

PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMIC RESEARCH
CASE STUDY: BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMICS
THE VIEW OF ACADEMICS¹

Rodica Milena ZAHARIA

Abstract

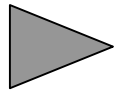
This article is a brief summary of the main outcomes of a study exploring the views of academics at the Bucharest University of Economics regarding their research activity and the evaluation of academic research.

I would like to express my gratitude to Laura Mureşan, Ph.D, and Cristina Neesham, Ph.D, for their support and their guidance which has made it possible for the article version of this paper to be accepted for publication in an international journal cited in the ISI data base. I would also like to thank my colleagues who were so kind and generously shared their opinions in a focus group and in-depth interviews, and to my husband, who was the first reader and the first critic of the paper.

My article reflects the knowledge and skills I have acquired during the Master Program in several courses, such as critical thinking, qualitative research, academic writing and educational management.

Keywords: higher education, academic research, qualitative research, ISI data base

¹ This article is based on Dr. Rodica Milena Zaharia's MA dissertation *Performance of Academic Research. Case Study: Bucharest University of Economics. The View of Academics*, presented within the framework of the Interdisciplinary Master Programme "English Language Education and Research Communication for Business and Economics", ASE Bucharest, 2008, having Dr. Cristina Neesham and Prof. Dr. Laura Mureşan as academic supervisors



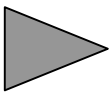
Introduction

The article follows the classical structure of a scientific paper: the research question, the literature review, the methodology, the findings and conclusions and recommendations.

The dissertation paper starts with the motivation of the work. Academic research is an important aspect of academic life. All over the world, universities are considered to be not only teaching core, but mostly research centers. In Romania, the tradition, especially for economic universities, is that the mission of higher education is to teach, not to research. This mentality has to change, as the new regulations impose new criteria for accreditation and evaluation based on research activity. Starting with this general idea, the research questions for my paper were as follows. Firstly, *why is academic research such a sensitive issue for Romanian society?* Another aspect that this paper wants to highlight is the particular case of the Bucharest University of Economics. It was the intention of the paper to identify *what the opinion of our academics is about the research activity in our university, how they appreciate the evaluation system of academic research and how they consider that this system can be improved.*

A considerable part of the literature on these topics is devoted to the issue of academic research. Academic performance is in many cases assimilated with academic research performance and many studies, as Benner and Sandström (2000), Korhonen, Tainio and Wallenius (2001), Kelchtermans and Veugeler (2003), David (2006), Stella and Woodhouse (2006), Burgio-Ficca and Doucouliagos (2007), Phelan (2007) underline the role of research activity in measuring the performance of universities and academics. Especially the results of the academic research process (mostly in the form of articles published in peer review journals) are among the most used indicators that assess academic research.

Romanian literature is not very generous in offering studies regarding academic research evaluation. There are some studies, among them those of David (2006), Nicolescu (2007) and Ad Astra (2008), which are oriented mostly towards analysing the efficiency of education process or academic ranking. As a conclusion, the research developed in this study can be considered as a contribution to the literature in the field and offer a starting point for future analyses.

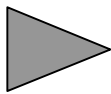


Methodology

Regarding the methodology, two techniques specific to qualitative research methods were used: focus group and in-depth interviews. Both aimed to follow the faculties, age and degrees structure of academics. There were 8 participants in the

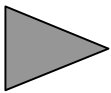
focus group and 8 academics were asked to answer to the questions in in-depth interviews. The interviews pursued the same discussion issues as the focus group, in order to have comparable results. Using these two methods has proved to be quite useful for the study, as in the focus group the attitude of academics was more “official” than in in-depth interviews and the critics regarding academic research evaluation processes in our university were expressed mostly in in-depth interviews. Also literature review contributes to identifying the place of this research. As mentioned earlier, the view of academics regarding the measuring of academic research performance is not among the issues developed by the literature, and in Romania this kind of studies has not been built up so far.

The focus group discussions, as well in in-depth interviews, were conducted around the following themes: (1) personal interest in research involvement; (2) evaluation of research quality; and (3) bodies entitled to establish criteria for qualitative evaluation.



Findings

The major findings of the study are that academics from Bucharest University of Economics are interested in research not only because they considered that it is the mission of an academic (as resulted from the focus-group), but because academic research has become a compulsory component in the evaluation system and because research (in the form of grants) is an additional source of income. Regarding the evaluation system, the respondents considered that the present system is not the best and the pressure induced by publication in journals that are cited in the ISI data base is too high. The present system does not take into consideration the specificity of Romanian economic universities, were academics (especially those over 50) are not familiar with international journals. Additional to this, there are very few Romanian economic journals cited in the ISI data base. Less precise answers were provided regarding the bodies entitled to establish the criteria for qualitative evaluation. The participants agree that there should be a body entitled to establish criteria for qualitative evaluation, but the solutions suggested were quite vague.



