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DEFINING, ASSESSING AND IMPROVING TEACHER QUALITY IN THE USA

O. Yu. Chugai

Kyiv, National Technical University of Ukraine «Kyiv Polytechnic Institute»

OChugai@meta.ua

The article deals with effective strategies of assessing and improving teacher quality in the USA. At the beginning of the article definitions of teacher quality are provided. Thus, the characteristics of “highly qualified teacher” are: having a bachelor’s degree, being licensed by the state, demonstrating subject matter competence, while the characteristics of “exemplary” teachers are: recognition of administration and colleagues, contribution to professional development of other teachers, developing curricula, creating learning environment which enhances students’ achievements. It is highlighted that there is a tendency for developing teachers’ standards based on students’ outcomes. Mentoring, continual professional development, observing and evaluating teaching performance are considered to be vital prerequisites of teacher quality. The article introduces detailed analysis of reasons for low status of teachers in the USA: the ones connected with normal schools evolvement into universities, with the position of teachers in society and the nature of teaching profession itself. The best strategies of assessing and improving teacher quality are identified: large-scale surveys, classroom observation, written examinations of teachers, student performance and achievement. It is stated that in order to meet the requirements of accountability, the emphasis is put on the continuous assessment which allows revision and improvement of academic university programs. University faculty members, internal and external experts are central in defining and assessing teacher quality. Much attention is paid to licensure as a prerequisite to teacher quality assurance, as well as to developing performance-based tests like Praxis III. Raising entry standards, reducing licensure differences between states, inclusion of clinical experience as a condition of program approval and teacher licensure are necessary for improving teacher quality in the USA. Prospects of further investigation are peculiarities of the Praxis assessment and its impact on teacher quality.

Keywords: teacher quality, assessment, licensure, observation tools, accountability.

Introduction. Education plays a vital role in addressing the social and economic demands of contemporary globalised world. In order to be competitive, learners should acquire complex knowledge and skills needed in a changing environment. Critical thinking, flexibility, problem solving, the ability to use advanced technologies and be involved in lifelong professional development have become more significant than ever before. Therefore, teachers should meet high standards and be able to prepare diverse learners, which is impossible without improving teacher quality. When there is agreement on connection between teacher quality and successful education, the views on defining, assessing and improving teacher quality differ.

The aim of this article is to study challenges and identify effective strategies of assessing and improving teacher quality in the USA. To achieve this aim it is necessary to complete the following tasks:

- provide definitions for the concept of teacher quality;
- analyze reasons for low status of teachers in the USA;
- identify the best strategies of assessing and improving teacher quality.

Background. Educational literature analysis suggests that numerous scientists have researched the issue of teacher quality: G. Ambach, who underlined the importance of standards for teaching improving practice, P. Ashton, C.J. Byrne, L. Darling-Hammond, A. Levine and B.C. Williams, who investigated the issue of teacher education reforms and ways of maintaining efficacy of teaching, J.I. Goodlad, S.M. Tracz, who focused on improvement of teaching skills, and others. Ukrainian educational system undergoes drastic changes aimed at its improvement. Therefore, considering valuable American experience in achieving teacher quality is actual and timely.

Defining the key terms. Because of complex and controversial nature of teaching, definitions of teacher quality differ greatly. Nevertheless, most researchers came to an agreement on two main elements: firstly, it is teacher preparation and qualifications, which refers to pre-service and continued learning, and, secondly, teaching practice, namely teacher performance in the

classroom. It is stated that these two elements are interrelated, so improvement of teacher preparation should lead to better teaching behaviors and practices. A national profile of teacher preparation and qualifications reflects the quality of teachers in the USA, that is why policymakers focus mainly on the training and educating teachers considering it to be more important.

