

THE EVALUATION OF EDUCATIONAL SERVICES QUALITY BY THE STUDENTS OF THE FACULTY OF ECONOMICAL SCIENCES „DIMITRIE CANTEMIR” CLUJ-NAPOCA

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Abstract: *The evaluation of the educational services quality by the students represents an important element of the internal quality monitoring process for the identification of the necessary actions required in the continuous improvement of the offered educational quality, and on the other hand it represents an indicator of the university interest of having access at the student's point of view. Starting from the student needs, together with the staff involved in the evaluation and quality assurance committee of the Faculty of Economic Sciences Cluj-Napoca, “Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University Bucharest, we elaborated a questionnaire for the evaluation of the educational services quality by the students, concerning: teaching-learning activities, available admission information, tutorial system, class schedule, material base, laboratory, course and seminar rooms equipments, administrative services, student organizations, counselling services offered by the faculty. The conclusions of the study were discussed with the faculty's management, decisions being made to take actions in order to increase the student satisfaction level.*

By developing and implementing their own strategy to quality policies and procedures, the higher education institution is explicitly committed to develop a quality culture in all its activities.

Keywords – *quality, university management, educational services, higher education, the quality circle.*

JEL Codes – *I23, M10, M31.*

The questionnaires were individually applied, between May and June, to the students following the bachelor's degree programs of the faculty, regardless of the education form or the specialization, the results being as follows:

32 questionnaires were applied through personal interview, all of them being validated as they were fully completed;

40 questionnaires were distributed among the students, only 27 of them being processed in the end (because only these many were brought completed to the faculty's Evaluation and Quality Assurance Committee).

The results of the study are given below.

At the first question, related to the importance of the Romanian higher education, in their professional preparation, the respondents appreciated:

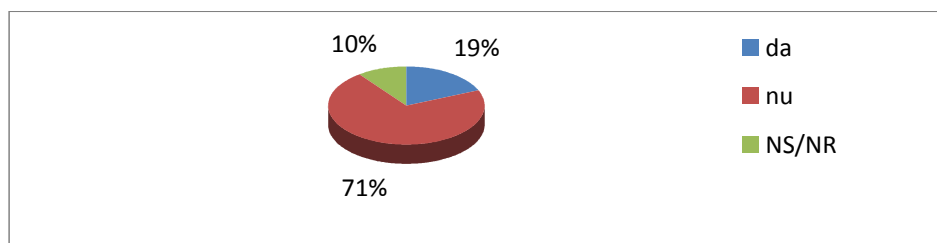


Fig. no.1. The answers to the question related to the importance of the higher education in Romania.

Realised by the author

The ones who chose the first answer version (“yes”), cumulate approximately 19% of the respondents. We could say that they have confidence in the bigger chances of integration on the labour market after obtaining a higher education diploma. We assume that these students consider that the higher education offer has been very well adapted to the needs imposed by a changing society.

The majority of the questioned students (approximately 71%) consider that the higher education has not managed that well to adapt to the changes in the Romanian society, maybe from the same reasons why they consider that the society is heading towards a wrong direction. The expectations, the needs of these students, in their opinion, are not fully satisfied by the higher education offer. In this respect higher education institutions can be recommended a more extensive analyze of the Romanian society.

The students that preferred the third choice (DK/DA) add up about 10% in the total answers. Like a short motivation to these answers, we could think about the fact that these students, are either not informed about the evolution of the higher education in Romania or maybe they don’t believe that the risk of not finding a job after the graduation of these studies is too big.

The question “*You have chosen to become a student of the Faculty of Economical Sciences, Cluj-Napoca, “Dimitrie Cantemir” Christian University, Bucharest. What were the main reasons of your choice?*” is trying to identify what were and what still are the main information source for the future students, related to the faculty they will apply to, the answers highlighting the following:

Approximately 15% of the respondents chose this faculty because they considered it a faculty with a high level of education. Through quality we understand quality of offered conditions and services.

12% of the ones questioned answered that they made this choice because of the level of the tuition fee. We can say that they consider the tuition practiced by the faculty acceptable in comparison with their income.

The third answer choice (“I preferred to be a student in the city where my parents live,”) had a 5% of the total answers. It is possible that these students are still living with their parents or they wish to stay close to their families.

