THE EVALUATION OF THE UNDERGRADUATE STUDIES PROGRAM OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BUSINESS ADMINISTRATION OF THE TECHNOLOGICAL EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE (T.E.I) OF THESSALY-GREECE BY APPLYING A BENCHMARKING APPROACH

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Abstract

The remarkable and multilateral developmental impact and perspective of H.E.Is is widely known. Moreover, the spread of competence and technological innovation should not be a privilege for a few people who have the possibility of acquiring knowledge and skills from the International Academic Institutions. Unfortunately, raw reality remains the same and in order to be reduced, the "conventional" Academic Institutions ought to evolve constantly and develop more remarkable international collaborations in order to be able to exist, operate and contribute to the strongly competitive environment. Based on the above references, the undergraduate course of the Department of Business Administration, Faculty of Business and Economics, of the Technological Educational Institution (T.E.I) of Thessaly is being evaluated through the Benchmarking process as it has been defined by the Hellenic Quality Assurance & Accreditation Agency (H.Q.A), as well as with the standards of other internationally recognized and accredited institutions (e.g. European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education – E.N.Q.A, Chartered Management Institution – C.M.I etc.) in order to detect any deviations that would need specific suggestions and improvement procedures able to make this Department strongly competitive.

Keywords: H.E.Is, Evaluation of Studies Program, Benchmarking, Quality Assurance & Accreditation Agencies, Suggestions – Improvements, Greece.

1   INTRODUCTION

There have been discussions around the world regarding academic issues resulting in the fact that if each academic system requires quality, then a set of well-organized processes of quality assurance is needed. In other words, it means that evaluation-assessment procedures of the effectiveness of all enacted laws for education and generally for every student in a country must be determined (Babiniotis, 2009).

Conducting a preliminary research on the relative bibliography, it is obvious that one of the basic incentives for the composition and sign of the Bologna Process in Italy in 1999 (besides achieving a unified quality system in education) is the desire of Europe and of the 29 countries that signed it to create a common area of higher education capable of competing mainly with the USA. The participant countries with the sigh of the Bologna Process are obligated to a common participation in the educational work and common actions for the reformation of the higher education system targeting at its harmonization to the European educational level.

The action plan, as it is defined by the Bologna process, focuses among other things on the adoption of a common evaluation system of studies and degrees (ECTS: European Credit Transfer System), and on a common European policy regarding the assurance of united and high quality studies (González-Soriano and Velga, 2004). These goals comprise the motive of this study, which focuses on the Hellenic Higher Education, and more specifically on the Business Administration Department, Faculty of Business and Economics of T.E.I Thessaly, with the parallel utilization of a research where the interests and benefits of stakeholders are involved, such as students, teaching staff, secretariats and administrative staff, in order to assure united and high quality studies in the Department.

2   BIBLIOGRAPHIC REVIEW

The concept of Quality Assurance in education is an issue of particular interest. According to Van Vught (1994), the exterior "area" of the academic reality emphasizes the need for high level quality, showing the relationship between tertiary education and society that has recently changed. Thus, we conclude that students are seen as "clients" and the policies of quality evaluation and its accountability are aiming at ensuring that the academic work utterly covers their needs and expectations. Apparently, these facts have made the academic institutions and professions to lose their credibility (Deem 1988; Scott 1994; Halsey 1992) and over the last 30 years some people are talking about an increasing trend for managerialism (Kogan, 1989) or even for an emerging academic capitalism (Slaughter and Leslie, 1997).

By examining the relative international bibliography, the theoretical definition of quality is apparently a subject of a long and intense discussion. For Becher (1989), for example, quality is nothing more than a creature of "political fashion", while for Neave (1995) quality is an ambiguous notion as well as for Harvey and Green (1993) who consider it unstable and over-valued. Scott, on the other hand, is quite absolute that no authoritative definition of quality in higher education is possible, while Westerheidjen (1999) stresses the lack of theory of quality on the bibliography related to higher education. Green claims (1994) that quality is a philosophical concept whereas Ashcroft and Foreman (1995) stress that the concepts of quality and standards are especially problematic and can be examined and evaluated only by a great number of alternative perspectives.

