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EVALUATION OF SCHOOL EDUCATION IN SERBIA

Abstract

In the education system of Serbia significant results have been achieved in the last ten years regarding the establishment and development of the evaluation system in education and the practical application of various types and procedures of evaluation. This paper gives a short overview of ways in which evaluation is carried out on elementary, secondary and higher education levels in Serbia. The overview is accompanied by a reference to problems and difficulties which are encountered in the practical application of educational evaluation. The final part of the text points to assumptions which need to be provided so as to use evaluation as a starting point for improvement and development of school education quality.

Key words: school evaluation, evaluation of students' outcomes, teacher evaluation, evaluation of higher education, quality of school education

Introduction

The issue of function, procedures and content of educational evaluation has been made current in recent years in many countries. The reasons that led to the need to introduce certain changes in the existing evaluation system are related to: the existence of growing demands for achieving effectiveness, efficiency and equity of education in order to respond to economic and social challenges; the need to monitor and supervise the quality of the schools, which occurs as a consequence of giving them a greater autonomy; the need to base decision making, to a greater extent, on evaluation results, thus making it evidence-based (Spasenović, 2013).

In Serbia in the last ten years there have also been significant changes in the domain of evaluation policies and practices. This paper provides a brief overview and analysis of evaluation structures and procedures which are applied in the Serbian school system. The overview is given by noting the types of evaluation applied on different levels of education, as well as by the components of school education which are under evaluation. Thereby, the emphasis is placed on the overview and analysis of segments of the complex system of school education evaluation, within which the most significant changes have occurred during the course of the last decade.

School evaluation

School evaluation in Serbia is carried out in the form of external school evaluation and school self-evaluation.

External evaluation of schools

External school evaluation is carried out in the form of inspection and pedagogical supervision of school work. Inspection supervision, which is the remit of municipal, i.e., city administration and which is performed by educational inspectors, looks into enforcement of laws and regulations by a direct insight into

school work and, depending on the results of the insight, imposes measures and controls their implementation. Pedagogical supervision, which is the remit of the Ministry of Education, assesses, by a direct insight into teaching and other school activities, the quality of school work against the determined standards, the implementation of the school curriculum and the school development plan, provides help and support to employees at school in performing educational work and self-evaluation and proposes measures for quality improvement (*Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja*, 2009).

Novelties in terms of external evaluation of schools date from 2012 since when this process has been conducted under a new procedure (*Pravilnik o vrednovanju kvaliteta rada ustanova*, 2012) and in line with the newly-established standards of work quality of institutions (*Pravilnik o standardima kvaliteta rada obrazovno-vaspitnih ustanova*, 2011). External evaluation includes the analysis of pedagogical documentation (programme documentation and work reports); direct monitoring of educational activities; interviews with school employees, parents and students. The state of affairs is assessed in seven work quality domains (school curriculum; teaching and learning; students' achievements; support to students; ethos; resources; management, organisation and quality assurance), and the general score of school work quality is given on a scale from 1 to 4.

School self-evaluation

The initial steps in the development of school self-evaluation were taken in the period from 2003 to 2005 when the *Evaluation and Self-evaluation of School Work* project was launched within which key self-evaluation domains were determined and the usability of indicators and developed instruments was tested (*Priručnik za samovrednovanje i vrednovanje rada škola*, 2005). A special training programme for employees in educational institutions was delivered with the aim of training them for self-evaluation and providing additional support in implementing that process. The aforementioned project activities provided the basis for development of bylaws and elaboration and definition of work quality standards of schools, against which school self-evaluation is performed (as well as external evaluation of school work). School self-evaluation, jointly performed by professional school bodies, School Board, principal, Parents' Council and Students' Parliament, is used to assess: the quality of education programmes; all forms and methods of teaching delivery; professional development of teachers and of other school staff; conditions in which school work is carried out; student and parent satisfaction with school work ... (*Pravilnik o vrednovanju kvaliteta rada ustanova*, 2012).

