QUALITATIVE EVALUATION: INTERDISCIPLINARY MASTER

Corina CACE[1]

Abstract: *The goals of this evaluation refer to: process evaluation and results of the master program (the theoretical component of training); program relevance evaluation in terms of the current activities from the university (acquisitions and transfers) and identification of the obstacles and opportunities for practical application.*

The impact of the master program was performed using document analysis (master program design, curricula, selection methods, needs analysis for formation, subsumption to the strategy of the Academy of Economic Studies) and content analysis (12 interviews with trainees) focused on subjects which are correlated with the goals of the master program. The analysis monitors 4 primary (internal) dimensions: theoretical-formative, applicative, beneficial-participative, change, in relation with 3 secondary (external) dimensions, which strengthen, facilitate and integrate with the primary dimensions: general aspects, previous training/need for training, group and group dynamics.

As regards the results, the general feature is the: acquisition of teaching, research and communication in English knowledge; development of a behavioural change in relation to the students, with the research activity and within the scientific community at the national and international levels and identification of obstacles that perceived as pertaining to the self of the trainees or at the institutional level.

Keywords: *evaluation, teaching, research, communication, English.*

INTRODUCTION

A new philosophy was born, in the context of „moral crisis of good intention' appear what, now, we can see the evaluation of public programmes. Evaluation is a systematic pursuit of the valorization or value of an object, but also a systematic acquirement and assessment of the information, for receiving feedback from an object (Cace, 2002: 15);

[1] Associate Professor Phd., Head of Theacher Training Department, Academy of Economic Studies, Str. Piata Romana, nr. 6, sector 1, Bucharest, Romania, Tel: 004/0213191900, fax: 004/0213117559, Email: corina.cace@dppd.ase.ro

also, performing of an evaluation involves decisions concerning the continuation, completion or change the program (Negut et. al, 2011: 61). Main purposes of evaluation are: measuring progress against program objectives, identifying strengths and weaknesses, analyze program effectiveness, cost-benefit analysis and better planning and organization of activities (Cace, 2003: 31) Very important is to see the benefits of the programs, what are they 'doing'? Why they were created for? Hence it is necessary to assess the benefits if the program, how much any education program, in particular, improves education. That's why we have to evaluate them, to see how it does so, and how it can do so more effectively.

Chen (2005) realized an analogy between fishing and program evaluation. Why we can learn from the 'art of fishing'? First, we may consider evaluation approaches and methods as being analogues to fishing equipment. But, as evaluator, being familiar with approaches and methods it is not sufficient for a good job. By this meaning evaluation, and evaluation research, becomes real and scientific only when methodological approaches are real closer by theory and also closer by contextual knowledge. That's way is important to have a conceptual framework of program evaluation research (program theory) (Tripodi and all, 1986). The framework grasps how the evaluation taxonomy can guide the choice of evaluation approach and the methodological aspects, too. Evaluation methodology is the whole system of „roads' going to an 'objectual reality'. Using diverse methods we are going to find a „real object'. But, for this, we need something more: techniques and procedures. This is the reason for considering evaluation a science. It has knowledge bases able to describe all three dimensions used in science definition: ontology, epistemology and methodology (Shadish and al., 1999: 42).

Program evaluation assumes that 'social problem solving' could be improved (by incremental improvements in on-going program, by better design of a new program, stop the program if it is bad and replace it with better ones) (Rossi, 1982; Rossi, 1985). That's way is important to elaborate an applied evaluation design to the specific case that is analysed. Qualitative research is more appropriate for this study case, because of its features: appropriateness of methods and theories; perspectives of the participants and their diversity; reflexivity of the researcher and the research and variety of approaches and methods (Flick, 2006: 14-16). Education quality can be explain by different points of view, that will grow the roots of qualitative analysis (Van de Bergh, 1995).

In teaching process, the testing and evaluation of students have an important role in enriching knowledge and taking control of learning (Penca Palčić, 2008: 125). The teaching process , including "student-centered learning" (Cace C. et al., 2011: 123), involves dynamic and reflective interaction between students-teacher-content knowledge (Halloran, 2010:133).

Context. Master 'English Language Education And Research Communication For Business And Economics'

This MA, at institutional level, is a part of the Academy of Economic Studies strategy for Professional Development. Is intended for academics, teachers, researchers, medical doctors, with an interest in developing their competencies in the mentioned areas, who

may then contribute, as facilitating the development of specific skills in academic and research contexts.

The main **aims of the program** (Muresan, 2008: 161) are:

- to contribute to improving teaching methodology, with a focus on the needs of HE for business and economics in an English- medium academic context;

- to facilitate the development of advanced communication competencies in English, both for academic purposes and for international communication in a variety of professional settings;

- to contribute to improving research practice, with a focus on both methodological aspects and related communication skills for presenting and publishing research outcomes internationally.