Hence, apart from the difficulty in the theoretic determination of the concept of quality, additional difficulties are deriving from the defining confusion between of quality and standards. An obvious distinction has to be made that while quality involves procedures (e.g. quality of the educational process as it is perceived by students), standards involve the outcomes or achievement. The relation between these two definitions can be given in terms of the size of the "qualitative" contribution of the educational process to the achievement of a pre-determined standard of higher education. The obvious distinction between the definitions of quality and standards give the possibility of separating the ethical, ideological and educational dimension of the issue (quality) from its technical dimension (standards).

Harvey and Green (1993) have put the basis for a pragmatic approach to the definition of quality. According to them, quality can be considered as a benchmark, as an utter truth that compromise cannot be allowed. Alternatively, we can use the term of "minimum performance limits" that a qualitative education must exceed. Lastly, we can use the relation of educational processes towards the desirable outcomes.

Quality cannot be defined entirely and unconditionally but it is relevant to the perspectives of stakeholders who act within the framework of higher education. These stakeholders have different principles and priorities.

This is actually the reason that the present research studies the specific program (Department of Business Administration, T.E.I of Thessaly).

3   THEORETICAL APPROACH

3.1   Quality Assurance in Education in the European Area.

Quality Assurance in the European as well as the international area has been a field of dynamic reclassification and action. More specific, in 1999, with the sign of the Bologna Declaration, the European Ministers of Education declared their intention and will to consolidate the European Higher Education Area (E.H.E.A) by 2010; that is to harmonize the structure of studies in Europe with specific principles, procedures and standards. E.H.E.A included the improvement of degrees' recognition, the promotion of mobility and the promotion of European cooperation in matters of quality assurance. Most of the European countries established national bodies of quality assurance otherwise the above issues couldn't be applied.

The Conference of European Ministers of Education in Berlin in 2003 called upon E.N.Q.A to develop an agreed set of standards, procedures and guidelines for quality assurance. The text "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area", edited by E.N.Q.A, was adopted in 2005 during the next Conference held in Bergen (Holland), according to which the quality assurance is anticipated to the following levels:

- Internal assurance – in levels of academic units and institutions – with procedures made by the institutions themselves

- External assurance by organizations outside the institutions, and

- External evaluation of the institutions themselves, as a guarantee of responsibility and independence by which the evaluation processes of the institutions are applied.

3.2   External Evaluation and the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency

The external evaluation of Greek H.E.Is is carried out by the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (H.Q.A), which comprises the higher supervisory and coordinating authority of the Quality Assurance System and it is an independent administrative agency of 15 members and it is overseen by the Minister of Education. So, in accordance with the Bologna Process and the E.N.Q.A's vision, the main goal of H.Q.A is to create and implement a unified quality assurance system as a reference point for the achievements and work of the Higher Education Institutions. The H.Q.A also collects and codifies the crucial information that will guide the State in effectively strengthening higher education in the country.

In order to achieve its goals, the H.Q.A collaborates with and supports the efforts of the Higher Education Institutions to improve the quality of the education they offer, with the goal of ensuring the confidence of Greek society in the national system of higher education. The H.Q.A is by definition a multi-member, independent institutional body. It is comprised of senior public servants who are nominated by the H.E.Is themselves and who cover the entire spectrum of disciplines that comprise higher education in Greece. The evaluation procedures, the regulations, and the procedure of quality assurance over the Agency itself are transparent and open to public oversight.

In order H.Q.A to achieve its mission and exercise its competences, it:

- Formulates, organizes, specializes, standardizes and publishes the relevant procedures, criteria and indicators within the framework of common principles and guidelines of the European Higher Education Area,

- Develops an integrated management information system and evaluation data base in collaboration with the Quality Assurance Units (Q.A.Us) of each H.E.I,

- Supports HEIs and their sub-units in the planning process of quality assurance and accreditation,

- Conducts surveys and researches relevant to its work or assigns them to other authorities.