Given that external school evaluation and self-evaluation of school work are a relatively new practice in our milieu, for the time being there have not been too many research papers dealing with implementation and effects of these processes. However, based on the insight into practitioners' experiences, it could be concluded that external evaluation of schools still provokes resistance with practitioners, due to the fear of identifying problems in education provision and disclosing results of school work. As for self-evaluation, it seems that the implemented procedures and methods are still not sufficiently developed, as well as mechanisms of necessary professional help and support to practitioners in this process.

Evaluation of students' outcomes

Monitoring students' work and development, as one of key domains of the evaluation in education, has undergone significant reviews and changes in the last ten years. Visible efforts have been made, for example, to ground school assessment on learning outcomes and defined standards of students' achievements, that is, to provide assumptions for practical implementation of criterion-based assessment, as well as to apply a combination of formative and summative assessment. In addition, conducting evaluation research into students' achievements and the introduction of final exams at the end of elementary and secondary education are of particular importance in the domain of monitoring students' work and development (Hebib, Matović & Baucal, 2011).

Testing students' achievements

National testing of students' educational achievements, whose main objective is to monitor schools and the education system, has not been carried out continuously and systematically in Serbia. So far, such research studies were carried out twice – in 2003 for third-grade students and in 2006 for fourth-grade students in both Serbian language and Maths (as key parts of curriculum in junior grades of elementary school).

Since 2003 Serbia has taken part in international research projects PISA (Programme for International Student Assessment) and TIMSS (Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study). In all four research cycles of PISA project Serbia was significantly below the average (Pavlović Babić and Baucal, 2013). In the first two research cycles of TIMSS research, when eight-graders participated, Serbia achieved scores below or near the average, and in the last research cycle in 2011 when four-graders participated, the score in both domains tested was above the average (Gašić Pavišić & Stanković, 2012; Janjetović, Malinić & Tošković, 2005).

Unfortunately, there is still a disagreement among the policy makers and administrators in the interpretation of the purpose of participation in international projects related to the research into school effectiveness, as well as a lack of seriousness regarding provision of financial and other necessary resources for implementation of evaluation projects and activities (so due to the delays in fulfilment of obligations towards OECD, Serbia will miss participation in the PISA 2015 cycle, whereas participation in the next TIMSS research cycle is still uncertain at this moment).

Final exams

Final exams in Serbia are taken after elementary, i.e., compulsory education and after secondary education. The final exam after compulsory education, which has been implemented since 2010/11, replaced the former qualification (entrance) exam (whose function was to select students for continuation of education in four-year secondary schools) and it was introduced with the purpose to: assess the accomplishment level of standards for the end of compulsory education; obtain the certificate of completed compulsory education; select students for (upper) secondary education. The concept of the final exam was gradually changed from 2010/11 academic year, with the idea that its final model be applied in 2013/14 (namely, the number of already known tasks, which had previously been published in the

collections of tasks, was gradually reduced in the mother tongue tests, and Maths and from 2014 the combined test was introduced including the following subjects: History, Geography, Biology, Chemistry and Physics).

The valid legislation envisages that the final exam, that is the matura exam – general, vocational and art, is taken after three-year and four-year secondary education. General matura, as defined, allows transition to the university education level and is taken upon completion of four-year general education in grammar schools; however, students who completed four-year vocational or art education also have the right to take general matura. Vocational or art matura is taken by students after completion of the third, i.e., fourth grade of secondary vocational or art school and they have the right to enrol to appropriate higher education institutions in line with the defined terms of entrance (*Zakon o osnovama sistema obrazovanja i vaspitanja*, 2009; *Zakon o srednjem obrazovanju i vaspitanju*, 2013). The implementation of the new matura concept, which should, at the same time, replace entrance exams at universities, is only planned for 2018/19 academic year.