The basic principle guiding the methodology and content of the formation in this educational program was that of interdisciplinary. The argument is the 'in-depth knowledge' specific to the two activities conducted in any university: teaching and research (Bardi and al., 1999; Bardi, 2007). Leaving from the identified[1] need for formation, a fair number of themes have been supplied during the actual training.

EDUCATION	RESEARCH
• Integrating professional and communication skills for teaching and learning in English in economic field; • Improving communication skills/ English for Academic purposes; • Quality Standards in Higher Education; • Educational management competencies; • Multidisciplinary approach; • Design and management of projects in education field;	• *Advanced communication skills in English;* • *Partnerships (between universities and/ with economic environment);* • *Academic writing requirements;* • *Effective writing for scholarly publication;* • *Genre analysis and critical discourse analysis applied in economics;* • *Research methodology in social sciences;* • *Correlating theory and practice;*
• *Developing critical and creative thinking skills for business studies, partnerships and projects;* • *Global issues and strategic perspectives for Romania: an interdisciplinary approach;* • *International criteria and practises of (self-) evaluation, peer-review, and feedback at all levels (students, teachers, institutions).*	

Adapted after: Conceptual framework of the Interdisciplinary Master Programme. Muresan, 2008: 164.

The **methodology used by the formation program** relied on: a team of trainers consisted of experimented Romanian specialists and reputed foreign specialists, both European and worldwide; an organised *formation session* by modules from various disciplines; the utilisation of active - participative methods such as: heuristics, lectures,

debates and case studies. In an attempt to provide for an interactive working environment, the feed-back and questions from the trainees have been permanently encouraged and taken into consideration. The new *teaching methods* are used to create a new attitude, to facilitate the acquisition of the taught knowledge and to consolidate the abilities. And the *trainees* became more accustomed to some specific types of intervention by role plays initiated by the trainers.

Evaluation of the Training Program: Results and their Impact on the Trainees

Research methodology

In this paper is evaluated a Interdisciplinary Master Program*: English Language Education and Research Communication for Business and Economics* from Faculty of International Business and Economics, Academy of Economic Studies-Bucharest, who functioned along three learning years: 2006-2008, 2007-2009 and 2008-2010.

This study which aims to determine the **impact of the master program** was performed using the following **methods of research / evaluation**:

- Document analysis

- Content analysis (**technical**) on the interviews with the graduates of the 3 graduation series.

Document analysis included master program design, curricula, methods for trainee selection and analysis of the needs for formation, subsumption of the master program to the strategy of the Academy of Economic Studies for career development and institutional development based on the quality standards of the higher education.

A number of 12 interviews have been conducted in order to get a consistent feed-back from the trainees. Most of the interviewed trainees which attended this master program are university teaching staff. A few exceptions exist though: one person is a teacher in the pre-university education system, one is researcher outside the educational system.

The content analysis of the interviews conducted with the aid of the interview guidebooks focused on subjects which are correlated with the goals of the master program (**problem centred interview**) (Yin, 2002). This interview is characterized by three central aspects (criteria): Problem centring; Object orientation; Process orientation

Evaluation Results

The analysis monitors 4 **primary** (internal) dimensions: theoretical-formative, applicative, beneficial-participative, change, in relation with 3 **secondary** (external) dimensions, which strengthen, facilitate and integrate with the primary dimensions: general aspects, previous training/need for training, group and group dynamics.
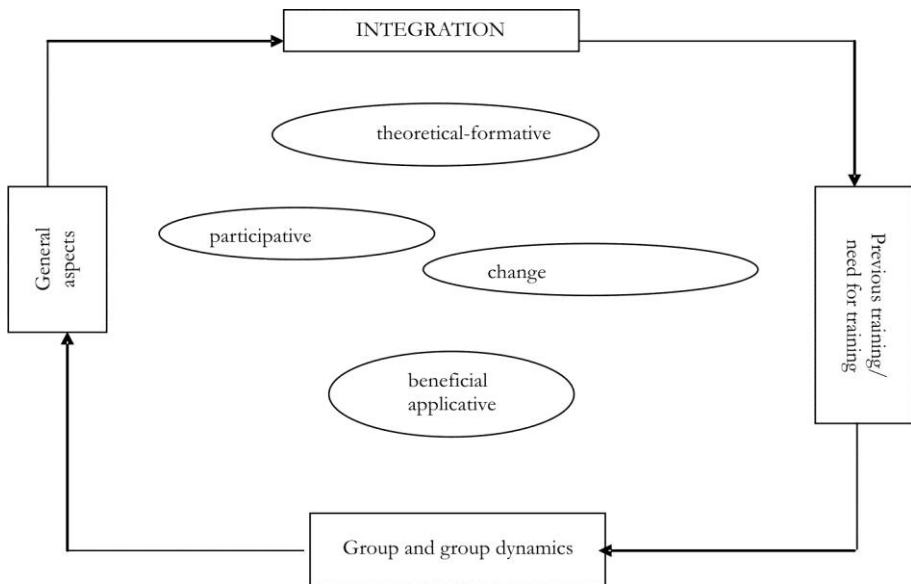
Primary/ internal dimensions of the training program