3.3   Internal Evaluation and the Role of the Quality Assurance Unit

Each institution is responsible for ensuring and continually improving the quality of its teaching and research work, as well as for the effective operation and performance of its services in accordance with international

practices, especially those of the European Higher Education Area, and the principles and guidelines of the H.Q.A.

The Quality Assurance Unit (Q.A.U / MO.DI.P) of each H.E.I is responsible for ensuring the above. The H.Q.A is constituted on a decision of the Council of the Institution and is comprised of the rector or one of his/her deputies, as president, five professors of the university, one representative of each category of staff, with voting rights when issues relating to the category of staff are discussed, a representative of the undergraduate students, and a representative of the postgraduate and doctoral candidates, if available, as members, as specifically defined by the Institution.

As it is apparent, apart from the harmonization of the Hellenic Higher Education with the corresponding European one, the need for quality assurance of courses and the internal educational procedures of H.E.Is is rather stressed due to a series of other significant factors, such as the increasing number of those who achieved a university placement, on the one hand, and a simultaneous decrease, on the other hand, on the quality and performance of those achieving a university placement with the abolition of pass mark of 10 (scale 1-20). Furthermore, over the last few years, the increasing demands of labor market and the competition among candidates to cover a job, has led to an increase of candidates who continue their studies in post-graduate and doctorate level (ICAP, 2005).

Internal evaluation planning must however start from an evaluation and introspection of the present situation. Accordingly, conducting "benchmarking" practices that are applied by internationally recognized Educational Organizations over evaluation of their courses, are defined as necessary. Benchmarking is a continuous and systematic comparison of one or more strategies, operations, procedures and practices against that of the best corresponding organizations of each area, businesses or economies that are considered "excellent" in each study area (Phillips, 2010; Camp, 2013). Applying benchmarking in an educational organization could significantly contribute to the development of this organization, making it possible:

- To detect the existing performance differences-deviations

- To document their reason of existence

- To identify the steps that have to be adopted in order to be able to develop best practices to upgrade the quality level of the studies offered and the relevant support services.

4 RESEARCH APPROACH

4.1 Aim of the research

The specific research will examine, on the one hand, whether the operation and function of the Business Administration course satisfies the official criteria of H.Q.A, and on the other hand, a benchmarking to see to what extend it responds-differentiates from the best practices applied by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education E.N.Q.A and the British Chartered Management Institute (C.M.I).

4.2 Area of research

The population being researched, the sample of the research, is comprised by people involved either directly (educational staff and students) or indirect (e.g. secretariat) with the Business Administration course. The sample was chosen by following the simple random sampling where the sample subjects come from different sectors-layers of the above department, while at the same time, they have the same possibilities of being selected, so the outcomes of the research to be equally allocated and represent reality.

4.3 Research methodology

In order to conduct a benchmarking process with the best possible ways, qualitative and quantitative methods were used.

4.3.1 Qualitative approach of research methodology

In the process of qualitative approach the method of interview was used. A series of interviews were set which were addressed mainly to the academic and administrative staff of the Business Administration Department, in order to find out the degree of response and the quality diversification of the program for the H.Q.A – as a first attempt – and then the same procedure in relation to the corresponding best practices applied by E.N.Q.A and C.M.I. Along with the interviews, this qualitative research made good use of the internal records, documents and other important reports followed by the above organizations.

A week before the interview, the academic and administrative staff of the Department was handed out a table with the questions that would be asked during the interview, as well as other files, documents and evaluation reports that are used by the above organizations so as the staff to be fully informed. Preceding the interviews, there was a brief introduction on the aim of the interview and the contribution of the interviewee was pointed out emphasizing the need for objectivity and clarity. The duration of each interview was 20-30 minutes in order to avoid any potential discontent from the participants' side. At this point we shall mention that the writers of the specific research, knowing the risks of possible modification of the questions, what Oppenheim (2001) defines as "stimulus equivalence", the made the questions in the same order and sequence to all interviewees in order to obtain as objective and comparable elements and information as possible.

