

Quality System in one ESP (English for Special Purposes) Study Course – Sport English

Abstract

Quality systems are usually developed for the whole institution, but in this article we discuss the possibility of applying a quality system to one study course – Sport English. In higher education institutions (HEIs) the quality system usually employs David Easton's model, consisting of resources, processes and results. The quality system applicable for teaching foreign languages consists of the quality of teaching, quality of delivery, quality of materials, and quality in assessment. Both models are used in constructing a quality system for a Sport English study course, and the first preliminary results are discussed.

Key words: *quality assurance, quality system, quality of delivery, quality of teaching staff, 1st year students.*

The article deals with the development of a quality system in 1 study course – Sport English – in the Latvian Academy of Sport Education. The aim of a quality system is to ensure a certain defined level of quality (quality assurance) and in a broader sense - to strive for continuous improvement, about something that we want to be, not about what is in reality. It is more about awareness about these issues.

There is some controversy concerning the notion of quality, as B.Poole (4) put it, it can be both static and predetermined (as in quality assurance, where quality is to be checked and guarded) and also dynamic (where continuous improvement is meant).

In education quality assurance (3) can be defined as the offered level of education, which satisfies the needs and wishes of customers, who can be outer (employers, society) and inner (students, staff) ones. The offered level of education should reflect the fulfilment of certain defined aims.

Quality assurance in higher education is a broad notion, including the policy of higher education institution (HEI), its strategy, tactics, procedures, decisions and activities which help to sustain and develop the quality in higher education.

Almost in all the Western European states a national quality management system is developed. Quality is estimated in a self-assessment process, the main aims of which are:

1. to show what is the model of quality assurance and strategic planning in a given HEI
2. to analyse the action of a HEI, the possibilities of development, risks (which prevent realisation of aims) and their reasons, as well as to propose a definite aim of further action.

During this process measurements of education indicators are performed, which allow to discover the problems of a given establishment and predict its further development. It is important to evaluate not only such factors as the qualifications of staff, the provision of the study environment, as well as study process.

There are 4 main stages in quality management. The first is QC – quality control, which is mainly concerned with the quality of a product. Later emerged a shift to QA – quality assurance, where there is reliance on the process, a step further is the concern about the needs of a customer. The fourth stage is total quality management.

A quality system develops along a circle or spiral, the first part of which is planning, second – doing, third – checking and fourth – acting. A year after its development, the system will be completely obsolete, so it will be necessary to implement changes.

There are 3 main quality management styles (2):

1. oral or without any documentation
2. documented
3. ISO 9000 approach.

A quality system in education uses David Easton's model, consisting of three parts – resources and applicants, process (students, study programme, academic staff) and results (graduates, employers, added value).

In the first part of our practical work we used an ISO 9000 approach in assessing a sport English course. We questioned 75% of the staff of the Department of Languages of the Latvian Academy of Sport Education. The results are presented in the results section of the article.

Since we could not find any literature, outlying quality assurance in one study course, we used the materials presented at the International Certificate Conference (ICC) in Riga, March 24-26, 2006. At this conference Jean Claude-Lasnier talked about the Quality Guide, which is used for modern language teaching and learning,

and is directly connected with the objectives of the “White Paper” Teaching and learning. Towards the learning society (1) in which the European Commission proposed the introduction of assessment systems (including elaboration of quality indicators) and quality guarantee systems, covering the methods and materials used to teach Community languages (p.68). The Quality Guide is divided into 3 main stages: Design, Implementation (management, monitoring, activities, supporting activities) and Outcomes. Each stage is divided into components called sections, which are divided into sub-components called elements. The main components of this quality system are “Quality of Teaching staff”, “Quality of Materials”, “Quality of Delivery” and “Quality in Evaluation”.

As it was stressed by Jean Claude-Lasnier the criteria in a quality system should be portable (adaptable, changeable), functional, suitable, feasible (consistency, if mistakes occur – be able to correct) and testable (easily tested), as well as understandable, applicable and accessible. The quality Guide is based on the following principles:

- 1) relevance (centred on the learner’s needs, appropriateness)
- 2) reliability (consistency between what is needed)
- 3) participation – common aim setting, their testing
- 4) transparency – levels, clarity of presentation, of structure (students complain about poor organisation)
- 5) attractiveness – interactivity.

