

TEACHING Y GENERATION – INFLUENCING FACTORS AND CONSEQUENCES FOR ECONOMIC EDUCATION

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Abstract

It is well known that economic education need adequately answers to global challenges. Despite to this, there is still a significant lack of understanding of how we can do this in practice. The purpose of this paper is to provide a possible answer, based on the idea of building economic education program focalized on the characteristics of the new generations of students.

We structure the paper as follows: first we offer a first approach about actual economic education, analysing the importance of understanding the new generation of students – Y Generation. In the next section we present the research method used for the empirical analysis, and we develop three hypotheses, based on interviews and data analysis. In our opinion, the operationalization of education centered on student in the field of economics is influenced by pragmatic orientation, of the management of communications and dialogue with students and also by presenting realistic and business models.

We test these hypotheses using a test administrated for 22 students in Management, enrolled in the second year, undergraduate studies. Then we include in our present paper the empirical results in order to show that all three hypotheses were confirmed. The results are presented with a thought description of the empirical analysis. Finally, discussion and conclusions are presented and implications for economic education are discussed.

Key words: economic education, Y Generation, factors, consequences

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INTRODUCTION

Any higher education analysis, especially of Economics, cannot be dissociated from understanding the economic and social framework of the university's activity. Even if it is asserted that a new paradigm in applied, mainly the one centered on the student, reality is in contradiction. On a declarative level, the post-Bologna Romanian higher education is centered around the interests of the student. Actually, the activity of each faculty is centered on teaching, research and obtaining grants for equipment, financing and a better pay for the professors. The gap can be observed between the assumed mission and the assumed practical strategies. This aspect is even more obvious if we talk about the actual financing system, which, as a survival condition, asks for the attraction of more and more students. And, the raising of number of students when the recruitment pool is diminished more and more (population segment made up of people with relevant ages for higher education) leads to a reduced medium quality. But, we continue to be tributary to a way of thinking which sees the university as an instance for general and academic education, to which only the best should have access and should educate the elite. It is rather the perception of a system which follows its own logic. The tenacity with which the universities try to defend their identity and autonomy is a merit which cannot be neglected. But, this

traditionalism has weakened their capacity to adapt to the new realities. Especially because the culture of the present students is being less applied outside of the Internet. New times require new ideas. And we have to do it especially in education. This is actually the purpose of this article, which proposes to make a foresight exercise of the economical university education from the perspective of filling with content the paradigm of education centered on the student. Our endeavor targets the finality of the economical higher education system by eliminating the flaw of self-centering.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

In the economical higher education, the exponential growth of the number of students, also encouraged by the development of numerous private universities, has inevitably led to a decrease of the quality of the offer. Staking on collecting the fees, the universities have made many compromises, which affect us. The economical higher education has become a land of paradoxes, fact signaled by many publications and reports (Malița M., Georgescu, C. (coord), 2010; ARACIS, 2010).

In the present article, we will stop at only one paradox, namely the one in which the system is declared as being "centered on the student", where in fact, the student is actually placed at the periphery.

How did we get here?

Traditionally, economical higher education set itself to offer the students' knowledge considered as being relevant for the rest of their lives. And, in the new economy of knowledge, everything that is acquired or learned is valid only for a maximum period of ten years (Giarini, O., Malița, M., 2003). The faster and faster development of the Internet has started to create databases, online encyclopedias and communication environments with numerous distance learning tools. Fascinated by this world, the students are becoming less involved in the traditional education, which is centered too much on reproductive learning. "The New World Order" (Laval, Ch., Weber, L., 2002) protrudes a new education (modern) based on the Internet as data source, credited as value and credible, with Wikipedia being a representative example. But, reality brings up a more and more powerful culture of corporative type of understanding of the educational system (standards, performance, incentives, competitiveness, market, competition, aggressive advertising etc.). As a result, we have a "hybrid between a production line and a sports type of competition" (Kohn, 2000, p.93).

