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Indicators of The Quality of The Didactic Process in Higher Education from The Student's Perspective

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Abstract

Quality in education represents a predictor of education for sustainability development. This article aims to measure: (a) the level of satisfaction perceived by students regarding the development of the didactic communication process (OS1) (b) the assessment of the importance given by the student to the organizational and didactic practices necessary to increase the quality of university education (OS2). The research is quantitative, and its specific tools were designed considering the following variables: (a) dependent variables: satisfaction, and knowledge, and (b) independent variables: indicators of effective communication quality, teacher competencies, effective learning practices, quality of training, importance and performance in training professional and transversal skills, indicators of conflict of interest and ethical dilemmas. The data processing aimed at determining the average scores for each dimension investigated and their ranking was based on the values obtained for each provided subsample. The resulting values have an average score of 1.45 and 1.34, respectively, revealing a relatively small distance between those two dimensions. This leads us to appreciate that students know the role, place and importance of the learning environment in increasing academic performance. Providing support services for students is also perceived as important since the average score obtained is 1.23 - not far from the average of those related to the learning environment. Didactic communication contributes to the efficiency of the didactic process; it is appreciated that empathy, personal integrity and expressiveness are the attributes that any teacher must possess; compliance with the rules can be considered a pillar of academic quality and academic success. At the ranking level, those dimensions rank first in importance, followed by "learning autonomy" (second place), ensuring an adequate learning environment (third place) and providing support services for students (fourth place).

Keywords*:* *higher education; didactic process quality; student's perspectives.*

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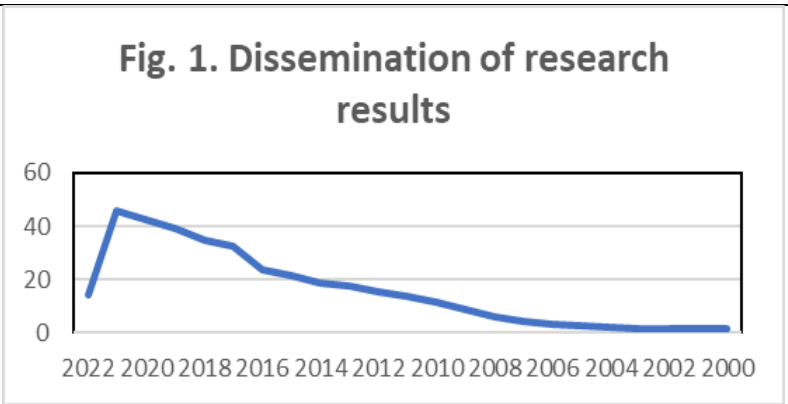
Introduction

In the knowledge-based society, the education places the discourse on the need for quality education, widely mentioned in educational policies in different countries of the world. The 2015 UN Summit marked the design and adoption of the participating countries' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, in which we find the goal of "Quality Education". The concept of "quality in education" is operationalized in the context of a series of indicators that describe: the quality of the educational environment, the quality of the educational process, and the quality of training and research. The explanation of "quality in higher education" correlates with the aspects related to the increase of the didactic process, the optimization of its conditions, the efficiency of communication in the academic environment and the consolidation of the institutional culture by respecting the principles and norms of ethics and academic integrity. Learning outcomes are a measure of quality in education. We define "learning outcomes" as the skills acquired by learners following training programs in the context of the triad of knowledge, skills and attitudes. Quality in university education is closely linked to the expectations of the beneficiaries and the satisfaction of quality standards. It is clear from the legislation on quality in education that meeting the expectations of beneficiaries is, along with quality standards, a measure of quality in education. Quality assessment in university education integrates the process by which higher education institutions meet the reference standards established with certain criteria for the accomplishment of education, to the reference documents at the European level. (ENQA, 2005, 2015). The analysis perspectives on quality assessment in university education (according to ARACIS - Romanian Agency for Quality Assessment in Higher Education), focus, in Romania case, on the following areas of evaluation: institutional capacity, educational effectiveness and quality management. (ARACIS, 2017). Each area subject to evaluation is described using specific criteria which, in turn, are measured by a series of indicators. In the ARACIS evaluation methodology, for the field "institutional capacity", the evaluation of quality in education considers the following: institutional, administrative and managerial structures (mission, objectives and

declared learning outcomes, academic integrity, public responsibility, regulations of the way of carrying out the university activities, financial estimate by the average costs of schooling per academic year, availability and capacity of educational and research spaces, facilities, quality of teaching staff, availability of auxiliary teaching staff). For the field of "educational effectiveness" were considered the following quality indicators: admission of students based exclusively on the academic skills of the candidate, the curriculum designed following new perspectives of scientific development, applied curriculum based on teaching strategies that encourage the use of digital resources, teamwork, cultivation of values, curriculum structured on disciplines corresponding to the fields of specialization, curriculum construction in accordance with European and world trends in the field of education, annual student passability and graduation percentages, graduates` rate of integration into the labor market, level of student satisfaction in relation with professional and personal development, student-centered learning methods, scientific research activity. For the field “quality management”, the quality standards are the following: organizational structures responsible for quality monitoring, regulations and transparent procedures for evaluating the quality of teachers' teaching performance by students, evaluating teaching staff by management, accessibility of learning resources, information management.

