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New Dimensions to the Analysis of Student Survey Results in the Instructional Process in Higher Education

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Abstract

The main purpose is to shed light on the student perception on the quality of higher education instructional process in the state system, as well as to discover the extent to which students are satisfied with their institution across the seven dimensions examined: the roles of teachers in higher education, the qualities of a teacher, the attitude of teacher and its impact on student, the student-teacher relationship, the effectiveness of assessment and teaching methods, and student learning and his/her time for individual study. The paper is structured as follows; first the concept instructional process is discussed as well as existing methods of achieving student feedback. Then, the survey methodology is explained. After this, the results are presented, followed by a discussion of issues.

1. Introduction

The research literature has focused largely on the effectiveness of teaching and learning, but little attention has been given to student attitudes, beliefs and experiences (Miliszewska & Sztendur, 2010). As the main stakeholders in higher education, it is logical to research the student perspective on the educational process. Feedback systems in "Ovidius" University of Constanta operate in the context of a centralised university framework which provides

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guidelines, codes of practice, questionnaire templates and informal feedback and these are supplemented by questionnaires at module, year and programme level, containing both central and departmental questions. Student evaluation of teaching performance and the instaructional process involved is a commonly accepted means of obtaining feedback on the quality of university teaching. However, its usefulness in contributing to improved teaching performance and the whole instructional process are dependent on the extent to which staff responds to and apply the information obtained in this way.

The key element is to achieve student satisfaction in order to gain competitive advantage, and with pressure on institutions to increase student enrolments and retention, the emphasis placed on a positive student experience has become much greater (Arambewela, 2010). Furthermore, achieving positive word of mouth from current students and alumni is a vital element of every institution's promotional mix.

2. Procedure

This study used a questionnaire-based survey developed by the authors and was conducted into different specializations (engineering, humanities and business). The questionnaire was applied initially to a sample of 125 students attending full-time and part-time courses of "Ovidius" University of Constanta, Romania, during the academic years 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. The students come from two different specializations, namely engineering and humanities (psychology, educational sciences and philology). The novelty of the present study is given by a new sample of students (25) coming from a different specialization, i.e business studies. The total sample of students count now 150 and they comprise three different fields of study, three different perspectives, such as engineering, humanities and business. The student feedback questionnaire data from our university were collected over a period of two academic years, namely 2012-2013 and 2013-2014. Since we surveyed a large number of students (150) we applied a standardized questionnaire with close-ended items whose aim was to collect more quantitative-type data focus on the specific, pre-determined issues. The questionnaire "The Questionnaire about the Educational Process in Higher Education" contains 7 items about the roles of teachers in higher education, the qualities of a teacher, the effectiveness of assessment and teaching methods, student-teacher interaction, ways to improve the quality of teaching performance, the effectiveness of assessment and teaching and the time allotted for individual study:

1. What are the most important roles of a teacher in higher education in your opinion?
2. What qualities do you value in a teacher?
3. Does the teachers' attitude influence you in your learning activity?
4. How do you assess your relationship with your teachers?
5. What are the most effective teaching methods in your opinion?
6. What assessment method do you find most appropriate for the objective evaluation of student performance?
7. How much time do you allot to daily individual study?

3. Results

This research resulted in identification of Romanian students' perspective on instructional process in a higher education institution, a state university. Respondents' situation is as follows: from the total amount of 150 students, 79 are students doing engineering courses, 46 come from different humanistic specializations such as psychology and educational sciences (36), another 10 belong to philology area, and 25 are from the business field of study.
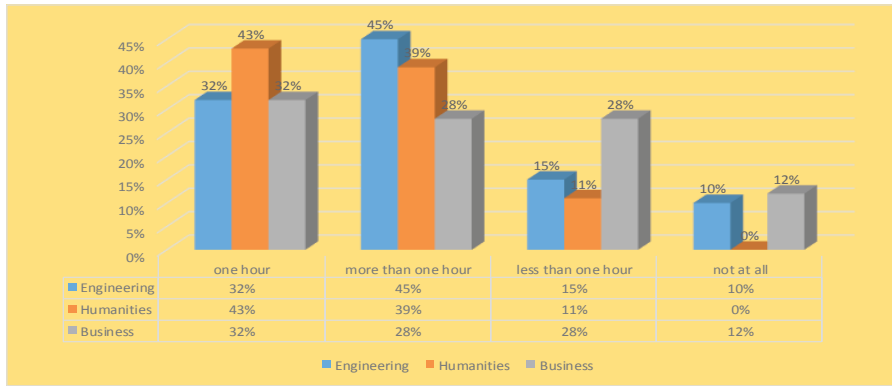
Figure 1 – The results of the questionnaire (question 1)
Question 1: *What are the most important roles of a teacher in higher education in your opinion?*

