THE USE OF GOOGLE FORMS IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE QUALITY ASSURANCE SYSTEMS IN VALIDATING ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract: Lifelong learning is one of the major challenges that education systems and education policies of the EU countries are facing at present. More and more people around the world are aware that their studies do not end with their high school or university graduation. They continue to educate themselves afterward via different opportunities - courses in private schools or vocational training centers, evening or extra-curricular training at high schools, self-study and more.

A major problem of non-formal and informal learning is its quality. Employers need staff who can meet the quality standards established in their country or internationally. Given this, it is necessary to build systems for validation of the results of previous learning and to ensure the quality of these validation systems. It is, therefore, necessary to establish and implement validation quality assurance systems. The main purpose of this VQA system is to ensure a high quality of the validation process.

Each validation quality assurance system should be integrated into the overall quality management system of the validating organization, which is part of its management system.

Updating organizational management systems through the introduction and improvement of quality management systems is a basic necessity for all organizations, no matter their size. The adoption and operation of a quality management system should be considered a top priority in the management strategy of any organization seeking to increase its effectiveness. The sustainable development of every institution or company requires quality assurance.

Essential activity related to these systems is surveying the opinion of two groups of people – the candidates for validation and their employers. To make the survey process more effective and efficient, it is appropriate to ask the question, "Are there modern technologies to make it easier?". The answer is, "Yes, of course – clickers, online polls and others."

This paper considers the implementation of Google Forms as one such technology alternative for the facilitation of the survey process. The functionalities of the Internet-based software and the advantages of its use and the ways of dissemination of the surveys are explained. The alternatives for conducting the survey process by the indicated forms are discussed.

Keywords: validation, quality systems, survey process, online surveys.

1. INTRODUCTION

Validation is a process of recognizing previous learning outcomes, mostly achieved through informal learning and self-studying. It allows beneficiaries who have successfully completed this process to continue to acquire knowledge within the formal education system, to find a better job, to improve their quality of life. In this regard, validation is key to the successful realization of the concept of lifelong learning. Kicheva-Kirova and Kirov (2015) emphasize the importance of lifelong learning for the development of human resources, needed for the future economic growth of United Europe.

In this regard, it is crucial for the validation to be carried out qualitatively. The latter necessitates that validation quality assurance systems are created and implemented. The process of self-assessment of the quality of validation requires the opinion of different respondents to be collected, aggregated, and analyzed. To make the survey process more efficient, it is appropriate to use modern online technologies such as Google Forms.

2. THE QUESTIONNAIRES IN THE PROCESS OF SELF-ASSESSMENT OF THE QUALITY OF VALIDATION

The validation in vocational high schools in Bulgaria, carried out under the project "New Opportunity for My Future" in the period 2013-2015, was conducted according to the requirements laid out in the "Handbook on the Validation of Professional Qualifications Acquired through Non-formal and Informal Learning". This document sets out the mandatory criteria and indicators on which the validation quality assurance systems should be based. A careful reading of these criteria and indicators points to the necessity of development and conduction of 3 types of questionnaire surveys as follows:

        - Survey of the opinion of the candidates for validation (Criterion 1.2);
        - Survey of the opinion of the employers of the candidates for validation (Criterion 1.2);

- Survey about the culture of administration (Criterion 4.2).

The content of these questionnaires can be different in each validating organization. However, proposals on the nature of questions and descriptors could be given as follows:

2.1. When questioning the candidates for validation:
- Question about in which way the candidate has learned about the possibility to validate his/her professional knowledge and skills with the following possible answers: by a representative/the website of the vocational school; by a representative/the website of the Employment Agency; by a representative/the website of Directorate General "Implementation of Penalties"; by a representative/the website of the Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria; by the Confederation of Labor "Podkrepa" representative/website; by the Bulgarian Chamber of Commerce and Industry representative/website; by the Bulgarian Industrial Association representative/website; by the Association of Industrial Capital in Bulgaria representative/website; by the NAVET representative/website; by a relative/friend/colleague; from the media - television, radio, newspapers, incl. the Web; other;
- Questions about what exactly was validated - degree of professional qualification - respectively first, second, third, or part of the profession; and by what specialty;
- Questions about the candidate's intention - whether he intended to validate the specialty mentioned above from the beginning or not, and if not why he changed his mind;
- A question as to whose was the initiative for the validation - the candidate's or his employer's;
- A question about the candidate's motivation for participation in the validating process;
- Questions as to whether complementary practical training was carried out in a real workplace and where exactly – at the employer's one or others;
- A question of whether the validation ended successfully;
- A question as to whether after the validation the respondent works according to the validated specialty;
- A question of whether the respondent would recommend the validation opportunity to their acquaintances;
- Other questions.

2.2. When questioning the employers of the candidates for validation:
- A question of whether employer's representatives participated in the Candidate Testing Boards;
- A question as to whether the employer paid for the validation of the qualifications of own employees;
- A question as to whether the employer invested in the material and technical facilities of the validating organization;
- A question about the employer's intentions regarding the career development of the staff members who had validated their knowledge;
- A question about the employer's degree of satisfaction with the competence of the staff members who have completed the validation process;
- A question about whether the employer would recommend the validation opportunity to others;
- Other questions.