Literature Review

There are many concerns about research on the quality component of higher education. A simple search on the Web of Science platform (on 26.05.2022) with the keyword “Quality of university education” refines 372,642 publications, most of them being journal articles. There is an intensification of the field of research on quality in education, especially in 2021, of the articles type. (as shown in Figure 1)



There are many perspectives to explain the concept of quality in university education: on the one hand in the context of analysing the quality of internal efforts of universities in ensuring a quality training process and on the other hand the level of learning outcomes and their recognition by the labour market, the extent to which graduates are absorbed into the labour market and their level of employability in representative institutions in various fields. Some authors find it difficult to provide a clear definition of "quality in university education." (Wittek & Kvernbekk, 2011). Another study (Tetteh, Amoako-Gyampah, & Twumasi, 2021) on how actors define “quality in university education” concludes that in higher education, quality in education is “conditioned by the commitment of management superior to the strategic decision on the general objectives, the management of the school, the orientation of financial and human resources towards ensuring efficient teaching and maximizing the value for all stakeholders”. Other authors (Smith & Baxter, 1992) appreciate that there are four directions of quality analysis in university education, namely: the organization (the faculty) as a training provider, research activity, students and the learning environment.

Research Issues

Quality in education is a predictor of education for sustainability (Cristea, 2015; Anghel, Neculau, 2022). Studies in recent decades have shown that effective education is based on the quality of teacher-

student relationships (Wubbels, Brekelmans, Tartwijk, Admiraal, 1999; Ruiguang 2021), the quality of teaching communication and the quality of the instructional design. Therefore, the following explanatory paradigm is considered: the increase of the teaching process quality in university education is directly influenced by the quality of academic interpersonal relations between teachers and students, didactic communication competence, academic instructional design and evaluation, and academic conduct of students and teachers. The efficiency and quality of these variables are also the factors on which sustainable education is based.

Research Methodology

This article aims to:

- measure the level of satisfaction perceived by students regarding the development of the didactic communication process (OS1);

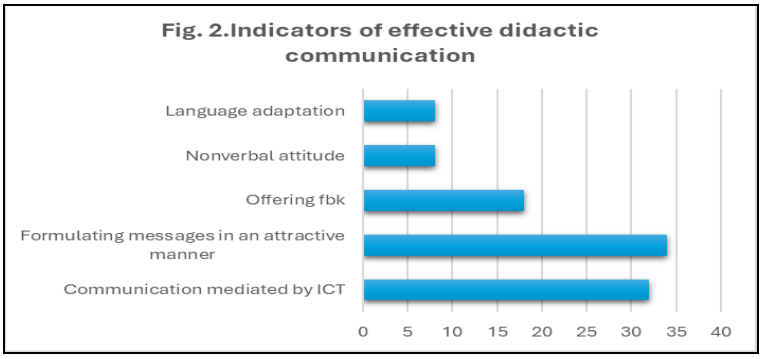
- assess the importance given by students to the organizational and didactic practices necessary to increase the quality of university education (OS2).

The research is quantitative, carried out through the survey based on a structured questionnaire, with closed and open type questions. The unit of analysis is represented by the group of students from undergraduate programs, consisting of 100 people. Selection of the target group was performed by the stratified sampling method. The research instrument was a structured questionnaire. The measurement of the questionnaire data was performed using a limited scale of the Likert type and a scale with a constant sum. The data processing involved determining the average scores for each dimension investigated and their ranking was based on the values obtained for each subsample provided. The target group of students is heterogeneous, consisting of students from different specializations at the Valahia University Of Targoviste, with the following structure:

28.2% students from humanities faculties, 19.9% students from the faculties with an engineering profile, 16.6% students from the faculties with an economic profile, 9.9% students from the faculty with a theology profile, 8.8% students from the faculty with a philology profile, 8.8% from the faculties with the profile "Political science and communication", 6.6% from the faculties with legal profile, 3.3% students from the faculties with profile "exact sciences". The questionnaire was designed considering the following variables: dependent (satisfaction, knowledge) and independent (indicators of effective communication quality, teacher competencies, learning practices, indicators of conflict of interest and ethical dilemmas).

Analysis and interpretation of results

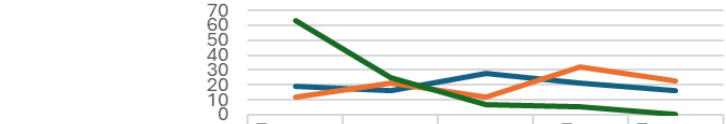
By the first specific objective of the research, (measuring the level of satisfaction perceived by students regarding the development of the didactic communication process - OS1), the following variables were considered: "coding the message in a language adapted to the level of preparation of students"; "non-verbal attitude in interacting with students"; "providing feedback during teaching activities"; formulating messages in a way that is attractive to students ";" frequent use of ICT-mediated communication ". (see Figure no. 2) Their measurement was performed using a five-step Likert-type scale.