4.3.2 Quantitative approach of research methodology

In the quantitative approach the method used was a questionnaire, which was addressed to students of the Business Administration Department. This method was considered the most advisable, as students denied participating for fear of exposing some of the academic and administrative staff. The questions were mainly scaled questions of closed type, using the five-point Likert-type scale (where number 1 was the lowest figure indicating "strongly disagree" and number 5 was the highest figure indicating "strongly agree") of the official criteria from the existing internal Quality Management System.

The questionnaire was initially completed by 24 students of the department who were randomly selected and with their comments they indicated some important changes in the formulation of some of the questions. This small sample was mainly selected in order to test the validity and reliability [Cronbach's a reliability coefficient (must be a≥ *0,700)*] of the questionnaire itself (Bishop et al., 2007; Hair et al., 2010).

The questionnaires were accompanied by a letter describing the issue, the importance and their contribution and it was asking the students to anonymously participate and give their honest answers. The letter was given in a random and representative sample. The distribution, completion and collection of the questionnaires took place the last week of November 2012. 250 questionnaires were distributed to the students and they were filled in by 211 people, from whom 13 questionnaires were incomplete. Therefore, the final sample of the completed questionnaires was 198. Students were completing them right away with the presence of one of the writers of the article, so if there were any questions, they would give the necessary clarifications, contributing thus to the validity of the questionnaires. After the completion of the questionnaires, the answers were codified and the resulting data was analyzed using the SPSS16 statistic program (Howitt and Gramer, 2010).

4.4 RESEARCH OUTCOMES

4.4.1 Research outcomes via Qualitative Research Methodology

Having access to internal records, documents and evaluation reports that are used by the above certified organizations (Table 1), the academic staff of the Business Administration Department of T.E.I of Thessaly pointed out, according to its reports and estimations, a bigger overall deviation to the standard quality criteria of this course from those applied in the corresponding British Universities (see C.M.I) than in European Universities (see E.N.Q.A); this certifies the high preference of young people to study in Great Britain. More specifically, it achieves a great degree of satisfaction of the H.Q.A quality criteria and, at the same time, a high degree in C.M.I and E.N.Q.A regarding "the course responds to the European and international standards of certified organizations for quality of studies – Q1.4" and "listing of the evaluation outcomes of the course – Q1.5".

However, it lacks in the criterion regarding "the procedures of organizing and coordinating the syllabus of the course – Q1.6". The main reasons of deviation are:

- The instability of the quality system which many times diversifies from each H.Q.A as a consequence of common changes in the composition of the Ministry of Education and of common contradictory policies in the quality of education

- The evaluation outcomes of quality are not being taken into serious consideration towards the fair funding of the Greek academic institutions based on their performances – and of the Business Administration Department itself – and thus most of the academic staff finds the whole evaluation effort as "simply a waste of their valuable time".

- The increasing government interventionism and control which is expressed by the diversification in the development procedure of the academic staff, creates insecurity and a series of other stressful emotions such as dependence on parties, unreasonable accountability, intro academic defalcation, colleague disputes and unhealthy interpersonal relationships etc., which does not allow the staff to do its academic work undistracted.

The same evaluation outcome occurs to the criterion regarding "the degree of syllabus innovation of the course – Q1.7". Thus, the low evaluation grade of question Q1.7 justifies the low level diffusion of research excellence and innovation of the Department, as it was until recently. In the rest criteria the department is at an average, comparing to European and international, and at a high degree in a few.

The data in the case of the administrative staff (secretariat) seem to be more difficult and the main reason of deviation is:

- The inability of the available administrative staff, due to large staff reductions as a consequence of the Greek economic crisis, to deal with the workload and to save time to improve the quality of the workload

- The continuous fluctuations on the number of students entering year by year the university, by arbitrary decisions made by the Ministry of Education, do not help in the planning of the supportive sources that the department needs

- The frequent changes by the Ministry in basic areas, such as those involving registries, especially at the mid-academic semester, result in secretarial overwork.

