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Article

The Hr Impact on Romanian Universities Education Quality

CES Working Papers

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Suggested Citation: Lupu, Adrian (2010) : The Hr Impact on Romanian Universities Education Quality, CES Working Papers, ISSN 2067-7693, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University of Iasi, Centre for European Studies, Iasi, Vol. 2, Iss. 4, pp. 78-85

This Version is available at:

<https://hdl.handle.net/10419/198094>

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THE HR IMPACT ON ROMANIAN UNIVERSITIES EDUCATION QUALITY

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Abstract: *Higher education is the main supplier of experts who will lead in the near future the Romanian society and its integrated economy into the European Union. Obtaining a quality-oriented behavior is a major constraint in the actual process of real European integration of Romania, representing meanwhile a key aspect in gathering the economic prosperity as the nation longs for more than 20 years. A major importance in this respect has the educational component.*

It becomes obvious that all of the universities` work must be oriented towards increasing the competitiveness of the institution both at nationally and internationally level. This can be achieved through quality work and results, a performing management, an appropriate financial policy of the rational resources` use and gathering of the new resources, strengthening the international dimension of business and encouraging a responsible attitude by the staff side.

For any higher education`s institution, the quality management must become the main path to increase its performance and prestige. Unfortunately, in many universities the quality management is confused with accreditation and the efforts are being made to achieving the standards` requirement, while continuous improvement is overlooked, followed closely by an element often not taken into account in the Romanian educational process: students` perspective.

Keywords: Higher education, Quality assurance, Continuous improvement, Human resources, Students` perspective

JEL Classification: I23

1. INTRODUCTION

The duty of any institution from the national education system, regardless of its type or level is to provide a quality teaching, learning and research. This arises from the need to build an institutional culture of quality education in order to help students` personal and professional development, while contributing to the society welfare. Thus, the beneficiary of the education system is none other than the society itself. Educational institutions are preparing specialists which will be subsequently played to the economic, social or political circuit.

For a higher education's institution, the management quality becomes the main path to increase its performance and prestige. However, many Romanian universities are confusing the quality assurance with accreditation and the efforts are being made to achieving the standards' requirements, neglecting more important aspects, such as the **continuous improvement**. Another detail that led us to the current research is the low importance given by some of the prestigious universities to their students' opinion when it comes about the educational quality and also the quality of services offered by these universities to them. Thus, if in Western universities the students are in the middle of the quality improvement process, in many of the Romanian universities student's feedback is very little or not at all considered.

2. HISTORICAL REVIEW

The first step made for harmonizing the complexity and diversity of degree programs and structures in Europe's higher education system was the *Sorbonne Declaration* in May 1998. Although there were only France, Germany, Italy, and the U.K. who signed the agreement, the declaration was well received and set the stage for broader initiatives.

The Bologna Declaration signed by 29 European ministers of education on June 19, 1999 was considered an effort to promote "actions which may foster the desired convergence and transparency in qualification structures in Europe" (De Wit, 2000, p. 9). The next important moments were the *Lisbon Meeting* (2000), the *Salamanca Convention* (2001) and the *Berlin Meeting* (2003) during which it was established the European Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA). Services of the network to its members mainly include information sharing through newsletters, web sites, and bulletin boards, training workshops and advisory support, as well as seminars and special projects. The latest concerns in this respect were shown in the *Bergen Meeting*, which took place in 2005.

3. AIM OF THE RESEARCH

The purpose of this paper is *twofold*. Firstly, the research aimed the assesment of Alexandru Ioan Cuza University's students opinion regarding the educational process. The second aim was to identify the students' issues such as referral to impact the quality of university's education.

4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In carrying out this research, *three objectives* were pursued. In order to ease the expression, we shall use the abbreviation **UAIC** instead of „Alexandru Ioan Cuza” University.

O1: *Identifying students` perceptions regarding the education`s quality in UAIC.*

O2: *Identifying problems faced by students in university and university`s campuses with potential impact on the education`s quality in UAIC.*

O3: *Identifying the manner of how UAIC auxiliary staff`s activity affects the educational process`s quality in UAIC.*

5. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- 1. What do UAIC`s students think about the educational process`s quality in their University?*
- 2. What is the UAIC`s students` opinion regarding the quality of services offered by their university?*
- 3. What do UAIC`s students think about the auxiliary staff`s impact on their university education`s process?*

6. HYPOTHESIS

H1: If the services offered by the University to its students are high quality, the education`s process in UAIC will be able to operate at optimum parameters.