On the basis of the data on implementation modes and results of the so far conducted final exams, it can be concluded that serious problems occur regarding consistent application of rules and procedures in all stages of preparation, implementation and assessment of the exam. It is therefore necessary to work further on ensuring assumptions for the final exams to provide objective and reliable data on students' achievements, as well as that all participants in the final exam take their share of responsibility for its regularity (*Izveštaj o realizaciji i rezultatima završnog ispita...*, 2014). It is also noticeable that the possibility to use the achieved final exam results as a starting point for external evaluation of school work and evaluation of the school system as a whole (which is, undoubtedly, its important purpose) is still not sufficiently recognised. This function of final exams is still not fully performed although reports on results of the final exam are prepared and distributed, which are meant to serve educational policy makers, academic and professional public, as well as employees at schools, as an important starting point in getting an insight into the existing situation and creation and implementation of activities aimed at education quality improvement.

Evaluation of teachers and of other educational personnel

Evaluation of teachers, school counsellors and principals of elementary and secondary schools in Serbia has been conducted as part of external school evaluation, that is, supervision over school work, and as part of school self-evaluation. Pedagogical supervision over school work is namely carried out as general, special and individual; the last form mentioned refers to evaluating teachers and other educational professionals on an individual basis (*Pravilnik o stručno-pedagoškom nadzoru*, 2012). Methods and procedures, as well as quality assessment criteria are elaborated in line with the defined standards of professional competences (competence standards for teachers and school principals have been defined and adopted). When implemented as part of school self-evaluation, evaluation of teachers, school counsellors and school principals is carried out through research and evaluation activities independently initiated by employees at school with the aim of analysing processes and results of all segments of school work and finding opportunities for improvement of practice.

According to the estimates made by teachers themselves, as shown by the latest research in this area, the evaluation of educational staff is burdened by numerous problems and difficulties. The teachers point out that evaluation of teachers does not fulfill its primary purpose, that is, it is not used as a basis for developing teachers' work and performance, as well as that external evaluation of their work is related to a controlling function and that it is not accompanied by a developed system of providing professional help and support for teaching improvement. On the other hand, various self-evaluation procedures of teachers' work are not carried out as planned and systematic procedures, since teachers do not see the significance of that process clearly and they are not sufficiently trained for its implementation (Stančić, 2015).

Evaluation of higher education

In recent years remarkable results have been achieved in establishing and developing the quality assurance system in the field of higher education. Quality in the field of higher education is assured through processes of institutional and curriculum accreditation and external evaluation and self-evaluation of higher education institutions (*Akreditacija u visokom obrazovanju*, 2010; *Zakon o visokom obrazovanju*, 2005). The accreditation procedure is carried out every five years, whereas self-evaluation takes place every three years. Higher education quality standards have been defined (such as: standards for quality assurance of higher education; standards for accreditation of higher education institutions and study programmes; standards for self-evaluation and quality evaluation of higher education institutions) against which external evaluation of higher education institution quality is conducted (through the accreditation system and integration and analysis of universities' and faculties' self-evaluation reports), as well as self-evaluation. The evaluation and self-evaluation procedure is further developed in more details through various documents on university and faculty levels and there are established professional bodies and commissions in charge of implementation of those processes.

Nevertheless, considered as a whole, it can be noticed that the existing practice of higher education evaluation is characterised by a focus on evaluation of scientific and research work, while evaluation of teaching quality is now far less developed (Hebib, 2014).

Conclusion

It could be said that a great deal has been done in Serbia in the last ten years on providing conditions for successful implementation of different types and procedures of educational evaluation. The practice of implementing evaluation in education is regulated by a series of legal provisions and by-laws, school education quality standards have been elaborated and defined, as well as mechanisms and procedures to assess the level of their achievement. However, the data obtained by application of certain evaluation procedures indicate numerous difficulties and problems in the education system and in school practice. It is therefore especially important to pay attention to the issue of how to create conditions to use evaluation data for improvement of school education quality.

In the immediate future it is necessary to develop capacities (individual, institutional and system capacities as a whole) for 'absorption' and usage of results of evaluation in designing comprehensive and carefully targeted interventions, that is, reform actions and processes directed towards education quality development.

Also, more intensive and more serious work is necessary on raising the awareness of all participants in school work and the school system regarding the importance of taking responsibility for school education quality assurance and development and the necessity for continuous and systematic evaluation in education (Hebib & Spasenović, 2014).

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