Thus, comparing to the criteria of H.Q.A, we notice a positive approach since all the procedures of their work start from an average and above and the procedure "documentation of the course's response to the needs of the department – Q 2.2" reaches the best degree.

On the other hand, in comparison to the European and international quality criteria of the course, most of the criteria of the Business Administration department fluctuate from low to very low levels. So, for example, in comparison to those of C.M.I, "documentation of the course's response to the labor market – Q 2.3" and "documentation of overview outcomes of the course – Q 2.7", are seen as completely disappointing, where for the first of them the responsibility lies on the inability of the department's alumni to be employed according to their qualifications to the Greek labor market.

4.4.2   Research outcomes via the Quantitative Research Methodology

The distributed questionnaire showed a high degree of reliability since the reliability coefficient of Cronbach's a was 0.873 (a≥0.700) (Table 2), hence the quality of the Business Administration department, as evaluated by the students, is significant and could itself contribute to the course in an attempt to achieve the predetermined "best" standards of education and its procedures by the accredited organizations.

Table 1: Reliability Statistics of Questionnaire

Cronbach' s a	N of Items
0.873	10

Starting with question Q1 (Table 3), which refers to whether "the course responds to the personal interests of students", mean[1] shows average value 3.4063 (and Sdt. Deviation[2] = 0.9108) which means that highly exceeds the neutral evaluation point. More specifically, 53,6% of the students claim that their personal interest

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[1] Mean is the average number which is calculated by adding a set of numbers and dividing the sum by the number of numbers.

[2] Standard Deviation shows the amount of deviation in a set of data values for the arithmetic mean (or average). A low Std. Deviation indicates that elements of the population tend to be close to the mean of the set, while high Std. Deviation shows that there is high dispersion of the values thus wider range from the mean.

Table 2: Benchmarking Approach of Business Administration Course of T.E.I Thessaly-Greece with Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agencies in H.E.Is, according to the Interview Method to its Academic and Administrative Staff.

Department of Business Administration	H.Q.A					E.N.Q.A					C.M.I				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
1. *Academic staff*															
1.1. Response of the course to the students' needs of this department.				o					o				o		
1.2. Response of the course to the functional needs of the department.				o				o				o			
1.3. Response of the course to the contemporary needs of this department.				o				o				o			
1.4. Response of the course to the European and international standards of the accreditation agencies for quality in studies.					o				o					o	
1.5. Documentation processes of the evaluation outcomes of the course.					o				o					o	
1.6. Organization and coordination processes of the syllabus of the course.			o				o					o			
1.7. Level of innovation of the modules of the course.			o				o					o			
1.8. Methods of reassessing, readjustment and based on the current situations of the modules of the course.				o					o				o		
2. *Administrative staff (Secretariat)*															
2.1. Documentation of the response of the course to the students' needs.				o					o				o		
2.2. Documentation of the response of the course to the needs of the department.					o			o				o			

2.3. Documentation of the response of the course to the needs of labor market.	0	0	0
2.4. Documentation of the organization and coordination of the syllabus of the course's modules.	0	0	0
2.5. Documentation of the outcomes of reassessment, readjustment and based on the current situation syllabus of the modules.	0	0	0
2.6. Documentation of the evaluation outcomes of the course.	0	0	0
2.7. Documentation of the reassessment outcomes of the course.	0	0	0

identify with the existing course which in turn justifies the high preference in entry examinations for Greek HEIs. In question Q2 if "the course responds to the needs of labor market", the majority of students (Frequency in %= 56,2%) showed a high preference towards the neutral opinion (neither agree nor disagree) (mean=2.9063, Sdt. Deviation =0.7343). It worth mentioning here that approximately one out of five students (Frequency in %= 21.9%) clarified that disagrees with the content of the above questionnaire. Regarding question Q3 "if the course contains innovative modules that differentiate it from corresponding either Greek or foreign HEI's courses", 40.6% of the students answered that they "agree", while 34.4% were neutral (mean = 3.1250 and Sdt. Deviation = 1.0701).