1. Theoretical component of training;

2. Applicative component of the knowledge, abilities and competencies after graduating the master program;

3. Benefits of attending the master program

4. Suggestions for improvement / directions of change

The theoretical component of formation

Involves four major variables: process, content, methodology and communication in English. Within *process component* can be identified three types of relations.
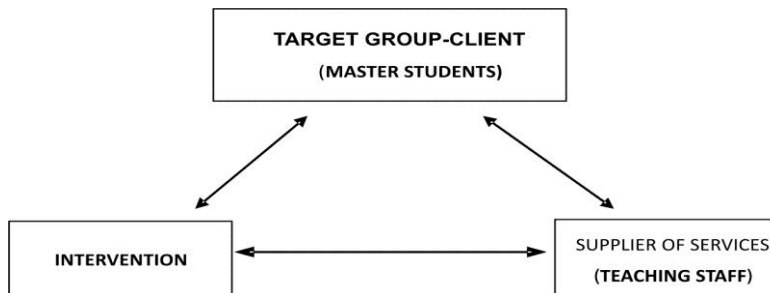
The methodology of formation usually presumes a triple procedure: need to evaluate the formation requirements of the trainees; adequate selection of the teaching techniques of formation to be used during the process of teaching; evaluation of the process of formation in order to get a full image of its results (Craft, 1996).

The theoretical component of formation actually refers to the usefulness of the program of master studies. The usefulness is seen as an aggregate value of the *contents*, *teaching methodology* (specific to adult education), of the *group management* and, last but not least, of the modalities and forms of *communication in English*. The trainees from the third series and the graduates of the first two graduations series have been interviewed on these aspects.

Their individual answers, as personal opinions, are diversified and cover a wide range. At first sight one may say that the initial formation (specialisation through master studies) plays an important role in evaluating the usefulness of the master program. It directs the answer and, especially, adds nuances to it.

> *'As PhD Student and junior assistant teacher, this master programme helped me a lot on different layers (communication, knowledge, research skills, self- assessment)' (junior assistant teacher, Economic background);*

> *'The program was organised exclusively on 'humanist' or 'philological' bases'; it was interesting and it could have been „much more challenging' (trainee, mathematics background);*

> *'Program of highest usefulness, inter-curricular approach, indispensable for the continuous formation of the university teaching staff' (trainee, socio-humanistic background).*

The interesting **curricula** were a support for the academic teaching-research activities.

> *'I appreciate that our master program is very useful for the continuous learning of a university teacher because with the assistance of our trainers we improved our teaching style, our evaluation skills and our proficiency in writing scientific articles.' (Trainee, finances -second graduation series)*

On the same topic, the curricula, in terms of novelty, the respondents had progressive evaluations: from '*different approaches of known themes or concepts*', '*novelty*', invoking expressly the '*novel character*'. Regarding the 'answer to the trainees' needs' or 'focusing on the students' the respondents mentioned that:

> *'[curricula]....perfectly adapted to the interests of the master students, brief, synthetic presentation of the course, systematization and accessibility for all disciplines';*

> *'addresses both the scientific research and the process of teaching; maybe too much stress on the research part, but this didn't bother me at all';*

> *'[curricula]...accompanied by a wealth of materials for documentation...'.*

The master program itself has, intrinsically, a challenging element seen through the prism of interdisciplinary. This variable is valued by the participants in the formation program.

The teaching methodology (teaching methods, means, techniques and procedures) has been positively appreciated by the trainees. The diversity of the teaching methods was

specific to the adult people (role plays, debates) targeting, besides the aspects of knowledge, those of the group communication. The transfer of knowledge was done using the methods of active participation. The general perception is related to the use of the 'new teaching methods', which are stirring: *'modern, catching, properly chosen connections'*. The flexible character of the methodology is praised, which is continuously adapted to the needs of the trainees (level of the group).

> *'The teaching staff endeavoured to adapt the teaching and evaluation style to the level of knowledge and experience of the trainees'.*

The trainees appreciated the diversity of the teaching methods and, at the same time, another very important aspect, their interactive character. They have perceived thus the useful cognitive transfer in the formation of skills, habits, even reasonable behaviours and actual competencies.

> *'diversified methods, predominantly interactive, focusing on the development of creativeness, problem solving'.*

> *'practical aspects, research mainly'*

The perception of the training course usefulness through the prism of the management is favourable. The administration of the master program is praised, as well as the competence of the trainers and the activity with the group of trainees, the functional and beneficial network of communications, and the contributions to the dynamics of the group.

'I think that the management of the master course was very good because:

- *we have been informed beforehand on the schedule for the entire term;*

- *teaching staff of high intellectual standards, some teaching abroad;*

- *socialization between the trainees on the one hand, and between the trainees and the teachers, on the other hand'*

The trainees noticed the flexibility of the program, its adaptation to the necessities of the group: *'malleable structure, high professional standard, modesty, will to share own know-how'* and the permanent bond, via various channels, between the teachers and the trainees.