Participation is closely linked with Education for Democratic Citizenship (EDC) – (5).

Main components of the Quality Guide.

1. Quality of Teaching Staff

In the work of this section there participated specialists from Latvia, the USA, France, the Netherlands, Sweden Finland, and other countries.

This section was concerned with teachers’ knowledge, skills and values.

How can we get evidence of it? By degree, certification, work samples, portfolio. How to maintain quality? Through regular training, self-monitored further development, teachers’ networks.

The participants agreed that the main problems of the teaching staff are the following:

- a) The teachers stick to old ways of teaching, show no flexibility
- b) Braindrain – teachers go to other branches
- c) Lack of national standards for teachers

- d) Drawbacks in teacher education – they have not learned the language where it is spoken (not possible for budgetary reasons)
- e) No system of promotion (the system of promotion in state institutions takes into account only the number of years of in-service and one observed lesson!). There is no promotion according to one's success in teaching – this may be one of the reasons for resistance to change.
- f) Low status of teachers in all countries

In order to design a quality system for our needs, we could ask respondents the following questions:

1. How many staff members have left your Department and for what reasons?
 - 1.1. have retired
 - 1.2. have been made redundant
 - 1.3. have gone to other branches. Where to?
2. During your pre-service training, have you studied the language where it is spoken?
3. How is the staff promoted in your institution?
 - 3.1. After a certain period of time
 - 3.2. According to certain number of publications
 - 3.3. After one observed lesson
 - 3.4. After completion of teacher training courses
 - 3.5. Combining factors 1+2
 - 3.6. Combining factors 1+2+3
 - 3.7. Combining factors 1+2+3+4

2. Quality of Delivery

The following factors should be considered

- a) Motivation
- b) Special purposes – how special?
- c) Active participation
- d) Steady learning pace
- e) Course matches real world needs
- f) Connected with learning style
- g) Classroom environment
- h) Which skills will be developed
- i) Challenging assignments
- j) Which teacher can do the job
- k) Materials – are they supportive.

As we may notice, factors 10 and 11 overlap with 2 other sections- Quality of Teaching, and Quality of Materials. In the article we will not discuss the quality of materials and the quality of assessment, since these issues will be discussed in a separate article.

On the basis of this section, we developed several questions for respondents:

1. Does your course have a unique selling point?
2. Does the technical provision of the course satisfy the needs?
3. How do you develop higher thinking skills?
4. How can you characterise the lecturers' attitude to students?
5. Does the study environment promote learning?
6. Will the obtained knowledge be useful in real life?
7. Are the materials attractive and challenging?
8. Is the study course sufficiently interactive?

Methods

For assessment the level of quality assurance in the Department of Languages at the Latvian Academy of Sport Education we used an expert assessment method. 75 p.c. staff members evaluated the level of quality assurance according to the ISO 9000 standards. These standards have 10 sections, the main ones of which are leadership, policy and strategy, personal management, resources, process management, satisfaction of clients, satisfaction of staff, and business results.

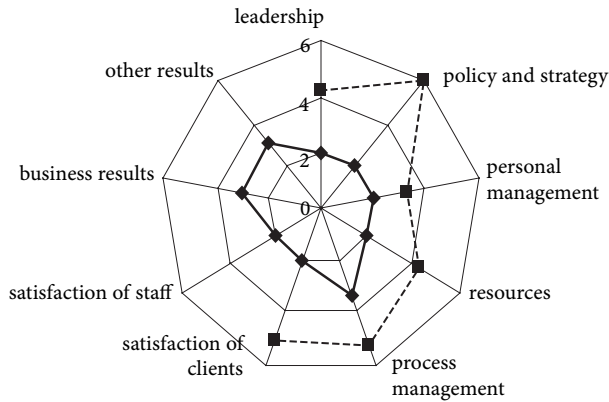
For the assessment of students' satisfaction, we developed a special questionnaire, consisting of 20 questions, inquiring about obtained knowledge, skills and competencies, difficulties in the study process, the teacher's work, the study process, materials and technical equipment.

