

EDU WORLD 2022**Edu World International Conference Education Facing Contemporary World Issues****ASSESSING STUDENT SATISFACTION - IMPACT ON THE
QUALITY OF TEACHING ACTIVITY**

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Abstract

This study explores the issue of student satisfaction as regards the academic environment, aiming to determine the positive/negative attitude towards several areas of interest: teaching activity - standards, requirements, educational resources available; academic environment - context conducive to learning; correlation of study programmes with labour market dynamics. The sample consists of 386 students and 30 teaching staff from the 5 Faculties of the Petroleum and Gas University of Ploiesti, covering various fields of science: oil and gas engineering, mechanical engineering, petroleum and petrochemical technology, philology, education sciences, economics, etc. In our research process we used the student questionnaire and the focus group for teachers to structure common directions for action to improve teaching. The conclusions drawn from analysing the raw data show that, while the level of satisfaction is acceptable with regard to academic activities (over 70%), we are deficient in terms of extracurricular activities and interests, which demonstrates a certain rigidity and lack of experience in harmonising the formal with the non-formal and informal curricula.

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1. Introduction

1.1. About the concept of satisfaction – a few general data

The world is changing, and these changes are determined not only by the society in which we live and grow up, but also by education, which therefore provides the means, together with other social aspects, to foster a global perspective in young people (Olmos-Gomez et al., 2021). After numerous reforms or reform attempts, after much publicized efforts for change in education, Miroiu et al. (1998) believes that Romanian education still works according to an intellectualist model according to which the most valuable mental faculty for education is the rational one. Facing problems of school maladjustment, failure or even school dropout that excluded the involvement of cognitive factors, the school began to take into account the possibility that these aspects are the consequence of some subjective factors related to the sphere of motivation or emotional balance. In this context, the problem arises of cultivating those skills that, on the one hand, reduce the probability of maladaptive behaviors, and on the other hand, help to form a balanced, creative and autonomous personality.

Adaptation to the new educational process, to the new living conditions requires maintaining the psychological balance and continuous improvement of the young person. It is very important for every student to easily and quickly adapt to the new requirements, to comply with them without various disturbances. The way in which the student's adaptation will be achieved can be felt both positively and negatively, and the difficulties of adaptation can influence the integration of the future specialist in society. A correct education, a gradual adaptation to new situations and the appreciation of the student's personality will fully facilitate the choice of the desired cause (Tărnă, 2011, p. 55).

The concept of satisfaction, developed in particular in the context of service activities, is the subject of much research in management science, social sciences and education. Individual satisfaction, educational satisfaction and professional satisfaction are real prerequisites for success and are therefore a focus area for research. Educational institutions around the world are now requesting students' feedback on all elements of academic life in the form of a satisfaction feedback questionnaire.

The literature defines satisfaction as a person's attitude towards an object. It is a complex combination of cognitions (beliefs or knowledge), emotions (feelings, moods or judgments) and behavioural tendencies (Hamner & Organ, 1978, p. 216, as cited in: Aldemir & Gülcan, 2004). The term satisfaction can be related to any object or service. When a person states that they are satisfied with something, they are considered to have a positive attitude towards it, and when they state that they are dissatisfied, they are considered to have a negative attitude, dissatisfaction and consequently poor motivation and engagement.

In another definition:

Satisfaction is a feeling of happiness that obtain when a person fulfilled his or her needs and desires. It is a state felt by a person who has experienced performance or an outcome that fulfilled his or her expectations. Students' satisfaction as a short term attitude, resulting from an evaluation of a students'

educational experiences. It is a positive antecedent of student loyalty and is the result and outcome of an educational system (IMS & Fernando, 2017, p. 533).

Satisfaction or dissatisfaction with the university/college has an impact not only on student results, but also on the competitive advantage of the university in a demanding environment (see Lee et al., 2000, https://unistars.org/past_papers/abstracts/JollyAbstract.htm) and also has significant psychological health implications for all actors involved in education. “Dissatisfaction generates stress, which in turn can generate psychological and/or psychosomatic disorders” (Öngider & Yuksel, 2002, as cited in: Aldemir & Gülcan, 2004, p. 123).