The **communication in English** is perceived as being at a very good level. Even if in the beginning of the master program there were people with a lower ability of communication in English. Gradually, the communication barriers have been removed and they acquired abilities of conversation and writing in English. Other people observed the positive attitude towards the '*intensive use of English*'; the dynamics, however, was influenced by the heterogeneity of the group in terms of this capacity of the trainees:

A gain was the formation of skills and the acquisition of the techniques of '*writing and formulating texts for publishing'.*

The **quality of teaching** accompanies, unavoidably, the perception on the usefulness of the training course. The framework of the analysis is given by the interlocking the

psycho-socio-pedagogical and managerial aspects. It looks at the ways that trainers create social and physical environments for learning by examining classroom management. This is due primarily to the correlations existing within the triad teaching-learning-evaluating and, second, to the multitude of factors (affectivity, motivation, will) of whose interference learning depends (mainly the adult learning). Third, the quality of teaching is perceived in terms of trainer's capacity to provide the group of trainees with factors of satisfaction and motivation.

'The quality of teaching during this master programme was excellent for most of the courses, because the teachers involved in this process put also <a piece of their heart> in it'.

Without digressing from the specific framework of 'expert teaching', a list of capacities is provided, which define the 'expert teachers-trainers' (experienced, effective teachers who have developed solutions for classroom problems) and 'reflective practitioners' (thoughtful and incentive).

'special scientific standing .... throughout the entire program of teaching'

The quality of teaching is related to the novelty-bearing information. The students appreciated here the attitude of the trainers and their openness towards the new, as well as their capacity to convey information via actively participative methods, whose finality was to acquire new competencies, comparable to those acquired in reference universities.

'The teachers endeavoured to come up with up-to-date information and to develop in the trainees, through quality teaching, the abilities indispensable for an elite university'

Teaching was not regarded strictly as a formal activity whose purpose is to transmit information but, by going beyond the strict framework of the classroom, it is considered as a support, a real help and an answer to the problems confronting the trainees in the classrooms when their turn to teach the others comes.

From the way in which the trainees appreciate the quality of teaching, one can readily notice the influence of the affectivity factor which acts directly on the teaching – learning relation, strengthening thus the acquisition of information. And, yielding, in the same time, an active behaviour.

'No doubt, each of them put everything better inside him/her in terms of professionalism, in order to make this master program a success; modern and diversified methods, implementation of methods used by reputed universities. And a lot of soul.'

'Very good. Interactive, well documented, fluent, attractive, modern'

Application of methods (as personal acquirement during the master program) in day-to-day activity (as specialist, teaching staff of Academy of Economic Studies from Bucharest) - the following variables were proposed for particularisation: teaching, research, organisational management, communication in English.

In terms of the transfer of knowledge, of the direct application and transfer into every day activity, 'changes' in attitude and behaviour have been noticed.

'Certainly, my activity has been influenced by the participation in this program; however, I think it is too early now to be fully aware of the way I have been influenced'

'I think I improved my teaching style, as well as the style of doing research, investigations'

Teaching is the first monitored variable. The trainees have assumed the learnt methods and applied them into their own activity, at least in their relation with the students.

'For instance, when I studied what kinds of errors the teachers make, I identified myself with some of them and that is why I tried afterwards to avoid doing those mistakes'

They consider that the new competencies they acquired through this program of learning have made their everyday activity more pleasant.

'I applied very much of what I have learnt during this master program: I organised for the students some special seminars of critical thinking, which they enjoyed a lot and considered very useful, we did, writing, academic writing (I would have anyhow did it, it was in the curriculum, but this way it was much more easier)'

The previous dimension referred to the actively participative methods used by the teachers during the training sessions during this master program. The use of these methods prompted the trainees to 'assume' these methods, which made their relation with the students, the teaching part, mainly, to get an interactive character. The teaching style is different and the stress is on the teaching methods which stimulate students; creativity and enterpreneurship.

'interactive (multidirectional communication, stressing on students' creativity and enterpreneurship) team work, case studies'

The differences perceived by the trainees in terms of own behavior in the classroom refers to aspects pertaining to the quality of teaching. They consider that they upgraded their teaching style as result of the new acquirements, either in terms of content, or in terms of the way information is presented, or in terms of teaching method.

'higher standard of the teaching done in the classroom (theoretical part and diversification of the methods); actual utilization of the methods acquired and practiced during the seminars (for instance team working, text analysis)'.

The transfer produced in the field of the research activity is the next step of our analysis. The transfer of knowledge and of information taking place, as teaching mechanism, is constantly changing, it's directed by the teachers, but will be the result of the student's own action of discovery.

The importance of research must not be overlooked beyond its formal, legal framework within the teaching activity. One of the special goals of this master program is to initiate the trainees in the research activity. It is meant to open the road to the evaluative research for every teaching activity (also as action research). It acts to establish the critical thinking and the creative thinking. It joins qualitative approaches with quantitative activities both in socio-human research and in the sphere of the economics and international relations. The gain, as described by the graduates of this master program, is huge.