Teacher quality has been in the centre of American policymakers' attention for several decades. In 1997 President Clinton proclaimed teacher quality as a priority issue which would allow the nation to compete on a global scale [8, p. 1, 5]. While President Bush calls for the necessity of highly qualified teachers in 2001, each state has its own understanding of this term mainly based on teacher qualifications and licensure requirements [7, p. 12]. According to the largest educational organization in the USA with more than 50 years of experience in the area of teacher quality, which is called Education Test Service (ETS), defining incentives for teacher quality is impossible without understanding the teaching continuum. It starts with obtaining teacher education, pre-service preparation, initial licensure, followed by getting a teaching job and induction, continues through practice and ongoing professional development to mastery and advanced certification. Besides, any definition of teacher quality should align with the provisions of "highly qualified teacher" given in "The No Child Left Behind" (NCLB): having a bachelor's degree, being licensed by the state, demonstrating subject matter competence. In addition, NCLB provides definition of "exemplary" teachers: their expertise is acknowledged by administration and colleagues, they contribute to professional development of other teachers, develop curricula, create learning environment which motivates students and enhances their achievements.

According to ETS, there are three major issues critical for improving teacher quality: developing requirements of good teaching, raising entry standards and supporting teachers. The debate over the issue of whether content knowledge is more important for good teaching than teaching skills does not make any sense because they both are equally important. There are four critical competences which define good teaching: basic academic skills, content knowledge of the subject, knowledge of generic, as well as content-specific pedagogy, and teaching skills. Despite the fact that non-cognitive skills of teachers are not assessed yet, the importance of enthusiasm, the belief in capability of students becomes evident [11, p. 2-4].

At the 2013 International Summit on teacher quality it was stated that definition of teacher quality in the USA is shifting from possession of certification to what students know and are able to do. Four core elements of teacher quality standards were defined at the summit: planning and preparation (knowledge of content and pedagogy, knowledge of students, planning, assessment), classroom environment (creating culture for learning and managing discipline), instruction (effective communication, providing feedback) and professional responsibilities (reflection practice, professional development) [9, p. 9]. Michael Strong points out that definition of teacher quality should include qualifications, personal qualities, adherence to pedagogical standards and ability to motivate students [7, p. 12]. As we can see, there are different approaches to defining teacher quality; a tendency of developing teachers' standards characterized by multiple components is based on students' outcomes.

Definition of teacher quality suggests the methods for assessing it. Thus, large-scale surveys are used to measure teacher preparation and qualifications, while teacher practice is usually measured through classroom observation. There are two more: written examinations of teachers, student performance and achievement. It should be noted that methods used to measure teacher quality are often developed to address a particular issue which policymakers consider to be important [8, p. 5].

The status of teacher education in the USA. Improvement of teacher education is impossible without considering the factors which are crucial for teacher quality in the USA. American researchers name three main reasons for low status of teacher education in the USA: the first connected with the historical peculiarities of the normal school, the second connected with the position of teachers in society and the third with the nature of teaching profession itself.

Let us analyze the first reason. As the demand for teachers rapidly grew, normal schools had to relax professional standards for teacher preparation which meant that the requirements for admission were simplified, the academic year became shorter and programs less academic.

Moreover, when normal schools evolved into colleges and then universities, it led to diffusion of the responsibility for teacher preparation.

The second reason for lowering the status of teacher education is its social position connected with feminization of teacher's profession, attracting practitioners from the lower class and serving the least advantaged people.

The third reason may be explained by the nature of teaching which is very demanding. The fact that teaching is possible providing a learner takes efforts means that teachers have to create the environment which promotes learning and motivates their students. Besides, teachers are isolated in their classrooms solving the whole range of problems; there are no clearly defined teaching tools to use but high standards to achieve [3, p. 297-298]. According to the new standards, teachers must prepare students to think critically and perform at high levels. Teachers should meet the demands of the curriculum and at the same time take into account the needs of the students scaffolding their learning [2, p. 40]. The fact that everyone has their own learning experience contributes to a widespread misconception that teaching is easy. Another unique feature of teaching is that successful teachers make students self-sufficient, being able to learn on their own. That is why teacher's expertise is not appreciated, but perceived as commonplace and mundane [3, p. 298-299].