At the same time, the education of the students is getting closer to scientific research. The first direction is given by the search methodology of data on the Internet (data mining). The success seems to be connected with the diffusion of data, quality of the debates regarding these in dedicated communication environments and also with the initiation of hypotheses and/or solutions as a result of specialized teamwork reunited by a communication environment certified with trust (Wikipedia.org/wiki/Data_mining, 2014). The second direction seems to be given by the learning techniques drafted by the discoveries in Neuro-science, IT, Psychology and Sociology in Didactics and Pedagogy (Miu A. C. & Crisan L. G., 2011).

A large study regarding the status of higher education was made by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education in 2010 (ARACIS - Quality Barometer, 2010). One of the results of this study, relevant for the purpose of the present article, is the one related to the "good student" and "good professor".

From the perspective of the students, "a good professor" is someone who, first of all, has pedagogical and trainer abilities (ability to communicate and explain) and, second of all, good professional qualities in that field. From the perspective of the professors, "a good professor" is someone who is a good professional and researcher, followed by communication and teaching abilities.

Following the survey regarding "the good student", again, the perspectives are different. In the opinion of the teachers, "the good student" is someone who is interested in knowledge, seriousness and discipline. Even though the same characteristics are (still) maintained in regards of the "good student", the opinions of the students are highly nuanced. "The students define "the good student" less through the intrinsic quality which he/she has, more precisely the one of participant/partner in the educational academic process and more through his/her lifestyle and also through a set of qualities and competences associated with this style of life. The ideal image of the cultivated, intelligent, creative, preoccupied with intellectual culture type of student is replaced with the image of a student gifted with social abilities and competences, with preoccupations which are connected with the academical field and also with spending his/her spare time outside of it and the one that succeeds in balancing these two" (ARACIS - Quality Barometer, 2010, p.19).

The present students are, mainly, components of "Generation Y", born between 1980-1995. It is a generation made up of the children of Baby Boomers generation, the first generation of families where both parents worked. Many times, single children feel the gap between the generations more, due to the technological advancement brought by the development of the Internet. Generation Y is still a mystery which needs to be researched. With one foot in college and the other one in the labor market, more often than not we find them playing with a smart-phone. They cannot breathe without the Internet, they believe in Saint Google and Facebook has taken them to a world full of "close" friends. Knowing English, they started to dilute the international and inter-cultural communication gaps. Most of them are captive in the mesh of multinationals or in the entrepreneur type of American dream. It is a highly educated generation which becomes committed latter on. They want everything and they want it now. They are more interested in different opportunities and challenges than in a solid career. They choose activities that they like and put aside or postpone until the last minute the things that they are asked to do. They took part at many extracurricular activities, which opened their appetite for "attractive offers". It seems that their adaptability is their strongest quality. It is followed by: pragmatism, individualism, detachment; nothing extra, nothing in common, nothing forced. For Generation Y, routine and exhaustion are negative factors which ruin the balance between work and personal life (Generation Y Research, www.ashridge.org.uk, 2014).

In these conditions, there is a need to forefront the development of a balanced personality and developing the predilections of the person who benefits from the educational services, according to his/her abilities and fields of interest. This endeavor has to be integrated into a program based on communication and team work, of practical application and simulation in realistic economical environments (Marin, C. C., 2001; Negreț-Dobridor, I., Panișoară, I. O., 2005).

All of us foster hopes and wait for solutions, in our case being anchored in economical science. Science which, in order to fulfill its mission, has to be one that both knows and acts. A science which, "based on the assumption of general wealth (be it prosperity or well-being) is rather condemned to be a religion, a religion of social progress. It is a religion which, by not being able to anticipate the fall in sin (crisis), does not prevent its consequences by antefactum solutions" (Dinu, M., 2009).

It seems that it becomes more obvious the fact that, "if up until now humanity was mainly preoccupied with scientific, technological etc. development, it is time to focus on developing better humans, on mainly re-educating fundamental values like ethics, morality, truth, honesty, integrity, knowledge etc." (Dodescu, A., 2004).