A good marketer appreciates that the advertise coming from the satisfied clients is the most inexpensive and in the same time the most efficient way of promoting the products and services offered by a company. It is also said that 20 satisfied clients can bring another 100 to the organization. These theories are also available for our study, which is proved through the very high percentage (60%) of those who chose this faculty at the advice and insurances of other people (these people being considered those clients satisfied by the quality of the education in the faculty).

The “DK /DA” was the choice of 2% of the students. We could say that this students got into registered into this faculty without putting into the balance what is important for their career,

without allow time for thinking about this decision or simply refusing to give a concrete answer to this question.

The following question offers information about the student satisfaction, the respondents having to appreciate the next aspects:

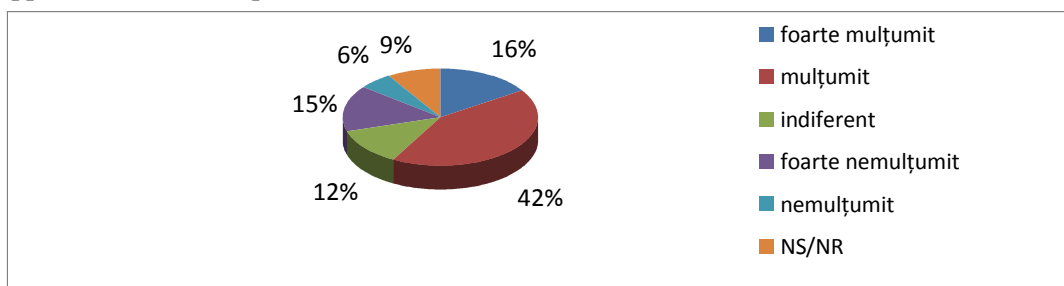


Fig.nr.2 The answer to the question related to the student satisfaction

Realised by the author

According to the chosen criteria, about 16% of the students declared that they are very satisfied with the conditions and services offered by the faculty. This could be a gratifying percent for the faculty's administration, but it cannot be considered big enough or satisfactory enough.

Approximately 42% of the students declared that they are satisfied with the conditions and services offered by the faculty, while 12% are not concerned about them.

From the ones questioned, 15% declared themselves dissatisfied and 6% very dissatisfied with the conditions and services offered by the faculty. Therefore a 9% of the students are left, who do not consider themselves able to evaluate some of the criteria regarding the activity that takes place in the faculty and the conditions it offers or they just refuse to give an answer.

Regarding the question related to the services offered by the Centre for Information, Counselling and Career guidance for students out of the total questioned students, approximately 5% answered that they are very satisfied with the services offered by the CICOC Centre, and about 19% said they are "satisfied" with it. The percentages for the other answers present themselves as follows: 41% "indifferent", 35% "DK/DA". The CICOC Centre is a service made available for the students to guide them in their career or to help them make a decision about their future career. The 41%, respectively 35%, mentioned above could raise question marks regarding the notoriety of this centre among the students. One recommendation that we can do from this point of view to the faculty management is to concentrate on promoting the centre and thus try to attract more students into the information and career orientation centre.

The usefulness of the studied subjects in relation to the specialization's (study program) requirements.

The percentages of the answers given to this criterion are the following: 22 % „very satisfied”, 44% „satisfied”, 13% „indifferent”, 19% „dissatisfied”, 2% „very dissatisfied”.

The study programs are formulated in detail, according to the results expected by learning and are matched with an academic qualification. Therefore, subjects to be studied separately for each specialization must be carefully selected to meet program objectives and targets.

The percentages are quite satisfactory, which means that the curriculum is well thought out, in accordance with the requirements of the specialization.

However, there is a fairly large percentage of students who were not satisfied. Talking with some of them I found that their complaints are related to the fact that they consider some material unsuitable for their specialization or expect a greater depth of material (in terms of practical application of the theory studied).

Complementarities and relations between classes

Flow rates are needed so that information obtained by studying a subject to be related to the information material studied further on, to create a "homogeneous" field where all the parts fill each other.

A very high percentage was obtained to the "satisfied" option, approximately 36%, but nevertheless an almost equal percentage (about 32%) was obtained for "dissatisfied." All of this could be related to the above criterion, namely „usefulness of subjects studied in relation to the requirements of specialization”

The other answer versions cumulated approximate percentages of: 12% "very satisfied"; 7% "indifferent"; 13% "very dissatisfied".