'I use what I learnt [...] to write professional articles'.

The challenge of research was a response to trainees' necessities, at a certain level, being a novelty and, at another one, and in-depth instruction on the background of the confrontation of ideas. Their present activity is influenced by the information acquired during the courses which materialized in actual competencies.

'I acquired basic notions, very useful, new things about statistics and various types of research'

'I learnt some research methods and some of them I used subsequently'.

The contact of the teachers was not fruitless. The acquisitions were obvious. The methodological aspects of research approached during the training sessions yielded concrete results:

'The discussions with the teachers about the way to manage a research project, from documentation to finalization, were extremely useful and I could build my own winning strategy for an international project for which I received funding from a foreign university (this project involved several aspects pertaining to English and to the research management)'.

The argument, for which the variable of organisational management is subsumed to the dimension quantifying the transfer of information, is double. On the one hand, we take into consideration the importance of the management of the class/group of students for the acquisition of the desired behaviors (competencies, capacities and skills); on the other hand, we take into consideration the importance of the management of the class/group of students in relation with and for translation towards the institutional level[1]. In the beginning of the analysis of this dimension we mentioned the triad teaching-learning-evaluation as well as the importance of the affection, motivational and volitional factors for learning. Teaching 'resides' at the interference of the psycho-socio-pedagogical planes. The question is which is the relation between the management of the class/group of students that learn and teaching. All the psycho–socio–pedagogical elements that influence, support and potentiate teaching may have a managerial signification. In turn, the managerial aspects may have a psycho–socio–pedagogical significance on learning which, in fact, is a behavioral change.

The trainees acquired new skills and competencies which yielded new behaviors. These new behaviors, in turn, have effect on class management (relation with the students), which generates the desired behavior in the latter learning at another qualitative level, produced within a context imposed by factors of satisfaction and enhanced by other factors of motivation.

'I used what I learnt within the activity of technical and operational testing-evaluation of the products and systems undergoing research or under implementation'.

New behaviors were also noticed in terms of the attitude towards the educational management in general. The application of managerial processes and actions is in agreement with the science of management, combined with the principles of education, particularly when we speak of the school organization as a complex social system.

---

[1] The aspect of the institutional relations will be analyzed subsequently

In terms of communication in English, every trainee did better after the conclusion of the master program. Irrespective of the competency level of the trainees at the beginning of the master program, they all appreciate that the core of this program was the English language. The effect of communication in English is appreciated in relation to certain relations whom the trainees developed within the academic environment/ '*development of the pedagogical language*'; either towards article writing in English and their public presentation or in the relation with the students via the debates organized with them in the classroom:

> '*after I graduated the master program, I attended international scientific conferences, where I presented the articles in English*'

> '*I communicate during the common actions with the foreign partners (presentations, action preparation, tests, equipment delivery and negotiations)*'

An inventory of the favourite aspects:

- '*The atmosphere during the courses*'

- '*The excellent communication with the teachers and their unconditional support*'

- '*The availability of the participants for dialogue and debates*'

- '*Openness of the master students towards initiatives*'

- '*The assessment process*'

- '*The very sound training of the teaching staff*'

- '*The practical character of the topics taught during this program*'

- '*The interactive character of the master program*'

- '*The discussions with the invited teachers from foreign universities*'

- '*The fact that I got more trust in me and in my capacity to communicate in English*'

- '*The flexibility of the program*'

- '*Even if there is no research experience, the first steps can be taken during this master program*'

- '*The meeting with colleagues from AES Bucharest participation in joint projects and discussion of everybody's personal experience*'

- '*I actually understood how a material should be written (research results) for publishing*'

- '*The quality of the training*'

- '*The information that we received was thus structured as to provide maximum utility*'

After reading this 'inventory' the conclusion that yields is that the interviewed people are involved emotionally; the feeling of belonging to a teaching community is predominant. The nature of the answers, even though it covers a wide range catches the aspects which, without exaggerating, target the objectives of this master program. The

mechanisms of action: the cognitive apparatus, the methodological one, the program management, had the role to meet trainees' necessities. This training program combines the pedagogical vision of 'student focusing' with the vision related to the scientific content.

An inventory of the negative aspects

Synthetically, the negative aspects are related more to each individual interviewed person and refer to the regret of not having enough time to attend all the activities of the master program. They have no connection whatsoever with the organization or management of the program.