Structurally, the concept of academic satisfaction integrates the following dimensions (see Van Damme, 2003, pp. 127-159):

- i. Excellence – (the level of excellence standards) – From this perspective quality is identified with the highest degree of difficulty. The best educational institution is the one whose diplomas enjoy the highest recognition. This level is often achieved at the cost of an extremely tough and rigorous selection of students.
- ii. Coherence – a quality program is one that demonstrates consistency between objectives and content.
- iii. Standards (meeting basic standards) - quality is defined by meeting minimum quality criteria in education.
- iv. Customer/beneficiary satisfaction reflected in the level of the gap between prior expectations and the reality of a situation. Quality is that which demonstrates satisfaction of meeting both explicit and implicit needs.
- v. Loyalty to the faculty implies the obligation of each member of the academic community to act in the interest of the faculty, to support its objectives, strategies and policies, in order to achieve the mission and increase its competitiveness (see Appuhamilage & Torii, 2019; Codul de Etică și deontologie universitară, 2019; García-Rodríguez & Gutiérrez-Taño, 2021).
- ii. •General attributes of the courses in which students are enrolled (e.g. curriculum, course content and teaching materials) have also been cited as significant (Wong & Chapman, 2022).

2. Problem and Statement

The economist perspective on education draws our attention to the fact that the school can be likened to a service provider and the students to their direct customers/beneficiaries, and a competitive economy does not allow us to disregard quality or to ignore the expectations, needs and interests of the beneficiaries. Students are said to be satisfied when the services they receive fulfil their expectations or go beyond their expectations making them more loyal (Burhan et al., 2020).

From a student perspective, “service expectations can vary greatly, depending on the individual resources the student already has, their personal needs, values, goals and aspirations, as well as preconceptions based on experiences of their peers” (Global Student Satisfaction Report A 2019 Global Overview, p. 10)

In this context, our research effort is based on knowing and understanding how students perceive and appreciate the academic environment as a whole.

3. Research Questions

The starting point for the present research coincides with the following set of questions: what are the elements of the academic environment that generate a positive attitude on the part of the students; how the initiatives in non-formal education managed by the institution they attend are appreciated; what are the expectations regarding the possibility of professional integration into their field of study; what strategies can be provided as solutions to these questions?

4. Purpose of the Study

In a synthetic form, the research objectives of this article are: to determine the students' degree of satisfaction, their positive or negative attitude towards the educational institution; to identify the existing vulnerabilities and to establish a roadmap of ideas with potential answers in order to increase the quality and consequently the degree of satisfaction.

5. Research Methods

In order to assess students' satisfaction with the academic environment, a questionnaire with 22 multiple-choice items was developed and administered, covering the following aspects: teaching activity - standards, requirements, available educational resources; academic environment - context conducive to learning; correlation of study programmes with labour market dynamics. On the basis of the results obtained, an interview grid was designed for teachers, aiming at formulating common working strategies.

6. Findings

The responses grouped by areas of interest reflect the following percentages:

Regarding the teaching activity - standards, requirements, available educational resources we note:

- i. the high degree of concordance between the expectations of the direct beneficiaries of the study programme and the subjects included in the curriculum is demonstrated by the responses of 90.2% of the respondents, the differences between the percentages recorded at the level of each faculty being hardly significant;
- ii. the efficiency of teaching methods and means used in courses and seminars is favourably assessed by 82% of UPG students. Remedial intervention in teaching strategies is considered necessary by 18% of respondents. A careful analysis of the results obtained at faculty level allows us to see that the highest degree of satisfaction is recorded by students studying social sciences and philology; while the lowest percentages are concentrated among students of technical specializations (only 35.3% are extremely satisfied/very satisfied). In the latter case, an explanation can be found in the low pass rate, but also in the poor preparation of students to meet the demands of the academic environment;