The Association of Teacher Educators aims at improving teacher education. The Association of Teacher Educators, which was founded in 1920, is devoted to the improvement of teacher education through exemplary clinical practice and research. Over 700 colleges and universities are represented in ATE, which office is located in the Washington DC. In addition, ATE has spokespersons in the Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). The goal of ATE is to advocate for teacher educators to become active participants in education policymaking and leaders in their field. ATE is focused on three main areas: the development of quality programs for teacher preparation, the analysis of professional development of teachers, and the provision of opportunities for the professional and personal growth of its members.

The first ATE Resolution approved in 2015 concerns the issue of federally mandated standardized testing and states that the adoption of "No Child Left Behind" has resulted in overusing of standardized testing in the whole country taking valuable instruction time teaching to the test. Besides, at the state level evaluations of teacher education programs are being linked to achievement tests, results of which are not always valid. Thus, ATE will promote the reduction of mandated standardized assessments, the adoption of alternative assessment systems and the inclusion of teachers in the creation of student assessment systems [10].

Qualitative criteria of teacher education programs. One of the prominent American educators, a researcher and practitioner Arthur Levine, points out nine qualitative criteria of a teacher education program: explicit purpose reflecting the needs of teachers and learners; coherent and rigorous curriculum; balance between academic and clinical education; faculty composed of academics and practitioners who are experts in teaching; admission which aims at selecting students with the ability and motivation to become successful teachers; high graduation standards; high quality research; adequate financial resources to support the program; continuous self-assessment and improvement. He also highlights other distinctive features of successful teacher education programs: clear definition of program outcomes; timely feedback for every student; student's portfolio; the modeling of good teaching; faculty sense of identity: teachers first and scholars second; willingness to acknowledge shortcomings and to address them; additional courses on evaluating teaching for mentors [4, p. 20, 81-87, 91-93].

According to Linda Darling-Hammond, assessment of teacher preparation programs usually encompasses four distinguished features: a focus on performance, integration of knowledge and skills in practice, multiple measures and opportunities for practice. Assessment of teacher performance implies not only examining lessons plans, videotapes of teaching, results of student learning, curriculum materials, but also teacher reflection and analysis, interviews, samples of feedback teacher gives students, the ability to plan and adapt to the needs of a learner, to cooperate with colleagues and communities. Multiple measures used in assessment imply multiple sources of evidence collected over time in different contexts which give candidates an opportunity to demonstrate their flexibility.

Linda Darling-Hammond emphasizes that assessment of teacher preparation programs also includes multiple opportunities for further learning and targeting the desired outcomes using feedback and reflection for better organized curriculum and instruction. Using different assessment tools like case methods, portfolios, exhibitions, action research allows every aspect of teaching to be evaluated. Thus, case methods develop as well as assess the ability of a teacher to observe and to make a decision. Portfolio is a tool for developing and assessing reflective practice, while exhibitions call for artistic, creative qualities of a teacher. Action research develops the ability of a teacher to conduct a scientific research collecting data, analyzing it and drawing conclusions which help to improve teaching practice [2, p. 116-118].

Observation tools for measuring teacher quality. Observation is a necessary element of quality assessment which provides rich material for conducting research and further development of teacher preparation programs. At the same time Jack Richards points out the importance of taking into account the nature and limitations of observation which does not allow assessing all the aspects of complex and dynamic teaching practice because not all of them can be directly observable. Moreover, the very presence of an observer has an impact on all the participants of that particular environment making it different from the mainstream one [7, p. 90-91]. Other drawbacks, such as limited competence of evaluators connected with their inadequate training, teacher resistance and apathy, lack of uniformity and high expenses, do not allow observation studies on a large scale [9, p. 6].

