews, portfolios, etc.

Questionnaires, interviews and observations seem to be among the preferred methods of evaluation by many educational institutions.



Could you complete the table with some quantitative and qualitative methods of evaluation? Where do questionnaires and interviews belong to?

Quantitative	Qualitative

Activity for pair work

Reflect on your context and discuss with your partner the following:



What types of questionnaires do you administer in your language institution? How do you make use of their results?



Do you apply any statistical procedures? What are their advantages and disadvantages?



What methods would you use to test the effectiveness of the system of proficiency levels and their descriptors in your language institution?

Types of assessment

Assessment in language teaching contexts can be interpreted as a tool for measuring the proficiency level of language learners and users. Assessment can be conducted through various testing procedures but also through observations, logbooks, portfolios, etc. Research methods help experts find the optimal balance of objective and subjective procedures to guarantee the validity and reliability of assessment. Different types of assessment complement each other and can be presented as pairs, for example: continuous versus fixed assessment points, holistic versus analytic assessment, subjective versus objective assessment, achievement versus proficiency assessment, norm-referenced versus criterion-referenced assessment, assessment by others versus self-assessment, etc. For more details see the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages, Chapter 9.

Systems of assessment in quality assurance tend to take a holistic perspective and will look at aspects like:

- performance assessment (language skills and competences);
- knowledge assessment (language systems, cross-cultural knowledge);
- personality development.



Do you follow the progress of your students in all these areas? What is your priority order, if any?

Common reference levels and the need for criterion-referenced assessment

To assess the quality of performance one needs reliable descriptors.

A framework of six broad levels indicating different degrees of language attainment is being put in operation throughout Europe (see the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages). Each level is described through a set of “can do statements”, specifying what learners will be able to do while listening, reading, speaking and writing at each stage of their linguistic development. The performance of each student is measured against thoroughly researched and universally agreed descriptors which play the role of common standards. The process represents a shift towards criterion-based assessment where learners’ achievements are judged in relation to standards and not their peers.

In a similar vein, the role of proficiency testing and assessment is growing in importance because it goes beyond classroom tasks and materials to measure learners’ ability to cope with real-life tasks and situations. The quality of teaching and learning will increasingly depend on the external validity of learners’ language competence, that is, their ability to react adequately to a variety of situations in a changing world. At the same time the role of achievement assessment will remain significant because it indicates attainment levels based on the material covered in class.



On the CD-Rom you find materials illustrating the relevance of the CEFR to quality assurance – for example:

- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/framework/CEF.htm;
- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/LM_Interview_LW.htm.



Can you further speculate on the differences and specific roles of achievement and proficiency assessment?

In what situations is it more important to focus on students’ achievements based on the language school syllabus and materials and in what situations is it vital to check their progress in terms of commonly accepted standards (for example, the European reference levels)?

What is the practical application of the CEFR levels? Who will/will not benefit from using them?

The European Language Portfolio and the role of self-assessment

The *European Language Portfolio* consists of three parts: the *Language Passport*, the *Language Biography* and the *Dossier*. The electronic Language Passport is an essential part of *Europass*, a set of documents meant to facilitate self-assessment and the synthetic presentation of one's qualifications and competencies – for example, for international mobility purposes. All language learners and users can assess their communication skills in several languages by completing the self-assessment grid in the Language Passport. For this purpose they will use the common descriptors and try not to underestimate or overestimate their abilities. Their judgment will be moderated by the personal dossier (a collection of tests, projects and sample written work) as well as by standardised international exams. The Language Biography part of the Portfolio will help learners to determine their learning priorities and objectives. The process presents new challenges for all educational institutions which intend to benefit from and, therefore, foster the development of a self-assessment culture across Europe. Quality performance means not only high test results but also the ability to assess correctly one's own progress, to set one's own aims and learning agendas, to achieve continuous and sustainable personal development.