RESEARCH DESIGN AND HYPOTHESIS DEVELOPMENT

For investigating the subject proposed in the present article, I used the following methods:

- in-depth interviews with teachers from high school and university economical education - 8, in March-April 2014;
- focused interviews with students and teachers regarding college life style - 12, in January-March 2014;
- secondary analysis of information included in self-evaluation reports regarding quality and in strategical documents of the universities, 2010-2012;
- testing of occupational interests, for a representative pattern of students studying at Economical Sciences - 22, management field, March 2014.

The relationship between education centered on the student (ICS) and orientation towards pragmatism

H1: The operationalization of education centered on the student in the field of economical sciences is influenced by orientation towards pragmatism.

Which is the difference between the traditional model of education and the education centered on the student? In the traditional view, the student is a receptor, mostly a passive participant, whose role is to write down and learn certain information in order to reproduce it later in a type of examination. The modified vision, the one of education centered on the student, suggests a model in which the student is made responsible, is considered an active and responsible partner under the guidance of the professor, who, as a holder of knowledge, becomes a *facilitator* and a *guide* for the student (Attard et al, 2010, pp. 7-8). In Economical Sciences, the encouragement of the student is highlighted for building up an own learning model centered on real economy: ideas-dreams-imagination-actions-accomplishments. In the Anglo-Saxon approach, the role of the university is to shape people, capable of becoming good specialists. An academic process, centered on the student, implies preparing the students for life, for a future career and for becoming active citizens in a democratic society. Under these conditions, their personal development has to be facilitated and an advanced knowledge base has to be assured, which can stimulate refinement, research and, in the future, innovation (The London Communique, 2007). Processing of data obtained by focused interviews with students and teachers (12) and as a result of secondary data analysis regarding the professional path of graduates of Economical Sciences, drove us towards the H1 hypothesis. Practically, students of fundamental Economical Sciences mainly see the bachelor studies in the light of their validation effect, which is given by the licensed economist diploma. This way, according to their opinion, they fundamentally gain a specialist title and the diploma represents the element which can assure access to certain jobs. Interviewed regarding the report between theory and practice, the obtained grade was 8.5 out of 10 - maximum possible in favor of practice. The students who work or who have worked in comparison with those who do not work, have given a smaller grade, the situation also being similar in the case of those who are involved in voluntary work. Mostly, female students are "pro-practice": they have given 8.9 in comparison to 7.6 given by male students. 82% of those who were interviewed agree with the fact that "in order to succeed you have to finish college", all of them have heard at least one time that "it's not worth going to college" and 55% believe that "finishing college is useless if you do not know someone". 90% see the Faculty of Economical Sciences as a "means for accessing a higher income". Interviewed in regards with the work-spare time rate, the students incline towards spare time: "work is important, but it shouldn't be always on the first place, if this means less spare time".

The relationship between education centered on the student (ECS) and the need for communication, dialog and explanation

H2: The operationalization of education centered on the student in the field of economical sciences is influenced by the management of communication and dialog with the students

The world that we are living in and especially the one which is being (re)formed facilitates the creation of a type of personality which can adapt to changes and it is ready to evolve towards other directions by means of evolutionary or adaptive abilities developed in school. The main characteristic of young people from Generation Y seems to be adaptability. They are not specialists in a certain field, but are capable to adapt much faster than the previous generations. "The present generation is rather defined by the search for references and the expectancy from college, as an institution, to offer assuredness in specialty and educational terms for a future economist profession" (acc. to interview data received from teachers). To the question "why do you think you are being considered as being passive?", the answer was "because we do not think it can be done and nobody teaches us how to do it". We want to highlight the fact that this aspect can be seen on a group level, because on an individual level, the youth of Generation Y is extremely critical and the main characteristic in connection with the colleagues is individualism. Self-oriented and relatively intolerant, the students of the present generation are in search of sense, significance, objectives and personal development directions. The interviews with the students have confirmed these things. Even more, the fact that they are "at sea" came out. From here, they have the need for explanation and to offer them a direction. The Internet, the virtual universe "informs" and shadows development. Formal education should not target "information" anymore, but "formation". This is the place for operationalization of the education centered on the student. In the direction of generating significance, sense and direction.