To solve these problems it is necessary to focus on the most important aspects like lesson structure (opening and closing, the number of activities, the transitions between the stages of the lesson), classroom management strategies (dividing students into groups, time management, seating arrangement, maintaining order), types of teaching activities (whole class, pair, group and individual activities), teaching strategies (presenting tasks, organizing practice, teaching techniques), teacher's use of language (language for instructions, questions, feedback, explanations), students' use of language (language used in group work, use of the mother tongue, grammar, pronunciation), student interaction (time on task, questioning behaviors, student-to-student talk). There is a wide range of observation procedures: checklists, seating charts, field notes, narrative summaries, the follow-up conversations with observers or interviews, audio or video recording [6, p.92- 97].

Checklists are the most common observation tools which may be easily adapted to the need of a concrete educational environment. For example, Auburn University uses a 5-point scale in its Observation of Teaching Checklist from 1 for very poor, when practice needs serious substantial improvement, to 5 for excellent, when no improvement is needed. There is one more indicator N/A (no account) and written comments on each criterion and in general. Three main areas of teaching practice are assessed: content and delivery, physical presence and social presence. The area content and delivery includes timing, overview of the goals, the level, clarity, pace, relevance of presented information, using examples, quality of demonstration, active learning techniques, handouts, providing summing up and take home message. The area physical presence encompasses making eye contact, facial expression, movements, professional attire, characteristics of the voice. Social presence is judged according to the level of the confidence, reinforcing student participation, using student names, engaging, respectful and relaxed teaching style [5].

Large-scale surveys provide quantifiable indicators of teacher quality and a picture of nation's teachers in general. Completing the surveys teachers provide information on their educational background, major and minor fields of study, certification, professional development experiences, etc. Such methodology is used to provide data for description of curriculum content, instructional and classroom practices, for tracking trends of teacher preparation and professional experiences. Researches state that only some large-scale surveys are conducted on a regular basis, as, for example, the Schools and Staffing Survey (SASS), which collects data on different aspects of teacher quality. The data from comparable questions from different surveys is analyzed and important conclusions, which influence the federal educational policy, are made [11, p. 7]. Value-added modeling (VAM) is based on linking teacher quality with effective teaching, which is defined

by student outcomes. Using this statistical procedure, the effects of teachers on student achievement are estimated by collecting data of students test results [7, p. 17].

Licensure as a prerequisite to teacher quality assurance. While licensure is recognized as a necessary component of teaching continuum, there is no clear understanding of the meaning and purpose of teacher licensure. The point is that initial licensure identifies the minimal requirements for teacher candidates' knowledge and skills, namely the desired level of competence. Therefore, it serves as a benchmark for novice teachers, but does not ensure further professional development. Later on a teacher may apply for a permanent license which requires additional efforts and gaining teaching experience. Education Test Service (ETS) defines three equally important key components for licensing decisions: education, experience and examination.

Teacher testing has a long history in the USA. A standardized test known as the National Teacher Examination (NTE) used to measure teacher's knowledge and skills for certification in the USA. Unfortunately, having basic knowledge does not meet all the requirements of teacher quality [11, p. 6]. To meet those needs the Praxis Series tests were developed by ETS. As distinguished from all the previous tests, Praxis III is performance-based. That means that, besides measuring basic academic skills, content knowledge of the subject, knowledge of generic, as well as content-specific pedagogy, and teaching skills, it also measures teacher's performance in class [1, p. 526]. The content of teacher licensure tests is based on state student standards and national disciplinary organization standards. Besides, the tests are evaluated and edited by teachers and subject matter experts from different states.

In order to prepare for the Praxis assessments better, candidates use learning guides developed by ETS. Devoted to various subjects, they present the content area of each test. In addition, Praxis Diagnostic Preparation Program (DPP) provides candidates feedback on their performance so that they can focus their efforts on problem area. It should be mentioned that there are alternative routes for talented candidates, but EST emphasizes the importance of consistent and uniform licensure standards for all candidates regardless their educational paths [11, p. 7]. Only then it is possible to guarantee teacher quality.