To assess your own communication competencies in several languages using the self-assessment grid, you can access the Portfolio website on the Council of Europe website (www.coe.int/portfolio) or download the electronic version of the EAQUALS-ALTE ELP for adults (www.eaquals.org).



For examples of ELP-related self-assessment instruments, adapted to various age groups, you can take a look at the "Self-assessment" section of the CD-Rom:

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/self_assesement/self_assessment.htm.

For ELP-based activities and ideas, see the ECML joint project website:

■ ELP implementation support and Training teachers to use the European Language Portfolio (elp.ecml.at);

and the EuroIntegrELP project at: www.prosper.ro/EuroIntegrELP/EurointergrELP.htm.

Activity for small groups

Consider your own context and discuss with your partner(s) the following:



What is your experience with implementing the ELP and self-assessment?



How can self-assessment be built more effectively into the overall assessment process of your institution?



Do learners in your context tend to overestimate or underestimate their language competence?

Assessment of staff performance through appraisal systems

A quality culture, as already mentioned, is a learning culture in which all members of the institution are active participants in the process of producing and assessing quality. In this sense, teachers, academic managers and administrative staff are all equally motivated to receive feedback on their performance and get engaged in professional growth activities. This is the main aim of the annual staff appraisals or reviews which assess the performance of staff against an agreed set of criteria.

Appraisal is conducted for accountability purposes (they inform decisions on duties, pay and promotion), for personal and institutional development purposes. In most cases, the appraisal process goes through several phases, namely, of preparation, finding relevant sources of information, filling in a self-appraisal questionnaire, conducting an appraisal interview and documenting the final recommendations.

The appraisal interview consists of opening, analysis, feedback, action planning and closing stages. The analytical stage, respectively the set of questions asked by the interviewer, relate typically to personal goals and values, responsibilities, competencies, results, career aspirations and potential for development. However, the core of the discussion should consist of an exchange of constructive feedback and realistic planning of activities aimed at personal, team and institutional development.



For examples of appraisal and self-appraisal questionnaires and checklists, see the “Self-assessment” and “Internal quality assurance” sections of the CD-Rom:

- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/self_assesement/self_assessment.htm;
- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/internal.htm.

Activities for pair work

1. Devise some items for a self-appraisal questionnaire for teachers. Relate them to lesson planning, teaching methods, students’ test results, etc. For example: what is the balance of attention given by me to different students? Are my teaching techniques equally effective with stronger and weaker learners? Are my lesson aims well defined?
2. Prepare some questions and role-play an appraisal interview with a partner.
3. Formulate some questions in the case of a mismatch between the results of self-appraisal and those of appraisal. For example: why do you think that the new teaching materials did not work as planned? How do you interpret your students’ feedback sheets?
4. Give some examples of constructive versus confrontational language in a post-appraisal feedback session (statements versus questions, use of softeners like “a bit”, use of past tense modals, of imperatives, etc.).
5. What type of assessment scale would you consider more appropriate for the (self-)appraisal questionnaire? Would you use numerical scales (1-3 or 1-5 or 1-10 point scales) or words (very useful, useful, fairly useful, not very useful)?

4.2 Quality systems: evaluation and assessment procedures

Assuming you would like to gain (partial) competencies in a foreign language, what numerical (number of lessons, price) and non-numerical information would you like to gather prior to choosing a school? Who/what can guarantee that you have chosen a quality language institution?

Types of procedures to guarantee quality

Language schools apply evaluation procedures such as: quality assessment (a procedure to measure achievement in a subject or skills area), internal quality assurance (a set of procedures agreed on and applied internally to sustain high standards in the educational institution), external quality assurance, usually referred to as quality control (a well-established procedure to validate quality standards externally) and accreditation (a procedure which grants formal recognition testifying to compliance with quality standards).



Look at the table below. Could you further specify the purpose of these procedures? Comment on some of the methods applied (observation, interviews, scrutiny of written documentation, peer review, self-evaluation, self-inspection, etc.).