The students' answers are presented in the graph above (Fig. 1) and as it can be seen all three specializations indicated that the most important roles of a teacher in higher education are those of coordinator (98% - engineer students, 72% - business students and 50% - humanistic students), followed by that of model (39%- engineer students, 35% - humanistic students and 32% - business students). The complete data are also presented in the table below.
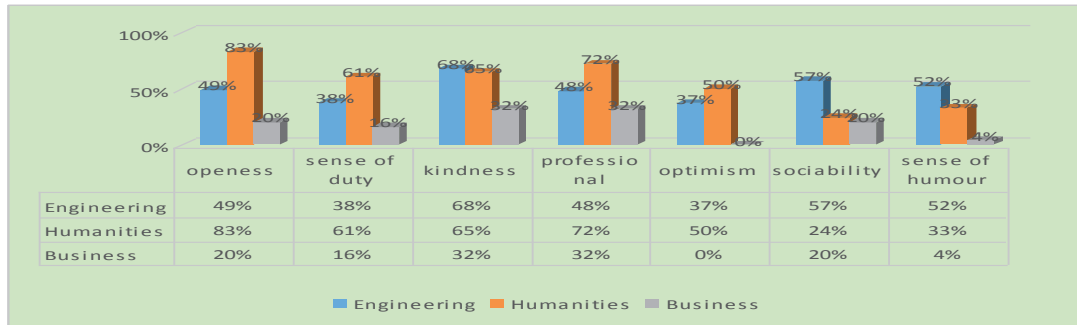

Figure 2 – The results of the questionnaire (question 2)
Question 2: *What qualities do you value in a teacher?*

Students could choose one or more of the following answers: openness, sense of duty, kindness, professional responsibility, optimism, sociability and sense of humor. Engineer students (68%) and business ones (32%) would prefer a kind teacher while humanistic students (83%) consider that openness is a relevant quality in a teacher. The frequencies for each answer are shown in the graph above (Fig. 2) and also in the table below.
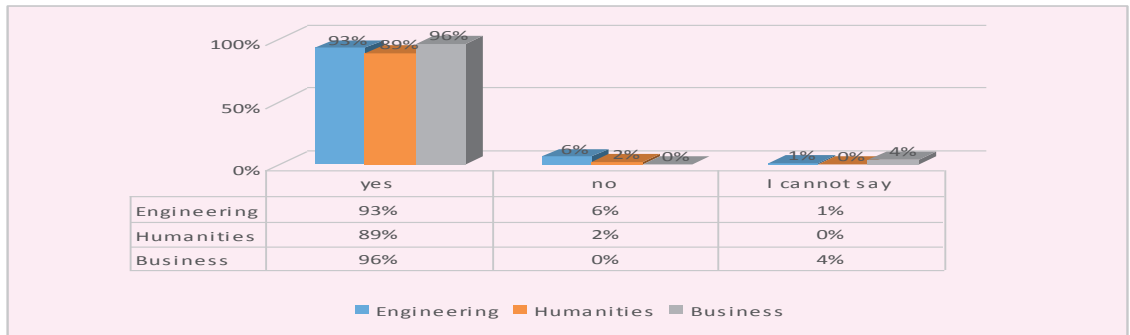
Figure 3 - The results of the questionnaire (question 3)
Question 3: *Does the teachers' attitude influence you in your learning activity?*

Most students (93% engineer students, 96% business students and 89% humanistic students) responded that they feel much influenced by the attitudes of their teachers in their decision and their way to learn. The more the teachers are interested in and motivated themselves for the teaching and research activities they perform, the higher their influence on the activity of learning and development of students. A small percentage of the students refused to give a clear answer. One subject gave a negative answer.
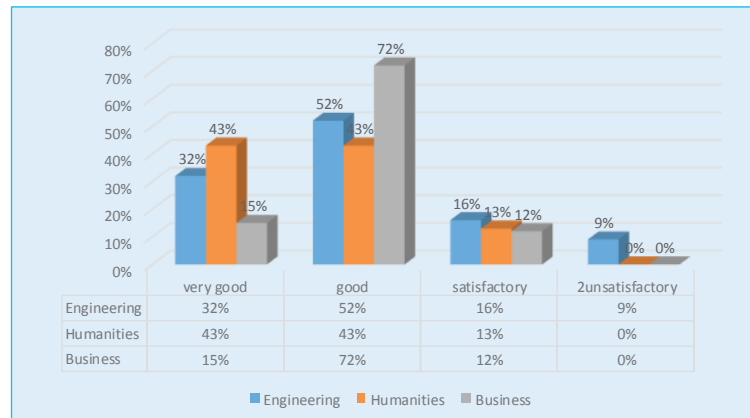