- *'Lack of international acknowledgement of the program; although the program does an effort to get international, it is just a start which should be developed a lot.'*

- *'More classes on project management, research methods, article writing for publishing in international databases of ISI journals and classes of „writing in English'.*

- *'In some periods the schedule was heavily loaded'*

- *'The class hours between 6 - 9 p.m., when I was very tired and didn't have the yield I wanted'*

- *'Some our colleagues who were very advanced with their English were behaving condescendingly with the beginners in English'*

The component of knowledge, abilities and competencies application after the graduation of the master program

The 'problems' referred to by the interviewed people are in fact negative contexts and limit situations perceived by them in their everyday activity (of teaching or researching). The answer behaviour of all the interviewed people has a common explanation the specificity / philosophy of the master program which:

a) raised several question marks regarding the 'own behavior in the classroom' or towards own research activity (becoming aware, which is a gain);

'*An important problem is that there still are students whom no matter how hard I try to determine to participate actively in the classes, they are still displaying a passive and disinterested attitude'*

b) produced a certain reaction of reply (an intention, or a latent behavioral state, which is also a gain)

'Student motivation, the lack of time to prepare the classes/ for a quality individual feedback for the students/ for the research (heavy loading of the teaching norms, very large, even disproportionate, sometimes, number of students in a group'

c) it determined the seeking and choice of the instruments by which the reply reaction becomes manifest (overt behavior in everyday activity, which is a gain) and, actually, aware to become, actually, a desire outcome.

The reasonable problem solving behavior is related directly to the way in which the problem is identified and particularly on the way people become aware of it. If the problem is perceived wrongly, which happens many times, its solving yields arguable actions (both in terms of teaching and research activity), straying from the essence of the teaching activity, in this case even from the goals of the master program.

> *'the most important problems confronting me in my teaching activity pertain to the infrastructure: not all classrooms have video projector, the groups of students attending courses or seminars are far too large. The main problems challenging my research activity regard the lack of financing and the institutional obstacles hindering the participation in conferences abroad to disseminate the research findings, to validate them, to improve them, so that they can be subsequently published in a reputed journal'*

The bulk of answers, however, reflect the aware and active-positive attitude towards the described problems and towards the teaching/research methods. The chosen teaching methods show that the transfer has occurred. A correlation with the variables of the dimension analyzed previously (the theoretical component of training, usefulness) strengthens this assertion.

The interviewed trainees show that both in their activity with the students and in their research activity, the competencies acquired during the master program are obvious. The topics of debates are selected to develop thinking by involving various operations (analysis, synthesis, and comparison), 'creative thinking', 'critical thinking'. Teaching is characterized by 'interactivity'. And the use of active participative methods elicits the interest of the students for study.

> *'simulation of real activities'*

> *'I use interactive methods any time I have the opportunity to do it. I use the video projector for PowerPoint presentations; the text analysis in the seminar because I want my students to develop their thinking, not just to reproduce what I teach them'*

> *'During the seminar activities I use: case studies, games, group activities, software tools in order to facilitate the understanding of different economic modelling techniques'*

The teaching and research activity is full of obstacles. However, some opinions show that the trainees are aware of the importance of the knowledge accumulated during the master program. They acknowledge the build up of competencies, but their use is blocked by the (institutional) lack of 'international collaborations'. Another aspect that have been expressed is the lack of agreement between the competencies of the master students and their cognitive level.

> *'Because the number of students paying course fees is very large and because the admission grade was lowered to 5 even at the best rated faculties of AES Bucharest, sometimes I have to adapt the teaching level to the intellectual and interest level of the students. Thus, the students with a high potential will be affected because I can not teach at the level I would like to'*

The mentioned obstacles are related, most times, to the institutional dimension, and less to the personal dimension. The institutional aspects may be considered as a 'given fact' and the response reactions are minimal. The personal dimension relates to the finality of the master program. The observable behaviour is considered to be the result of the accumulations gathered during the master program.

> *„Lack of time, large number of classes / large number of students in a group, lack of motivation for the students to attend the seminars'.....*

> *'research: lack of a team. I do research only on an individual basis or in teams with people outside the institution where I work'*

Benefits of attending the master program (short-term and long-term benefits)

The benefits of the master program is evaluated in terms of trainees on the basis of their perceptions about master program influence on their teaching activity, research activity, organizational management and communication in English, and about the dynamics on these influence over time.
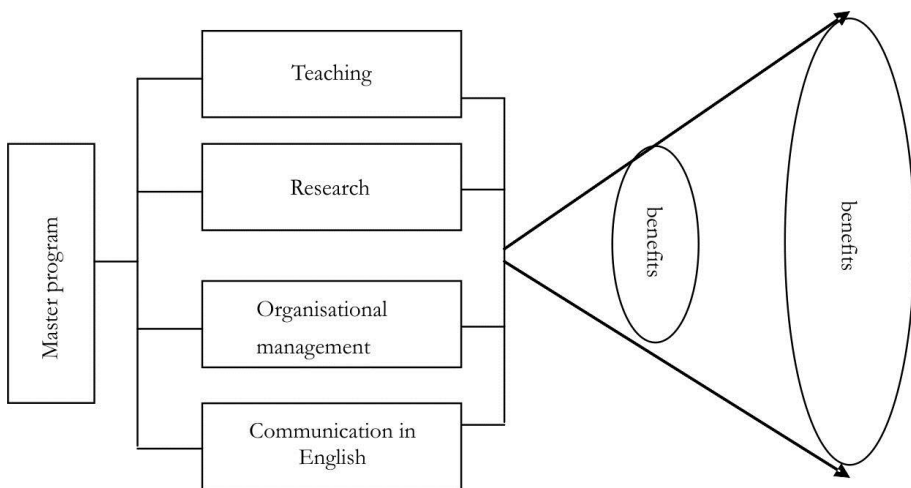
In terms of the ***benefits for teaching***, behavioural changes are obvious in the classroom, following the acquisition of knowledge. On the short term, either existing behaviours are improved/ perfected or new competencies have been established. The classroom activity is perceived as having been reorganised. The teaching objectives are correlated to the volume and quality of the contents. The teaching strategy is directly influenced by the information acquired during this master program. These behavioural changes lead to a better relation with the students. On the long term, a creative,