Conclusions. Therefore we can conclude that despite different approaches to defining teacher quality in the USA, there is a common tendency for developing teachers' standards based on students' outcomes. Induction, mentoring, continual professional development, observing and evaluating teaching performance are vital prerequisites of quality teachers. The main methods to measure teacher quality are large-scale surveys, classroom observation, written examinations of teachers, student performance and achievement. The emphasis is put on the continuous assessment when faculty members, internal and external experts are central in defining and assessing quality. Raising entry standards and reducing licensure differences between states, inclusion of clinical experience as a condition of program approval and teacher licensure, reduction of mandated standardized assessments and the adoption of alternative assessment systems are necessary for improving teacher quality in the USA.

Subsequent research work may include the investigation of the Praxis assessment and its impact on teacher quality aimed at using American innovative practice in Ukraine.

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О. Ю. Чугай. Визначення, проведення оцінювання та підвищення якості навчання в США.

Стаття присвячена аналізу ефективних стратегій оцінювання та підвищення якості навчання в США. «Висококваліфікований вчитель» має ступінь бакалавра, державну ліцензію, володіє предметною компетентністю; характеристиками «зразкових» вчителів є визнання їхньої майстерності адміністрацією і колегами, внесок у професійний розвиток інших вчителів, розробка навчальних програм, створення такого навчального середовища, що підвищує досягнення студентів. Підкреслюється, що існує тенденція орієнтації на результати навчання студентів при розробці стандартів для викладачів. Наставництво, постійне професійне зростання, спостереження та оцінювання ефективності практики викладання є важливими передумовами досягнення бажаної якості навчання. У статті приводяться причини низького статусу вчителів у США пов'язані з еволюцією педагогічних училищ в університети, соціальним становищем викладача в суспільстві і специфікою професії. Визначено такі стратегії оцінювання та підвищення якості викладання як загальнонаціональні дослідження, спостереження, письмові іспити для викладачів, досягнення студентів. Враховуючи вимоги підзвітності, зростає значення поточного оцінювання, що дозволяє вдосконалювати навчальні університетські програми. Викладачі університету, внутрішні і зовнішні експерти грають ключову роль у визначенні та оцінюванні якості навчання. Велика увага приділяється ліцензуванню як необхідної умови забезпечення якості навчання, а також розробці тестів, що включають оцінювання практики викладання. Підвищення вимог до вступу, зменшення відмінностей між отриманням ліцензій в різних штатах, врахування практики викладання при ліцензуванні необхідні для поліпшення якості викладання в США. Перспективою подальших досліджень окреслено особливості тестів, що враховують практику викладання та їхній вплив на якість навчання.

Ключові слова: якість навчання, оцінювання, отримання ліцензії, інструменти спостереження, звітність.

О. Ю. Чугай. Определение, проведение оценки и повышение качества обучения в США.

Статья посвящена анализу эффективных стратегий оценивания и повышения качества обучения в США. «Высококвалифицированный учитель» имеет степень бакалавра, государственную лицензию, обладает предметной компетентностью; характеристиками «образцовых» учителей является признание их мастерства администрацией и коллегами, вклад в профессиональное развитие других учителей, разработка учебных программ, создание такой учебной среды, которая способствует повышению достижений студентов. Подчеркивается, что существует тенденция ориентации на результаты обучения студентов при разработке стандартов для преподавателей. Наставничество, постоянный профессиональный рост, наблюдение и оценка эффективности практики преподавания являются важными предпосылками достижения желаемого качества обучения. Определены такие стратегии оценки и повышения качества преподавания, как общенациональные исследования, проведение наблюдения, письменные экзамены для преподавателей, достижения студентов. Возрастает значение текущего оценивания, что позволяет совершенствовать учебные университетские программы. Перспективными будут дальнейшие исследования особенностей тестов, учитывающих практику преподавания и их влияния на качество обучения.

Ключевые слова: качество обучения, оценивание, получение лицензии, инструменты наблюдения, отчетность.