What every student and his/her family look for is what kind of course he/she would choose in order to have an immediate occupational settlement. Due to the intense economic crisis that Greece faces the last years and the high percentage of unemployment among young people that reaches 60%, young people don't have the luxury of studying what they want, but what they ought to in order to have decent living conditions. Thus, according to the students' estimation outcomes for the course being examined and according to question Q 4, knowledge and skills that will be obtained by attending the course will provide an equivocal (Frequency in % = 31.3%) to significant (Frequency in % = 37.5%) professional perspective and evolution (mean = 3.1875 and Sdt. Deviation = 1.0298).

The application of the course as an educational procedure in action can be seen in questions Q 5 and Q 6. In the first question on whether "students are regularly notified on the demands of the course (45.8%) answered that they agree with the provided notification, while 23.6% have neutral stance (mean= 2.5625 and Sdt. Deviation 0.5040). On the contrary, in the second question whether "the course indicates in details aspects related to its function (forms of course evaluation, feedback of students' performance, possibility or remarking in a course etc.)", six out of ten students (Frequency in % = 62.5%) expressed a neutral estimation (mean = 3.0313 and Sdt. Deviation = 0.6948). On the issue of quality feedback, this high percentage probably means that students don't know what the comments of an encouraging feedback would be in relation to their assessment feedback, while on the issue of remarking we believe that it is due to the sensitivity that the academic staff of the course shows - because of the economic crisis and job uncertainty - in satisfying students that made use of this policy.

In questions Q7 [You aren't facing any difficulties in corresponding the modules of the course to those of the respective foreign academic institutions (e.g. via the Erasmus program, Comenius, Leonard, κλπ)], Q 8 (The quality of the secretarial support contributes satisfactorily in issues concerning the course), and Q10 (You have the opportunity to evaluate the quality of the overall course as well as in each academic semester), the evaluation approach seems to have similarities since students express a positive point (53.3%, 46.9% and 59.8% respectively) [for Q7 (mean = 3.4462 and Sdt. Deviation= 0.9877), for Q 8 (mean= 3.4062 and Sdt. Deviation=0.9108) and for Q10 (mean=3.8911 and Sdt. Deviation= 0.8862)]. Moreover, in question Q8 an interesting percentage of 31.3% expresses a neutral position, while in question Q10 approximately one out of five students also expresses a neutral position (21.4%) and an absolute positive position of almost the same percentage (23.5%).

It is known that a very serious problem that Greek H.E.Is are facing over the last few years is the compulsory decision of Troika to reduce the costs of education resulting in the abolition of some of these institutions, the temporary closing of others and the incorporation of some of them, especially faculties and departments. Consequently a series of consecutive problems is created (e.g. incorporation of departments for the first four semesters with common modules, abolition of laboratory courses and altered to practice exercises with different credit units, even compulsory transfer to another city). The quality of studies is thus degraded but the lenders remain indifferent. It touches though the psychological balance of students who experience an unknown and relatively uncertain education environment. So, in question Q9 "No problems are caused in your studies by the frequent and unscheduled changes in the course", the outcomes of the students' assessments were kind of expected. 18.2% answered that they are strongly affected by these changes, 40.7% that they are affected and 17.2% were indifferent (mean=2.1374 and Sdt. Deviation=0.6837).

4.5 Research conclusions

On the basis of the above presentation and analysis of the outcomes of the quality research, the most significant conclusions are those focusing on the gaps that need to be further improved. Thus, the Faculty of Business Administration, of T.E.I Thessaly, lacks an organization and coordination of the syllabus not

Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Points (Criteria) with an Emphasis in the Evaluation of the Studies Program of Business Administration Department, of T.E.I Thessaly-Greece