analytical, organized, student-focused behaviour is expected. The acquired knowledge allow designing strategies which to better the relation with the students (in terms of communication and results of the students) which to strengthen the relation between teaching–learning–evaluation.

In terms of the ***benefits for research***, on the short term, there are the methodological aspects. The interviewed persons also perceived real benefits, new knowledge supporting the writing of research reports and of scientific articles prepared for publishing or even published. On the long term, the benefits are aiming towards a structured research activity. They are evaluated in relation to the involvement in national and international projects as efficient activity (from project design to its implementation and management). The knowledge acquired during the master program will play a favourable role in the future publishing activity of the trainees.

The component of ***benefits to organizational management***, on the short term, refers to the system of knowledge and information, as novelty. A new vision on the organizational management emerges, development of the system of interpersonal relations, communication, a new way of evaluating at the institutional level. On the long term, the benefits are perceived in relation to the abilities to implement the learnt methods, to the improvement of communication at the institutional level.

The component of ***communication in English*** is rich in actual benefits on the short term. The range of answers is wide and gradually increasing qualitatively, from learning the language to designing a course in English. A benefit of the master program is that it strengthened and developed the ability of communication (in terms of speaking and writing abilities). On the long term, the finality is the development of course lectures in English and doing the course lectures and seminars also in English. The master program favoured the trainees to reach a stage of knowledge that allows both the documentation for scientific articles, and actually writing the articles and presenting them publicly in English within the scientific community.

Suggestions for improvement and direction for change

First direction for change takes in consideration increasing horizontal communication between all stakeholders of masterly program (initiators of masterly program, trainers, students, graduators) and representatives of all departments and faculties to extent interactive methods and teaching methodology at the institutional level. That means transfer of knowledge in a progressive way and in the end the whole institution become more flexible being able to respond to the different challenges (Gaspar, 2000).

Second, show the importance of research centered approach and applicative component of it in direct correlation with student's previous specialization.

From the international point of view, the suggestion includes the institutional recognition of the MA through partnership design and develops with universities and research centers' witch promote similar educational programs.

Conclusions

In this paper, the author evaluates the process, the results of the master program, the program relevance in terms of the current activities from the university and identified the obstacles and opportunities for practical application.

Regarding the theoretical component of training, all respondents appreciated positively the build up of information and knowledge during the master program. The individual interviews confirm the positive evaluation of the training courses: the general feature is the **acquisition of knowledge in the field of teaching, research and communication in English.**

Regarding the practical application component involving the accumulated knowledge and acquired abilities, most of the evaluations are positive. The acquisitions and the transfer of knowledge yielded an obvious **behavioural change in relation to the students, with the research activity and within the scientific community at the national and international levels.**

Regarding the acknowledgement/identification of the obstacles and opportunities for the practical application of the acquired knowledge, there is a bi-dimensional perception of the obstacles and of the solutions proposed to go past these obstacles. The first dimension reveals obstacles that perceived as pertaining to the self of the trainees; the proposed solutions refer the short-term or long-term benefits resulting from the **new competencies that were acquired through the master program**. The second dimension is specific to the obstacles perceived at the institutional level, to which not many solutions can be proposed.

The qualitative evaluations yielded several conclusions:

a) The master program provided the trainees a complex presentation of the types of intervention required by the *teaching activity*, by the *research activity* and by the class *management* (specific to the learning groups), on the background of stimulating continuous *communication in English only*. Improving the language skills, students will be more likely to benefit from a mobility program (Kovačić et.all., 2009: 36).

b) One of the main gains of the *training* was the establishment of a new attitude of the professionals for the critical thinking and for the creative thinking regarding the active teaching methods and regarding the options for *intervention in the class*. This contributed to the shift from the predominant attitude directed towards a unidirectional speech, to an attitude focused on the students and on the active participation in the classroom. Therefore, school quality is directly influenced by the student participation (Kovač et al., 2010: 347). The learning process is more efficient 'from the mini lectures with feedback and (reflective) analysis and least from reading and discussing professional literature' (Marentič Požarnik, 2009: 356). That's way, it's necessary to empower students to 'cultivate their independent learning skills and not be penalized for making mistakes when they do attempt new techniques and skills' (Halloran, 2010: 138). More than that, performance evaluation of teaching by the students plays an important role in process improvement. Especially when teaching material is clear and adapted for cognitive level of students (Deković-Kesovija, 2011: 185).