Teacher-student communication

After the responses given to this statement we are very pleased because about 71% of students surveyed were "very satisfied" or "satisfied" with how their communication with teachers is carried out.

A percentage of about 12% of students say "indifferent" ,10% are "dissatisfied" and 7% "very dissatisfied."

The quality of the faculty website:

A percentage of about 10% of surveyed students are "very satisfied" with the quality of the faculty website, and about 42% are "satisfied."

These percentages are considered positive, but, nevertheless, a percentage of 31% of students are "very dissatisfied" and 10% are "dissatisfied" with the quality of the site. We believe that we should improve the website of the faculty since lately young future students prefer searching the internet for the desired information on the faculties which they want to follow.

The quality of information provided by faculty staff (decisions, regulations, etc..)

The satisfied and very satisfied students, in relation to the quality of information provided by the faculty staff cumulated a rate of approximately 36% (5% "very satisfied" 31% "satisfied") of all responses. This can be considered a positive response.

But however, the real situation is the fact that, about 47% of respondents are dissatisfied or very dissatisfied with the quality of the received information.

Given that the percentage of dissatisfied students is higher than of the satisfied ones, we propose changing the way the students are being informed (from the summary information on the bulletin board to the detailed information available on the site, etc.).

We also obtained a rate of about 15% of students who said they were "indifferent" probably because, probably, for their part, student life at a university is about going to classes or not, passing the exams and all these, without considering other activities taking place within the faculty where they study.

About 2% of the students chose the answer "DK/DA"

Sense of community (student teachers)

We've all been told Lenin's famous words: "Learn-learn-learn!!!" But life in a university requires more than simply learning activity. It requires the formation of links, student growth and development within an academic community, a sense of community.

However, unfortunately, after analyzing the results we observed that not much sense of community is reflected among students. According to the answers , we have 7% "very satisfied" ,22% "satisfied" ,15% "indifferent" ,35% "very dissatisfied", 2% "dissatisfied" 19% "DK / DA".

We consider however, the percentages of the variants "regardless" and "DK / DA" rather sad than unsatisfactory. Efforts to create a "community" should not be made only by teachers but also by students. I believe now that Lenin wanted to say, "Learn- theory-learn to communicate -learn to behave!!!"

At the question "In general, in relation to the activity and the conditions offered by the Faculty of Economic Sciences in Cluj-Napoca" I am:" the questioned students answered: 13% "very satisfied"; 63% "satisfied"; 19% "unsatisfied"; 5% "very unsatisfied".

The results of this question show the fact that more than half of the questioned students declared themselves satisfied with the activity and the conditions in the faculty. If we consider the stipulations of the ARACIS methodology for external quality evaluation, which considers that if the minimum level of students that appreciate positively the learning/development environment offered by a higher education institution and their own learning path is 50%, then we can say that the faculty is in a good position from this point of view. However we cannot ignore the percentage of around 25% of students who are unsatisfied in relation to the activity and the conditions offered. This raises the problem of identifying the needs of the students and finding the methods for satisfying them as efficiently as possible.

CONCLUSIONS:

The students who filled in the questionnaire, according to the factual data, are mostly people over 30 years old, from urban areas, therefore we can consider that their answers are based on a life experience and an already established personality with a well-defined character.

We must take into account the fact that more than half of the respondents are from Cluj-Napoca, city considered one of the "big university centres" in Romania. This is because the lifestyle and the way of thinking in such a city cannot compare to the lifestyle in a smaller town and much less to the way of thinking and living in the rural area.

Also the type of education, year of study and specialization must be taken into account as policy makers in providing answers. The year of study is important in several ways, among which we mention the fact that, for example, the students in the second year are halfway through the study period. Therefore they do not know the content of all the subjects they are going to study, they are undecided (and, on one hand it is normal to be this way) on the career to follow, they are not decided on the job they wish to fill after graduation, etc. Specializations are a decision maker because they focus on labour market areas.