Evaluative Points (Criteria)	n	Min.	Max.	Mean	Std. Deviation	Frequency (in Percent %)				
Questions						•	•	•	•	• 5
Q1.There is response of the course to your personal interests.	198	1,00	5,00	3,4063	0,9108	3,1	15,6	21,9	56,3	3,1
Q2.There is response of the course to labor market's needs.	198	1,00	5,00	2,9063	0,7343	3,1	21,9	56,2	12,3	6,6
Q3.The course includes innovative modules that differentiate from corresponding Greek and foreign H.E.Is.	198	1,00	5,00	3,1250	1,0701	12,5	9,4	34,4	40,6	3,1
Q4.Knowledge and skills obtained from this course will contribute to your professional evolution.	198	1,00	5,00	3,1875	1,0298	6,3	18,8	31.3	37,5	6,3
Q5.You are regularly notified on the demands of the course (module outline, syllabus, learning goals, teaching methods etc.).	198	1,00	5,00	2,5625	0,5040	7,7	12,5	23,6	45,8	10,5
Q6.Points of the course regarding its function are regularly pointed out (module assessment methods, feedback of student's performance, possibility of remarking a module etc.).	198	1,00	5,00	3,0313	0,6948	8,8	10,0	62,5	15,6	3,1
Q7.You are not facing any difficulties in corresponding the modules of this course to the corresponding foreign academic institutions (e.g. via the programs of Erasmus, Comenius, Leonard, etc.).	198	1,00	5,00	3,4462	0,9877	6,2	11.4	23,3	53,3	5,8

Q8.The quality of the secretarial support of the department contributes satisfactorily in issues involving the course.	198	1,00	5,00	3,4062	0,9108	3,1	12,5	31,3	46,9	6,3
Q9.No problems are creating in your studies from the frequent and unscheduled changes in the course.	198	1,00	5,00	2,1374	0,6837	18,2	40,7	17,3	9,0	4,8
Q10.You have the possibility of evaluating the quality of the program overall and in each academic semester	198	1,00	5,00	3,8911	0,8862	1,6	3,7	21,4	59,8	23,5

because there are gaps or omissions of the academic staff, but for the indirect effects of the problematic operation of the Ministry of Education. Moreover, a similar kind of lack appears on the innovation in the modules of the course that creates a reduced competitive advantage in terms of excellence and innovation. Data is more difficult in the case of the administrative staff (secretariat) of the department. The main reason of this deviation is the secretariat inability to fulfill its task, mainly due to external factors such as the noticeable reduction of staff on account of the economic crisis, and also due to the instability of the educational system on account of ministerial decisions concerning the organization of the school such as continuous fluctuations on the number of people achieving a university placement, frequent changes in procedures involving transferring of students etc. All these prevent the department from organizing its educational and supportive needs. In the rest of the quality criteria of the course, the department, compared to the respective European and international, is at an average and in some cases it is in a high level of approach.

Regarding the evaluation findings of the quality research with a students' sample, a positive opinion is expressed in most of them (e.g. the course responds to the students' needs, systematic notification on the demands of the course, easy correspondence of the courses to those of the respective foreign academic institutions, and students' possibility to evaluate the course).

Students' assessments concerning the degree of innovation of the course and the contribution of the obtained knowledge and skills to their professional perspectives and evolution, the answers fluctuate between neutral and positive points. The points referring to the response of the course to the demands of labor market and those concerning its educational operation are in a medium (neutral) level. In the two negative ends are the assessments regarding the problems created in their studies by the frequent and unscheduled changes imposed by Troika's decisions to reduce the education costs, leading many H.E.Is to close down, others to postpone their opening and most of H.E.Is to be incorporated creating thus a series of difficult organizational problems, such as incorporation of departments in the first semesters with common modules, abolition of laboratory courses and even compulsory transfer of the original study place.

5   CONCLUSION

Completing the present study regarding the evaluation of the course in Business Administration of T.E.I of Thessaly-Greece and taking into account a comparative benchmarking of some evaluation criteria as they have been defined by the Hellenic Quality Assurance and Accreditation Agency (H.Q.A), the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (E.N.Q.A) and the British Organization, Chartered Institute of Management (C.I.M), deviations were detected and suggestions were made for the improvement not only of the quality of the course but also of its educational procedures, using best practice as it is applied in the corresponding educational institutions of the above mentioned organizations. However, there were also many convergences that show a positive perspective for the department.

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