- iii. the professional qualifications of the teaching staff are rated as very good by 47.2% of UPG students. However, significant differences in perception can be observed between students of different faculties. Thus, while 64.5% of students in the socio-humanities programmes rate the level of teachers' professional qualifications as the highest, the results for the technical field are almost 30% lower. The rapid evolution of knowledge in scientific fields, the difficulty of making knowledge accessible and of adapting it to the students' potential may justify the percentage differences;
- iv. more than half of the respondents (51.1%) consider that the teaching activities carried out are characterised by: accessibility, coherence, systematisation, etc. Difficulties of comprehension are, however, more often felt at the level of science subjects;
- v. 51.1% of UPG students are satisfied with the way in which the educational institution facilitates access to the educational resources necessary for their scientific training, providing them with printed or electronic textbooks, academic courses, course materials, laboratory guides, etc.
- vi. 90.9% of UPG students consider that the evaluation of the results reflects the informative and educational value of the scientific content presented.

The following ideas emerge with regard to the academic environment - a favourable context for learning:

- i. 66.6% of UPG students recognize and appreciate the willingness of teachers to participate in extracurricular activities, which shows flexibility and openness to non-formal education. Percentage differences between study programmes account for some of them being by nature more compatible with the non-formal area in education;
- ii. teacher-student relationships are based on a series of values such as respect, trust, collaboration, according to 81.6% of students;
- iii. the main complaints point to issues related to the university's infrastructure, such as: 33% of respondents complain about insufficient/inadequate educational facilities, 54% call for more institutional efforts to diversify leisure opportunities;
- iv. the unfairness of the scholarship system is reported by 38.7% of students, which can be explained by the high percentage of paying students.

On linking curricula to labour market dynamics:

- i. the majority of the subjects surveyed (88.2%) consider that the curriculum of their study programme meets the requirements of the specialisation. Although the differences of opinion between students of different specialisations are not substantial, we can notice a higher level of dissatisfaction with students in economics. The dynamics of the labour market, the far-reaching changes in the economy and the increased applicability of knowledge in this field may be possible explanations for the percentages recorded;
- 85.8% of students consider that the preparation for their socio-professional integration is supported by the study programme through assignments, individually developed projects in which the objectives are: creativity, autonomy, decision-making skills, etc.

- ii. 77.6% of students are confident about their employability in their field of study and their professional success, which proves their interest in aspects related to the dynamics of the labour market.

The objective analysis of the data highlighted the strengths of the educational environment, such as: staff professional qualifications, quality of the educational message, effectiveness of teaching strategies, human relations management. The recommendations for improvement focus on infrastructure (educational and leisure facilities).

Continuing the investigative approach, we conducted a focus group with teachers from all five faculties of the university in order to formulate common, clear, realistic directions agreed by the academic community as a whole. Some of the proposed solutions are: documentation of national and international experiences in the field of hybrid teaching-learning strategies that harmonize interests and generate motivation and satisfaction in learning; developing engaging strategies in non-formal activities and offering options for diversified volunteering programmes that are tailored to their professional interests and at the same time serve as valuable experiences with an impact on successful labour market integration; working consistently to develop a sense of belonging to the academic community, which would contribute to increased co-motivation, performance and satisfaction.

7. Conclusions

The data from the questionnaire in conjunction with the results of the focus group conducted with teachers lead us to the idea that, in order to ensure competitiveness, it is crucial to integrate these perceptual benchmarks into a coherent theoretical model to allow the evaluation, but especially the improvement of educational practices by readjusting the academic environment.

We note also that, (see Harvey, 2022):

Student satisfaction should be about student learning and the resources that support it. Satisfaction should not be about teacher performance ratings. Information should be about how courses are organized, what knowledge students learn, what skills they develop, how well they are prepared as lifelong learners and what the infrastructure is like to support learning. (p. 266)

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