The relationship between education centered on the student (ECS) and presentation of accessible models

H3: The operationalization of education centered on the student in the field of economical sciences is influenced by business and human models that are easy to accomplish.

Formal education has to encourage the students' capacity of exceeding their personal limits due to consumerism and the influence of mass-media. The collapse of the labor market for young people, including economists, requires the reconfiguration of the educational system and a real step towards the student. The curriculum has to be directed towards a productive thinking. In the case of students of Economical Sciences, this has to encourage the exposure, search and usage of adequate specialized resources.

The youth of generation Y is not admiring Hollywood stars anymore, they admire normal people who succeed. With other words, they are looking for "references with which they can identify with and situations that they can set as objectives". Competition on the labor market makes their life more stressful in comparison to their parents and makes them to be afraid of missing opportunities. They want to be original (but they do not really know how), to prove that they are "doers", "to feel that they are needed", "not to be judged by their mistakes but by their courage to try".

The interviews showed that the students appreciate "the interest of the teachers in understanding what their needs are", "the ability to communicate during the lecture", "teachers that present experiences and give examples from the real economy, if possible, from the regional/local one". One third shows "the need to interact with the students beyond simple teaching, to answer potential questions". They want "professional models and ways of solving certain practical problems".

FINDINGS

The data used for testing these hypotheses was gained by a computerized appliance of an interests evaluation questionnaire (IEQ). This questionnaire assesses interests, more precisely, crystallized preferences for certain fields of knowledge or activity. The questionnaire was applied in March 2014 on a number of 22 students from the Faculty of Economical Sciences of the University of Oradea, signed up at the Management Studies program from the 2nd year. The pattern was randomly chosen and has the following characteristics: age of respondents between 18-24, 4 boys and 18 girls.

The computerized questionnaire targets six categories of interests. Realistic interests are manifested by the tendency to lean forward activities which require manipulation of objects, machines and tools. Conventional interests assume preference for activities which need systematic and ordered manipulation of certain data or objects in a well-organized and defined framework. The investigative interests imply an attraction for research, investigation under different shapes and in diverse fields. The artistic interests are manifested by attraction towards less structures activities, which imply creative solving and offer the possibility of self-expression. Social interests imply orientation towards activities that require interpersonal relationship - preference for teaching or for helping people in solving different problems. Entrepreneurial interests are manifested by preference for activities which allow initiative and possibility for coordinating own activities or activities of a group.

The choices of the students according to preference for certain knowledge or activity fields are presented in the following figure:

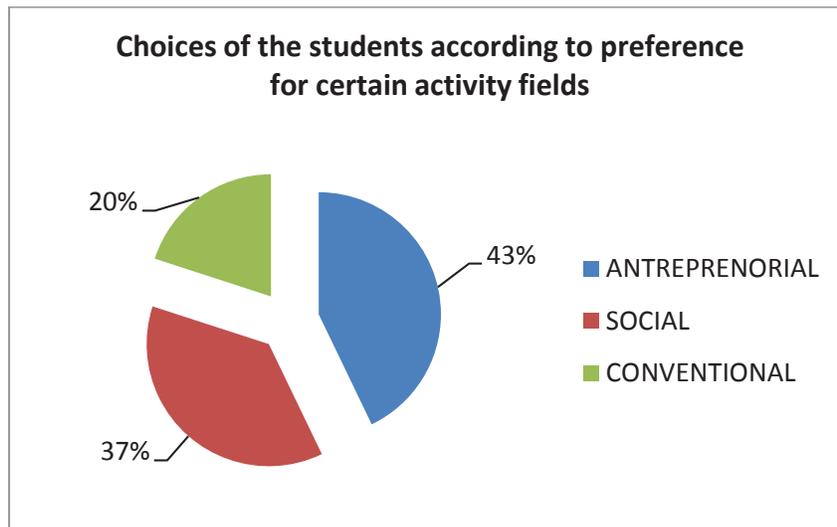


Fig. 1. Student's choices according to the preferences for certain activity fields