c) Overall, the training program provided strong and sustained arguments for an integrated approach of the *research* component. The research component has been presented as a very complex activity which operates at multiple levels:

- methodological (coexistence of the disciplines which approach different methodologies): quantitatively; qualitatively;

- relational-interpersonal (accomplished and evaluated research activity): individual, group;

- in evolution: by training session, by groups of training sessions; at master program level;

- curricular: mono- ,trans- ,interdisciplinary.

In terms of process aspects, the trainees evaluated as efficient the organization of the training sessions. According to the opinion of the trainees, the discussions on very practical topics were beneficial. And some of the accumulated knowledge and acquired capabilities already are implemented in projects and applications, which shows their practical applicability

Besides the change of attitude, the feeling of belonging to a professional community and the establishment of a professional identity were very important results for the trainees. The need for training through this master program was strongly supported by the participants. The argument is, as added value, the system of interpersonal relations that has been established within the group and which has thereafter been expanded at the institutional level. An interdepartmental educational and relational structure is thus fostered, which is beneficial both to the development of future partnerships within the university and to the development of the university.

References

Bardi, M. et al. (editors) (1999). *Innovation in Teaching English for Specific Purposes in Romania - A Study of Impact*. Bucharest: Cavallioti.

Bardi, M. (2007). *Managing Innovation- Aspects of Professional Learning*. Bucharest: Cavallioti.

Cace, C. (2002). Evaluarea programelor sociale (Social program evaluation). *Jurnalul practicilor pozitive comunitare*, (3-4):13 – 32.

Cace, S. (2003). Importanţa evaluării şi monitorizării programelor sociale la nivel comunitar (The importance of monitoring and evalution of program at community level). *Jurnalul practicilor pozitive comunitare,* (3-4):29-34.

Cace C., Nicolăescu V., Katsikaris L., Parcharidis I. (2011). *Managementul resurselor umane implicate în economia socială*. Bucureşti: Editura Expert

Craft, A. (1996). *Continuing Professional Development-A practical guide for teachers and schools*. Routledge London & Open University.

Chen, H-T. (2005). *Practical program evaluation: Assessing and improving planning, implementation, and effectiveness*. Sage Publications Ltd.

Deković-Kesovija, M. (2011). The use of student evaluations to improve the quality of teaching performance. *Metodicki obzori,* 11, 6(1):185-190.

Flick, U. (2006). *An Introduction to Qualitative Research* (3rd. Edition). Sage Publications.

Gaspar, M. (2000). *The practice of best practices*. Budapest: Open Society Institute.

Halloran, P. (2010). Using Case Studies as a Lens to Observe Teaching Evaluations. *Journal of Computing and Information Technology*, (2):133-139.

Kovač, T. et al. (2010). The model for evaluating the influence of student participation on school quality. *Napredak*, 151(3-4):335-349.

Kovačić, A. et.al. (2009). Linguistic Competence in Tertiary-Level Instruction in English and Its Relevance for Student Mobility. *Journal of information and organizational sciences*, 33(1):25-37.

Marentič Požarnik, B. (2009). Improving the quality of teaching and learning in higher education through supporting professional development of teaching staff. *Napredak,* 150(3-4):341-359.

Mureşan, L. (2008). *The Bulding 'Learning Organisation' Elements in the Interdisciplinary Research and Teacher Education Master Programme at the Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies*, *Synergy*, 4(2): 157 / 173. Bucureşti: Editura ASE.

Neguţ, A., Nicolăescu, V., Preoteasa A. M., Cace C. (2011). *Monitorizare şi evaluare în economia socială*. Bucureşti: Editura Expert

Penca Palčić, M. (2008). Influence of testing and evaluation on learning. *Life and School*, 54 (19):125-136.

Rossi, P. H. (1982). *Standards for Evaluation Practice*. San-Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Rossi, P. H. (1985). *Evaluation - a Systematic Approach* (3-rd ed). Sage Publication.

Shadish, W.R. Jr.; Cook, T.D.; Leviton, L.C. (1999). *Fundamentele Evaluării Programelor- Teorii ale Practicii (*Foundations of Program Evaluation: Theories of Practice). Bucureşti: Editura ALL.

Tripodi, T.; Fellin, P.; Epstein, I. (1986). *Social Program Evaluation-Guidelines for Health, Education and Welfare Administrators*. University of Michigan.

Van de Bergh, W. (1995). *Achieving Quality in Training. European Guide for Collaborative training projects*. Tilkon, Wetteren B.

Yin, R.K. (2002). *Case Study Research, Design and Methods*. Sage Publications.