H2: If the University management`s structures will take better account of the problems faced by students, both within the university and its campuses, the education`s quality in UAIC will be improved.

H3: If the University auxiliary staff would benefit from professional development courses, the education`s quality in UAIC will be improved.

7. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The present research is a causal and objective representation of reality, its aim being to propose a representation likely to explain a situation. As a research method we used a qualitative method, *the survey sample*. Moreover, qualitative methods are the most useful research methods in human resources management, being also used in plenty other fields. The instrument used in this research was the *questionnaire*. The questionnaire`s items evaluation has been made using two types of scales: nominal scale and the Likert scale.

The questions are mostly closed because they are letting the subject to indicate one or more choices from the proposed answers. Thus, responses are more easily given, and data's processing and interpretation are simplified. The questionnaire contains both single-choice questions and multiple choice questions. There were also used questions such as prioritizing items.

In order to conduct this research, we chose the sample of UAIC's students. Questionnaires were distributed to students belonging to all of the 14 University's faculties, striving meantime to maintain a balance in determining the number of respondents from each faculty's students, due to the big differences existing between the numbers of students in some faculties.

7.1 Data collection

We aimed to assess views of students from all the years of study, and mainly from the elder ones, considering the latter as having a greater understanding of the issues explored by referencing to a richer and wider range of experiences. In the information's collecting stage, we considered two target segments: students living in UAIC's dormitories and students living in their own areas, considering that in this manner we can objectively observe all of the student's life aspects.

For the dorms students' sample, we conducted fieldwork, while for the other side of the respondents we have appealed to friends and acquaintances through which we managed to attract respondents and thus to cover the target segment. As necessary for information sharing and questionnaires' collection there were required ten days.

7.2. Sample

To achieve a representative sample, the drawn questionnaire was applied to a number of 300 students from all University's faculties, keeping a balance between the numbers of each faculty's respondents. The survey includes a series of 30 questions which assess student's opinion regarding the educational quality, the quality of services offered by university and the auxiliary staff's influence on the overall university educational quality.

Before the large-scale research, a **pilot study** was carried out among five different students in order to identify any potential problems with the questionnaires used in the study. After they were validated, the survey packages were distributed among 300 students. Of the 300 questionnaires that have been sent to the chosen students, five of them were returned partially completed. Thus, we considered reasonable for the sample to remain composed of 295 respondents, 200 living in dormitories and 95 in their own areas.

7.3 Measures

The measures followed the questionnaires. Each question was multiple choice answers, respondents indicating the variant or variants being more close to the academic reality. Regarding the type of questions such as prioritizing the options, a **five-point scale** was adopted ranging from **1** (strongly disagree or strongly unsatisfied) to **5** (strongly agree or strongly satisfied).

8. SUMMARY OF THE MAIN RESULTS

After interpreting the results from the questionnaires` processing, we could draw several conclusions.

The first issue would be the relevance of the theory taught in college. Regarding this aspect, at the UAIC`s level 24% of the respondents found it to be relevant, while 25% considered it to be inappropriate in the current practice`s context. The overwhelming proportion of responses to this question was directed to consider the theory as relevant only in some areas of interest.

It is interesting to follow an analysis at each faculty`s level. Thus, we could observe a number of faculties, such as Chemistry, Biology or Physics, especially the ones from exact sciences` field, whose students considered the actual theory as still being appropriate, something expected otherwise. Instead, the students from faculties such as Theology, Psychology, Philosophy, or Economics and Administrative Sciences (FEAA) considered the theory taught during the college as being irrelevant to the practical context.

For questions concerning the dormitories` activity, we have stopped only on the sample of 200 students living in dormitories. Thus, of the 200 respondents, only 7% said they were very satisfied with the accommodation activity in their dorms, 35% satisfied and 31% have adopted a neutral attitude. By contrast, 21% were shown dissatisfied, and 6% very dissatisfied.

As regards the view taken at the faculties` level, we can see that the most satisfied students by these conditions are coming from the FEAA, Geography and Theology, and the most unsatisfied are those from Chemistry, Psychology and Philosophy.