Speaking of employment, as part of the society we live in, in the present conditions of financial crisis it is not considered particularly "thriving". That is why I believe that some students gave negative answers to certain questions, such as forecasting a future for the changing Romanian society. However, leaving aside their social condition (not related to the activity in the faculty), I consider that the interviewed students appreciated positively the quality of the educational services offered by our faculty. The negative percentages obtained with certain evaluation criteria, can be fixed with little effort from all parties involved. For example, a closer communication between academics (teachers, tutors or faculty management) and students, **as many students as possible**, may reduce complaints about the quality and the quantity of the information offered by the teachers to the students, it could increase the sense of community, it could change the opinion of certain students on the complementarities and relations between classes as well as on the usefulness of the studied classes etc. It is understood that in order to remedy all these, a high level of student's participation in class is a must.

However the main problem is not the teacher-student communication, but the lack of effective participation of students in organized activities within the faculty. We consider inappropriate for such a large percentage of students not to be able to have an opinion, be it critical or appreciative, regarding the activity of student associations. Also there is too much indifference regarding the services available for students within the COCOC centre which was especially designed / created for students.

As a final conclusion, we wish to point out however that there is a disregard to the conditions and services that are available for students. I believe that as long as there were complaints against

them, suggestions could be made to the faculty's management and the spaces concerning these suggestions wouldn't have been left blank.

Higher education is a service offered to the society, with a great impact on the personal development of individuals, because it gives them "a chance for greater autonomy, a greater social mobility, professional and international mobility, higher incomes and an increased personal empowerment" (1) It is also, why we strongly affirm that the Romanian higher education has contributed and should contribute in the future in the formation of the nation, the development of Romanian society's intellectual capital, the training of elites from different activity fields and the consecration of the most important Romanian values.

In the last decade, the Romanian universities have gone through an extensive transformation process, which is not over yet. Changes imposed by the Bologna Process, the transition towards the knowledge economy, multiculturalism, information society, the pressure of more and more people to access higher education, face universities with new requirements.(2) At the same time, within the European and global academic space new universities are developing - such as the virtual or transnational ones - which compete with the traditional ones, competition that does not identify itself with anything that existed in the academic area ten years ago. The effects of this competition are felt in our academic area, causing profound changes in the specific rules and procedures of higher education, in the specific values of one or another of the Romanian universities, in the behaviour of the two categories of "actors" involved in the act of education : teachers and students. By developing and implementing their own strategy in the quality policies and procedures, the higher education institution explicitly commits for the development of a quality culture in all its activities.

Personally, I consider that the main objectives of the higher education institutions must address quality and at least in terms of relationship with the students these objectives should be:

- student involvement in extra-activities (debates on college activities and processes) in order to improve them;
- creating analysis and synthesis skills, communication and interpretation of certain situations, events, actual actions and activities;
- developing creativity in an ameliorative thinking system, to find solutions.

Given the conducted survey and its results we propose for the future activities of the Faculty of Economic Sciences, Cluj-Napoca, a discussion forum about the quality of teaching and learning within the faculty, organized under the title **Quality Circle**.

The circle of quality should be an activity based on a free agreement between students from all majors and years of study and at the dean's initiative. Meetings will be held once a month and, in general, will be attended by heads of year and other representatives.

The purpose of debates is to understand the concept of quality, not on a general level, but a concrete and practical level of the activities and processes that are actually occurring and to interpret the current situation, not from the perspective of finding guilty ones but solutions to improve. For example, if a student has passed an exam but does not have the mark written in the student book, we must not identify the responsible person for this situation (teacher, secretary, etc..), But solutions must be found to establish rules concerning the registration of marks (one teacher writes marks in the booklet - the teacher or assistant).

At the end of the academic year, the activity of the Quality Circle can be monitored, identifying the main conclusions and improvement proposals for certain activities. For example, in virtue of the conclusions drawn at the end of an academic year proposals can be submitted, that include solutions to problems identified on the way: changing the site, improving communication, etc.

The success of the activities carried out under the Quality Circle stands in the satisfaction of seeing the students participating in an organized way to improve faculty processes. Thus, the faculty's management knows better what the perception on various activities is, among students

and can apply procedures to improve on some activity components: schedules, teaching, seminars, students practice, the preparation of essays, evaluation etc. In the context of student-centred education, a requirement is that students are explained the working methods so that they understand the regulations and criteria for the requirement, without excluding the possibility of improving them. Future plans relate mainly to the effectiveness of professional practice and improve the practice period, both in duration and in the actual performance. It refers to defining new forms of partnerships or agreements with institutions that can accommodate the practice.

Notes:

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