Figure 4 - The results of the questionnaire (question 4)
Question 4: *How do you assess your relationship with your teachers?*

Figure 4 presents the respondents' perception on student-teacher relationship rated from very good to unsatisfactory. Almost half of the students surveyed rated the relationship with teachers as very good (43% - humanities and 32% - engineering). A fairly large percentage, 72% (business) 32% (engineering), respectively 43% subjects (humanities) rated as good the relationship with the teachers. Less than 20% of the subjects rated as satisfactory the relationship. It is important to note that there has been no response indicating a teacher-student relationship as unsatisfactory for humanistic students. Students' responses to this question are conducive to teacher's assuming more social and professional responsibility for the students' training. The university teacher has the mission and responsibility to initiate a coherent program of educational experiences that would lead to the personal, educational, professional and social development of his/her students, to use innovative forms of teaching and achieve an optimal level of good teaching congruent with the students.
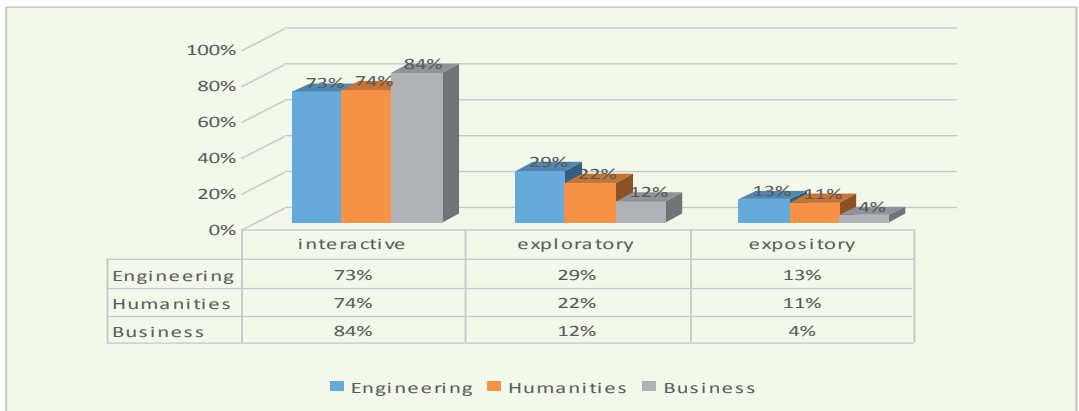
Figure 5 - The results of the questionnaire (question 5)
Question 5: *What are the most effective teaching methods in your opinion?*

As is clear from Figure 5, students' responses were grouped into three categories: interactive methods, exploratory methods and expository methods. Over 70% of the students valued the interactive methods for both courses and seminars. Between 12% and 29% chose exploratory methods, and very few expository methods. These responses indicate an increased interest of students for innovative forms of teaching, debates on issues of professional concern, communicative exchanges and collaborative staff-student groups for different tasks.
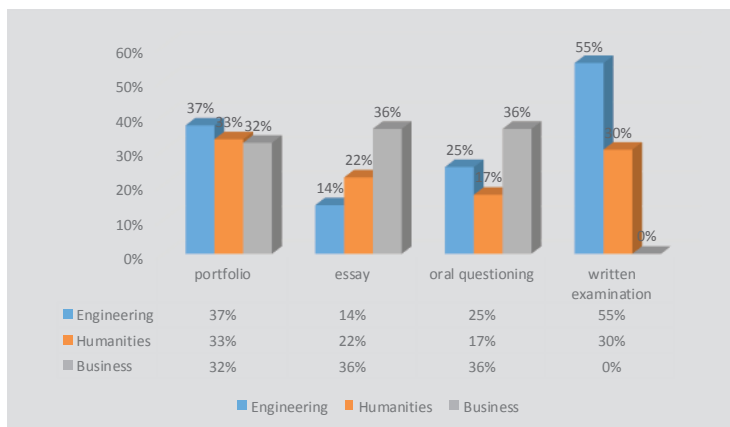

Figure 6 - The results of the questionnaire (question 6)
Question 6: *What assessment method do you find most appropriate for the objective evaluation of student performance?*

Students' answers to the question about what assessment method they find most appropriate for the objective evaluation of student performance offer interesting insights too. As can be seen in Figure 6, students indicate their clear preference for written examination in the case of engineer students (55%) compared to humanistic (30%) and business students (36%). The latter group students seem to prefer as well as the assessment methods involving creativity, spontaneity, freedom of expression, originality, critical thinking such as essay (36%) and portfolio (32%). These methods encourage personal expression of the student.