Referring to the relationship with the dormitories` personnel, 15% of the respondents declared themselves highly satisfied with its activity, 46% fairly satisfied, 24% rather unsatisfied, while very dissatisfied were shown to be 15% from the total of 200 respondents. In addition, 81% of the respondents have seen the activity carried out by this personnel as having potential impact on the UAIC`s educational process quality.

Regarding the secretariats` activity, at the University level only 3% of the respondents were very satisfied, 25% satisfied, 39% were neutral in this regard, 24% were dissatisfied and 9% were

very dissatisfied. The biggest problems that were seen by students as affecting the secretarial activity are the short time allocated to relating with students (25%) and the reduced secretarial staff (21%). There were also 72% of the respondents that considered secretarial activity as having a major impact on their faculties' educational process.

As refers to the medical facilities' staff dedicated to UAIC's students, 13% of the surveyed students have a very positive opinion about it, 27% have a good opinion, 39% have rather a bad opinion, while 9% manifested a strong negative opinion, adding that the medical personnel from this facilities shows gaps in training and moral conduct. 12% of the respondents have not used such services. In addition, 81% of the respondents stated that the medical services' quality provided by UAIC to its students may or really does impact over the university educational quality process.

Regarding the usefulness of professional development courses for the UAIC's staff over its education quality, 57% of the respondents considered that such courses' organization would positively affect the quality of education.

9. CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSIONS

In the present research, there were treated many issues faced by the "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University's students, also trying to realize a scan over the dormitories life, how are the secretariats running, the quality of care provided by the university, its dining services, guard services and the housekeeping activity both within faculties and their campuses. All these were observed in order to highlight the students' view regarding how the human resources from these organizations understand to do their job.

Moreover, we tried to identify if UAIC's auxiliary staff can influence the quality of university's education process, and if so, to what extent and in which way this influence is manifested.

Thus, a first conclusion which can be extracted would be the theoretical basis used in most of the faculties is considered by the students as outdated and in inconsistency with today's common practices. As a general idea, the respondents have opined that the manner of services' providing by the University to its students is likely to influence the UAIC's education quality.

Secretarial work is seen as deficient in all of the UAIC's faculties. Much of the Psychology and FEAA's undergraduate students believe that the secretarial activity hampers the educational process, instead of acting as its catalyst.

Cleaning service assurance both within the faculties and their campuses is seen as unsatisfactory, particularly in FEAA and Philosophy.

The staff from the university's medical facilities is seen as having poor training and moral conduct. Following these results it can be inferred that hypothesis no.1 is validated.

The respondent students stated that the activities implying auxiliary staff may positively or negatively influence the university's education quality. Meantime, the surveyed students considered staff's professional development courses as having a real impact on the university's educational process. These come to validate the third hypothesis.

Due to the total lack of similar research, the second hypothesis is to be verified in a personal further research, the current study going to serve as a reference point in a subsequent comparative analysis.

10. Recommendation and further research

After processing the results, we could refer to the existence of some students' issues able to influence the quality of the University's education. Further, we provide a number of recommendations designed to improve the current situation.

In terms of secretarial activity and its personnel, we considered the opening of an information office in order to relief secretariats' work and to allow them to dealing with more severe problems.

Regarding the students' accommodation activity, we highly suggest a more rigorous check of the students' medical dossiers in order to get an accommodation place. This must be done for increasing the accuracy of the granting accommodations' process, the respondents seeing this activity as being poor managed and having corruption issues.

Another recommendations is the bibliography's enrichment and updating as possible, especially in the faculties that require it (E.g.: FEAA, Philosophy, etc.). The surveyed respondents considered that the difference existing between the theory taught in college and the common practices is one of the major problems encountered when they engage in a company.

A very important aspect is the medical services offered by the university, these being seen by the students as not having such a high quality level. Thus, we recommend providing professional medical services able to serve even in more complex cases.

This research is to be continued in the near future. Higher education quality could be also addressed from another perspective than human resources' impact, such as the doctoral studies' quality ran within "Alexandru Ioan Cuza" University.

This research could be also continued by anyone interested in the field, because from time to time the students' perspective must be required, if not from a formal position, at least from students' research.

In the end, we would like to highlight an aspect that characterizes the Romanian higher education system. We want to relate so much to the Western Europe education's high level, but we are neglecting one important detail: in those universities, the students are considered the most valuable assets and are treated accordingly in this respect. It would be ideal as within the Romanian universities things to be seen from the same perspective.

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