2.3. In the culture of administration questionnaire:
- A question as to whether the Validating Organization's staff demonstrated qualities such as tolerance, accuracy, empathy, etc. in the course of validation;
- A question as to whether the person had any complaints during the validation process;
- A question of whether corrective actions were taken quickly;
- A question of whether the deadlines were kept;
- A question of whether, due to administrative problems, validation ended unsuccessfully;
- A question about the respondent's recommendations for the improvement of the culture of administration;
- Other questions.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE GOOGLE FORMS

Google Forms are an Internet-based software suitable for conducting online surveys and examination tests. The software has versions in all language packs that Chrome browser supports.

This resource is completely free and is available simply on the basis of creating a Google Account by registering an email address and nothing more.

An online questionnaire created in this way can include questions of the following types:
- Short answer – when the respondent is required to enter short text responses;
- Paragraph - when the respondent is required to enter longer text responses;
- Multiple choice - when the respondent is required to select one of several possible answers;
- Checkboxes - when the respondent is given the opportunity to choose multiple responses at the same time;

- Drop-down - when the respondent is required to select an option from a dropdown menu;
- Linear scale - when the respondent is required to choose a number from a scale, for example: 1 to 10;
- Date - when the respondent is required to select a specific date from the calendar;
- Time - when the respondent is required to select a specific time of the day or a time interval;
- other options – Multiple-choice grid, Tick box grid.

For ease of use, questions can be copied, which can save a lot of time and minimize input errors. For each question, a mandatory response can be asked - in the completed form, the mandatory questions are marked with an asterisk (*). Questions can be displayed in a shuffled order.
It is possible, in the e-questionnaire, to be inserted:
- Sections,
- Images - from the computer, snapshot from the phone, from a URL, from a disk drive, from a search on the internet;
- Videos - from YouTube or a specific URL,
- Progress bar and others.

In terms of formatting, the software allows:
- to insert an image in the header of the form;
- to select the theme colour;
- to select the background colour;
- to select the font style.

The general form settings include making choices about whether or not:
- to collect the email addresses of the respondents;
- to require sign-in, limiting responses to 1 per person (with one account);
- the respondents can edit their responses after submission;
- the respondents can overview the aggregated results of all forms submitted till that moment.

The forms can be send to the target group in several ways:
- Direct Sharing - via an individual URL for the form, incl. short address;
- Social sharing - Facebook, Twitter;
- By e-mail;
- Embedded in a website.

For the purposes of validation, the first and third of these options are the most appropriate.
When there is an opportunity to use a computer lab in the validating organization for the purpose of surveying, validation candidates could be handed a printed questionnaire's URL. They should fill in the Google Form on the spot in the lab, after which the form should "be closed". The collection of responses will then be stopped, and this will ensure that the questionnaire form is completed only by the target group and not by other people.
When respondents are not present in the validating organization (for example, when surveying the opinion of employers), links to the forms can be sent to their email-addresses, accompanied with filling-in instructions, including the deadline date and time.
There is also a third option: the respondents can fill out paper questionnaires and then a validation organization's employee will enter all the responses in the electronic form(s). The point is that the answers can be immediately summarized in charts and lists.

The advantages of every Google Form are that:
- It is completely free;
- It can be created in any language available in Google Translator;
- It can be organized and conducted in a short time;
- The forms are perfectly suited and are convenient to be filled in any browser and on any device - a computer, a tablet, a phone;
- The design is aesthetic;
- The validation organization does not need a dedicated server and website to take advantage of the opportunity - free web space is available after registration, which is more than sufficient for validation purposes;
- Automatic response processing with the option to directly publish on the Internet as needed;
- Storage of responses in spreadsheet database allowing additional processing options, incl. in "Excel" - sorting, filtering, aggregating by selected criteria, inserting pivot tables and charts, etc.

4. ALGORITHM OF THE ONLINE SURVEY PROCESS

Online surveys can ease the work of the self-assessment committee significantly, but only if they are well thought out and implemented. For this reason, the following algorithm could be recommended:

1. The first stage - getting acquainted with the criteria for self-assessment and determining the number of necessary questionnaire surveys based on the groups of respondents and the topics of the surveys.

2. The second stage - designing the questionnaires. It is recommended that after the initial brainstorming, the first variant of the questionnaire is printed and "filled in" by another person who did not participate in the brainstorming, checking the spelling and punctuation, the thoroughness of descriptors, the correct choice of the type of each question – multiple choice, checkbox, and so on.

3. The third stage - creating the online survey forms based on the corrected questionnaires. It is recommended to follow this order:
- to copy the texts from the corrected text file of the questionnaire;
- to check for mistakes once again - spelling, punctuation, type of question;
- to do the formatting;
- to choose the sending method of the form;
- to fill in a trial form and make adjustments if needed;
- to delete the "trial" response.

4. The fourth stage - sending forms and accepting responses.

5. The fifth stage – "closing" the forms, summarizing the results and publishing them if necessary.

6. The sixth stage – surveying in the next period when the results should be presented separately from the previous ones. It is recommended that the form is copied, indicating, for example, the new year or period of the survey in its title; previous responses must be deleted by deleting the associated spreadsheet and only then the form may be sent to be filled-in.

5. CONCLUSION

The online surveys conducted via Google Forms allow effective self-assessment of the quality of validation. The main advantages of this software are extensive language choice, free-of-charge and immediate summarization, making it a convenient contrivance for any validating organization.

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