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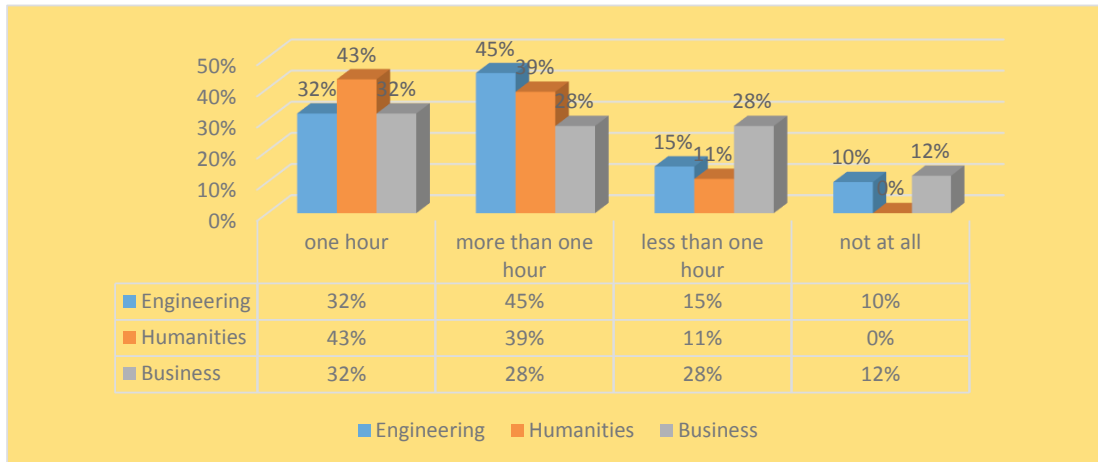|	one hour	more than one hour	less than one hour	not at all
■ Engineering	32%	45%	15%	10%
■ Humanities	43%	39%	11%	0%
■ Business	32%	28%	28%	12%

Figure 7 - The results of the questionnaire (question 7)
Question 7: *How much time do you allot to daily individual study?*

Results presented in the last figure, Figure 7, clearly show that most students' responses indicate a very important element of the instructional process: time granted to learning. The most diligent students who would allot more than one hour or one hour to their study are as follows, humanities (43%) who are willing to spend more than one hour to their school work; the engineering students (45%0 and the business one (32%) allocate one hour to their study. Less than half of the students surveyed declare less concern for daily individual study.

4. Discussions

The findings of the paper are intended to provide useful information to institutional managers about the quality of the educational process, an important tool in implementing strategies to bring about improvement. Moreover, the conducted survey shows a strong student sense of science/field of study identity in terms of the student-professor relationship and it proves to be a great way to learn more about the impact of teaching efforts on students and communication exchanges. It also enables identification of areas of strength and weakness in student-teacher interaction and offers insights that can lead to more accurate assessments of student responses. Across all of the questions examined in this study, the 'scores' awarded by respondents indicate a more favourable perspective than unfavourable on quality educational process in higher education system.

The students surveyed appreciate that they are generally satisfied about what they have been offered, and this satisfaction relates to more subtle aspects of teaching such as student-teacher relationship and the communication exchanges in this context. However, they also revealed the fact that the need for communication, understanding and appreciation is fairly high in the instructional process. Responses to the closed questions pointed out that student-teacher relationships lack some flexibility and may affect the development of students' academic self-concepts. If students had positive relationships with their professors it would increase their sense of science identity mentioned at the beginning of this paper or the degree to which students feel a part of a science community as opposed to observers of it.

Although the empirical base of this study is relatively small, we consider the findings can reveal some insights of the higher education system impact on students and can identify some indicators of how effective policy would come to be designed and implemented. This is especially important for the Romanian higher education competitiveness which is being called into question lately. Extending such studies to other contexts of the instructional process (institutional facilities, learning environment, didactic activity, university curricula, etc) and including larger samples would make it possible to form research-based studies that could inform university

teachers, higher education institutional managers, policy-makers about the direction and quality of instructional process in Romanian higher education system.

5. Conclusions

There are several noteworthy aspects of this paper worth mentioning. First, it illustrates the kind of careful, deliberate thinking that should go into the teaching and the use of any instructional strategy. Engaging in reflection is a vital part of learning for university students and offers insights that can help teaching staff improve their teaching in response to student evaluations.

Secondly, the paper emphasizes something that is already known but ignored. It can say that students' need for communication, understanding and appreciation is very high. As Moore (2005) points out, "Beyond the training in the chosen specialty that higher education ensures through its programs, students want more involvement from the point of view of their knowledge and self-awareness, their personal, social, cultural-axiological and even spiritual development".

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