Quality procedure	Purpose	Method
Quality assessment		
Quality assurance		
Quality control		
Accreditation		

For a discussion of methods and instruments in relation to various stages of quality monitoring, see also Unit 3 of this guide.

Quality assurance

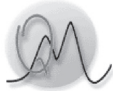
Quality assurance is a broad concept which refers to establishing, monitoring, controlling, assessing and improving quality processes within an institution on an ongoing basis. In the field of education it guarantees high standards in relation to curriculum design and overall strategic planning, choice of materials and technical equipment, learning/working environment, staff development and, generally, to exploring and satisfying clients' needs.

Quality assurance is ensured internally through competent quality management and leadership, through quality assessment and self-assessment procedures, and externally, through quality control. Quality assurance procedures include among other things different observation schemes, long-term staff development programmes, staff review systems, data collecting and feedback systems, methodology and materials evaluation procedures, benchmarking and innovation policies, etc.

Quality-driven institutions apply these on a regular basis. For example, teachers are observed once or twice per term, feedback questionnaires are administered during and after each language course, staff appraisals are conducted at least once during the academic year, etc.

For more details on systems for internal quality assurance, see also Unit 3.

The case studies at the end of this guide illustrate the successful application of quality assurance principles and procedures in concrete institutional contexts.



For more examples, see also the sections on "Internal quality assurance" and "External quality assurance" on the CD-Rom:

- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/internal_quality_assurance/internal.htm;
- www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/external_quality_assurance/external.htm.

Activity for small groups

Consider your own context and discuss with your partner(s) some of the following:



How do you ensure quality assurance in your institution? What procedures do you apply?



How do you obtain and provide feedback from/to clients? Are post-feedback activities documented?



Is there a department or a person responsible for applying quality assurance systems in your institution?

Quality control

Quality control is traditionally regarded as a set of procedures carried out by external experts to validate independently the strengths and weaknesses of an educational institution.

EAQUALS (the European Association for Quality Language Services) establishes and maintains high educational and service standards in its schools by applying quality control through a rigorous inspection scheme and procedure. The inspection scheme is based on the Code of Practice and EAQUALS charters (Information Charter, Student Charter, Staff Charter). It includes basic aspects of quality performance in the areas of teaching and learning, academic management, administrative management, information systems management, student safety and welfare. An inspection is typically done by a team of inspectors in the course of two days.

The national associations for quality control of Poland (PASE), Romania (QUEST), Bulgaria (Optima), Greece (QLS), Italy (AISLi), etc. apply the principles of EAQUALS in the specific context of their countries. Their member schools are inspected on a regular basis. The principles of external quality control apply in the public sector, too, and are usually carried out by inspectors of education.



See the CD-Rom for more information on EAQUALS and various national inspection schemes:

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/framework/standards_e.htm.

The section on “External quality assurance” also comprises information about a range of different approaches to external inspections, together with numerous examples from various national contexts from all over Europe:

■ www.ecml.at/html/quality/english/continuum/external_quality_assurance/external.htm.



Is your institution inspected regularly? What does an inspection involve in your context?

How does the pre-inspection process/post-inspection process impact your school?

Re-visit the different quality models you have discussed in unit 1 of this guide. In what ways does your inspection scheme reflect these models?

Is there anything else you would like to be included in the inspection scheme so that it reflects more adequately the various aspects of quality teaching and learning?

How do the EAQUALS' areas of inspection compare with your national or institutional inspection scheme?

General indicators of quality performance

In all these procedures quality performance is related both to a set of standards and also to basic indicators like accountability (taking the responsibility for what you are doing and making it public for judgment by others), effectiveness (meeting your goals, achieving the best possible results), efficiency (meeting your goals and, in addition, showing that you have made prudent use of the resources available) and competitiveness (meeting your goals and proving that you are a viable competitor, you can perform in a competitive environment).

Activities for pair work

Go back to the various definitions of quality and discuss also other indicators of quality performance (for example, client and stakeholders' satisfaction, etc.).