We would like to note that, according to Holland's theory (in Miclea & co, 2009), the individual's personality pattern is made up of "a dominant type, one for which the person shows the highest level of similarity and of secondary types ordered according to similarity". Thus, the first three choices are important, the dominant type of interests, with the highest rate (Miclea &co 2009). The received data, with its limitations, allows us to assert the fact that the presented hypotheses are confirmed.

Thus, hypothesis H1: *Operationalization of the education centered on the student in influenced by pragmatism* is confirmed because the tested students have a 43%

preference for entrepreneur interests (see fig.1). The interviewed students, part of Generation Y, have a global and entrepreneurial thinking. The preference for entrepreneurial activities in comparison to employee life can be observed. They are fairly optimistic and self-confident and believe that they "can do everything that they set their mind to". They are animated by the idea of having a job that they like, but also a job that offers them challenges and interesting experiments, one that encourages creativity and individuality, flexibility, involvement, acknowledgment of values and offers related earnings.

And hypothesis H2: *The operationalization of education centered on the student in the field of economical sciences is influenced by the management of communication and dialog with the students* is confirmed. We make this statement because the second choice of the students was the one related to social interests. Students of Generation Y are very interested in diverse opportunities and challenges and less interested in a solid career. Time spent with friends and family is very important for them. The student "would like to spend less time working and the practiced profession should also allow them a harmonious individual development".

Preference for conventional interests, meaning activities which need systematic and ordered manipulation of data or objects in a well-organized and defined framework make us assert that also hypothesis H3: *The operationalization of education centered on the student in the field of economical sciences is influenced by business and human models that are easy to accomplish*, is confirmed. Due to the fact that technology was a constant part of their life, the students of Generation Y always knew that they have the possibility to choose. They think that "they need entertainment and interaction" and, even more, "to be recognized and accepted". "They do not want to risk too much" and work based on the "maximum comfort with minimal effort" principle. Are very interested in accessible models and say that "if I do not see that I can succeed, I'm not in".

CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

The role of the teacher is changing. For the student of Generation Y, it is important to re-think it in terms of acquiring the quality of a mentor, capable of diagnosing, orienting, encouraging and learning together with the students.

The delay in switching de facto to an education centered on the student in the field of Economical Sciences is no longer justifiable from any point of view.

The students of Generation Y from the field of Economical Sciences are strongly oriented towards pragmatism, have the need for appropriate dialog and communication and want business and human models that can be achieved!

Orientation of the curriculum has to be done based on the principle of diversity of the offer and of choosing the product by the beneficiary of the educational services.

The problems related to developing the norms can be resolved by suggesting and having online courses.

Technology will continue to advance and it will happen very fast. We cannot remain lingered in the idea that "in order to be successful, I want you to work just like I do". We will get nowhere, because the youth of Generation Y says: "we do not want it this way; we also want to feel good, to have freedom instead of property and higher flexibility than responsibility". Technology can be the common ground between the generations, with the condition of considering the fact that the differences are determined by the way we see the world according to our education. The change is urgent and it has to be done right now because, even people of Generation Y with ages between 27- 30 do not understand and do not identify themselves with those who now have an age of less than 20 years (the Millennials!). If we are afraid of Generation Y, what will we do with the Millennials? They now learn to work conceptually, to resolve problems in groups, to resolve major problems,

on a global level. They will see us as being absolutely archaic people and will not understand why there is a need to stay in a bench in order to learn! They will want to take their technology outside, to learn in the open and to communicate even more than Generation Y does it now. (wall-street.ro, 2014).

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