Conclusions and recommendations

The conclusions and recommendations of the study are that the academics interviewed were rather reserved towards academic research and one motivation is given by the fact that the evaluation system was not sufficiently debated and discussed. A better personnel policy is necessary to be developed in the university, in order to ensure increasing labor productivity and to induce a climate of trust and

cooperation. The access to international journals for all academics is a must, if more scientific articles are required. There are some incentives that our university developed for academics in order to increase the number of articles cited in ISI data bases, such as financial rewards, as well as the possibility to attend a master program *English Language Education and Research Communication for Business & Economics*, oriented towards communication and research in English.

References and bibliography

- Ad Astra.** 2008. "Despre noi",
http://www.ad-astra.ro/general/about_us.php?lang=ro, viewed 8 March 2008.
- Antony, S. & Woodhouse, D.** 2006. "Ranking of Higher Education Institutions", *AUQA Occasional Publications Number 6*, viewed 3 March 2008, available from Elsevier
- Athey, S. & Plotnicki, J.** 2000., "An Evaluation of Research Productivity in Academic IT" in *Communications of AIS*, Volume 3, Article 7.
- Benner, M. & Sandström, U.** 2000. "Institutionalizing the triple helix: research funding and norms in the academic system" in *Research Policy* 29.
- Burgio-Ficca, C. & Doucouliagos, H.** 2007. "Substitution and Complementarity in the Creation and Communication of Australian University Research" in *Australian Economic Paper*, Vol 46, No.2, pp.170-190.
- Comisia Prezidențială pentru Analiza și Elaborarea Politicilor din Domeniile Educației și Cercetării din România.** "România Educației, România Cercetării", viewed 9 March 2008,
<http://edu.presidency.ro/edu/cv/raport.pdf>
- Creamer, E. G.** 1999. "What Explain Why Such a Small Group of Faculty are Prolific"
- David, D.** 2006. "Procedurile de promovare academică din România și rolul cercetării în cadrul acestui process" in *Ad Astra* 5/2006 www.ad-astra.ro/journal, viewed 5 March 2008.
- Florian, R.** 2006. "Starea actuală a sistemului cercetării din România", www.ad-astra.ro, viewed 9 March 2008.
- Fox, K. J. & Milbourne, R.** 2006. „Is it Harder to Soar with Eagles when You Work with Turkeys?" in *Australian Economic Papers* 45(4), pp.362-371.
- Im Kun, S. Kim Kee, Y. & Kim Joon, S.** 1998. "A Response to Assessing Research Productivity: Important But Neglected Considerations", *Decision Line*.

- Karukstis, K. K.** 2003. "Sustaining Research Productivity throughout an Academic Career: Recommendations for an Integrated and Comprehensive Approach"
- Kelchtermans, S. & Veugelers, R.** 2006. "Top Research Productivity and its Persistence. A Survival Time Analysis for a Panel of Belgian Scientists", http://www.econ.kuleuven.be/fetew/pdf_publicaties/0576.pdf, viewed 7 March 2008.
- Korhonen, P., Tainio, R. & Walleniu, J.** 2001. "Value efficiency analysis of academic research", *European Journal of Operational Research* 130.
- Kissinger, P. T.** 2003. "Research Productivity and Culture in Different Environments", www.currentseparations.com, viewed 29 February 2008.
- Marsh, H. & Hattie, J.** 2002. „The Relation Between Research Productivity and Teaching Effectiveness: Complementary, Antagonistic, or Independent Constructs?" in *The Journal of Higher Education* 73:5, pp. 603-641.
- Meador, M. & Others.** 1992. "Academic Research Productivity: Reply, Still Further Results", *Economic of Education Review*, Vol. 11, No. 2, pp. 161-167.
- Neri, F. & Rodgers, J. R.** 2003, "Ranking Australian Economics Departments by Research Productivity"
- Nicolescu, L.** (coordinator). 2007, *Evaluarea Eficienței Învățămîntului în Academia de Studii Economice din București*. București: ASE Publishing House.
- Phelan, S.** "EU Research Productivity", <http://organizationsandmarkets.com/2007/12/20/eu-research-productivity>, 20 December 2007, viewed 9 March 2008.
- Richmond, R. C.** 2001. „Keeping a broad perspective on research", *Evaluating Research Productivity* no. 105, viewed 29 February 2008, available from Elsevier
- Rodgers, J. R. & Neri, F.** 2007., "Research productivity of Australian Academic Economists: Human-capital and Fixed Effects" in *Australian Economic Paper*, Vol 46, No.1, pp. 67-87, viewed 3 March 2008, available from Elsevier
- Roșca, I.** Mesajul Rectorului, Academia de Studii Economice, viewed 5 March 2008, http://www.ase.ro/site/despre/ase/mesajul_rectorului.asp

The author

Dr. Rodica Milena Zaharia is professor at the International Business and Economics Department, in The Bucharest Academy of Economic Studies. She graduated in 1988 and defended her PhD thesis in 1999. Her specializations are in Economic Development, World Economy, Research Methodology and Corporate Social Responsibility. She is the author and co-author of over 20 articles in peer reviewed journals, 8 books, 3 book reviews, and more than 50 conferences. She is director of two research contracts gained through competition (PN II and IDEI) and an international research study with the Center for Post-Communism Studies (St. Francis Xavier University, Canada).