Results

1. The "quality spidergram" is shown in Picture 1.

The quality spidergram shows that the quality system at the Department of Languages confines itself to first stages of a quality system – quality inspection and quality control, showing only some traits of quality assurance. The head of the Department evaluates all aspects of quality higher than the rest of the Department. She evaluates strategy and policy especially highly. Maybe she has a clearer vision about these aspects, but the fact remains that she has not explained them to the staff.

Picture 1. Quality spidergram.



2. Students' assessment of the Sport English study course in 2006.

29 students participated in the final assessment of the study course. The results revealed that there are many problems, among them – necessity for more discussion and interviews concerning sport in Latvia and the world, more work in pairs and groups, more video and audio materials, more attention to special sports the students are doing, more creative work, more speaking, more listening, more independent work, assessment system should be more based on current work, not home assignments.

The majority of the students admitted that they felt good and did not lose confidence during the study course (65%), 20% confessed that they felt insecure.

The majority (64%) admitted that they had studied many new sports terms, one third agreed that they had learned to express themselves and to listen to others, only one respondent agreed that he/she had broadened his/her view about culture of our and other nations.

Approximately half of the students expressed a view that they could be more active during the study course, only one third were sure that they had been sufficiently active during the study course.

From the activities the students preferred:

- 1) reading (34%),
- 2) speaking (31%),
- 3) group work (also 31%),
- 4) watching video (20%),
- 5) listening (14%),
- 6) pair work (also 14%),
- 7) assessment of peers (13%),

- 8) writing (10%),
- 9) home reading – 0.03% (1 respondent).

The students were also encouraged to explain their answers. About peer assessment they wrote that they are future teachers, and for teachers the ability to assess is very important, about reading – one can not only learn the pronunciation, but also the spelling of new terms, about listening – you can learn a lot by listening to people who speak well, about discussions – you can learn to express yourself, compare viewpoints, about writing – I like to express my thoughts on paper, about pair work – you can compensate for your poor knowledge and skills with the help of the partner, about group work – you can develop co-operation skills.

The students disliked the following activities:

- 1) grammar – it is difficult, calls for different instruction methods
- 2) individual reading – it is always the same
- 3) many activities failed due to different level of English knowledge, skills and competencies.

Table 1. Students' assessment of the study course

Statement	Totally agree	Agree	Dis-agree	Totally disagree
	(%)			
Contents of the study course do not overlap with other courses.	11	54	31	4
The delivery of the study course is comprehensible	10	70	17	3
The lecturer encourages students' thinking	18	64	14	4
The lecturer is well-prepared for classes	21	71	7	0
The lecturer has a positive attitude to students	21	57	21	0
The lecturer has high requirements	15	52	26	7
The number of classes is appropriate to course contents	14	57	29	0
The technical equipment of the course is good	7	25	54	14
Study environment promotes learning	11	22	52	15
Study course is sufficiently interactive	8	72	12	8

From the students' answers we can conclude that they evaluate the teaching staff positively: the majority of the students totally agree and agree that the delivery of the course is comprehensible (80%), the lecturer is well-prepared for classes (92%), the lecturer sets forth high requirements (67%), the lecturer has a positive attitude to students (79%), and the lecturer encourages students' thinking (82%), and the study course is sufficiently interactive (80%).

Also the organisation of the study course is evaluated positively: 71% of the students consider that the number of classes is appropriate to the course contents, and the contents of the study course do not overlap with other courses (65%).

The students' evaluation of the learning environment is more negative than positive. 68% of the students disagree and totally disagree with the statement that the technical equipment of the course is appropriate, 67% disagree and totally disagree with the statement that the study environment promotes learning.

From the results of the questionnaire we can conclude that the main problems of the given study course lie in the technical provision of the course and selection of appropriate, challenging activities, which are suited to students with different levels of English and different learning styles.

Further work entails further broadening of students' questionnaires, involving more questions about the evaluation of materials and study processes. It is necessary to develop a questionnaire for the teaching staff and the head of the Department. Full coverage of quality management calls for questioning also graduates about their satisfaction with a given study course and possibilities to employ knowledge, skills and competencies in real life.

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