It was found that, to an almost equal extent, students perceive as effective indicators of successful didactic communication aspects that reflect "the attractive formulation of scientific messages and their

transmission with the help of new technologies." It can be seen that the students in the target group are inclined towards a visual and auditory learning style (32.3% consider that the use of new technologies in the process of didactic communication is very necessary and 34.3% consider “important” for the teacher to formulate the messages in an attractive way). On the other hand, only 8.8% of the surveyed students consider that: “nonverbal attitude during communication” and “adaptation of the teacher's academic language to the particularities of the trainee group” support to a small and moderate extent the effective didactic communication. We can see that students recognize elements of streamlining the process of didactic communication in academia, which is explained in the context of improving the academic communication practices of teachers in accordance with the learning characteristics of the target group. Regarding the use by teachers, in the didactic communication activity, of modern means, the students appreciate that they are satisfied to a very large extent (63%), to a large extent 25%, to a moderate extent 7% to a small extent 5%. It should be noted that the level of dissatisfaction is zero. This aspect indicates that all teachers engaged in the training and assessment process use digital teaching aids which leads to the achievement of an attractive teaching environment for students (see Figure no. 3).

Fig. No. 3. The level of use of teaching aids



	To a very large extent	Largely	Moderately	To a small extent	To a very small extent
E-learning platforms	19	16	28	21	16
Social networks	12	21	12	32	23
Digital teaching aids	63	25	7	5	0

The use of teaching aids by teachers is also reflected in accessing digital platforms in the training and assessment process. Of these, 19% consider that e-learning platforms are used to a large extent, 28% to a moderate extent, 16% to a large extent, 21% to a moderate extent and 16% to a very small extent. It should be noted that students from all specializations are aware of the importance, place, and role of e-learning platforms. The university uses such means of learning, which are accessible to students. There is a weak perception of the use of social platforms in didactic communication. In the context of today's digital society, we can see that some social media platforms are not suitable for educational communication. This highlights the importance for teachers to use scientifically validated teaching tools to facilitate transformative learning. A percentage of 55% of the students place the virtual spaces within the social media category used in the didactic communication in the lower levels (to a very small extent and to a small extent). A percentage of 21% of students appreciate that the means of communication such as social media are widely used. This fact can be analyzed in the context of the transmission of messages with a clarifying role regarding the tasks in the evaluation. In this situation, they are most often approved by student groups organized on the Facebook platform. When asked to identify specific online blended-learning methods that they used with teachers in teaching this

academic year, students identified the following: interactive discussion method, virtual classroom, Broadcast method, reference materials method online, and written test method. It is found that all students know the place and role of learning platforms in the training and assessment process. This is supported by the presentation by teachers of the importance of their use by students in the training process or the actual use of these platforms during the training process. There is a preference for students for the method of online reference materials, which correlates with their interest in using e-learning platforms. The personality of the teacher influences the learning process and the quality of learning. Asked to rank according to the degree of perceived importance the attributes necessary for the teacher's personality, students appreciate that: empathy, personal integrity and expressiveness are of the highest level, necessary and mandatory in the profile of the teacher. This leads to the following conclusion: academic life offers students a successful pedagogical profile with the following characteristics: expressiveness, empathy, and integrity. To increase academic quality, certain practices can become successful models. The measurement of the perceived importance of these practices was performed using a scale with a constant sum. Data processing involved determining the average scores for each dimension investigated and their ranking was based on the values obtained for each subsample provided.

The number of points awarded highlights both the hierarchy of the stimuli investigated and the "distance" between them. The measurement results indicate the following: the quality of learning, as perceived by students, is most greatly influenced by "regular participation in courses and seminars" and "adherence to academic rules." Additionally, factors such as learning autonomy and ensuring a suitable learning environment are also important, with average scores of 1.45 and 1.34 respectively. The small distance between these scores suggests that students recognize the significance of the learning environment in improving academic performance. Furthermore, the

provision of student support services is also considered important, as evidenced by an average score of 1.23, which is relatively close to the average score for the learning environment. This highlights that students recognize the significance of the learning environment in achieving academic success. It indicates that there isn't a significant difference between the analyzed dimensions. On average, a score of 2.45 is attributed to "constant participation in courses and seminars" and "compliance with the rules", suggesting that students place equal importance on adhering to university procedures and the educational process. Compliance with the rules is viewed as essential for academic quality and success.

At the rank level, these dimensions rank first in importance, followed by “learning autonomy” (second place), ensuring an adequate learning environment (third place) and providing support services for students, fourth place. Regarding successful academic practices that can contribute to academic success, the distribution of responses and the measurement of perceived importance are described as follows: the most important practices that can lead to academic success are given by the "correct allocation of study time ”(score 2.56) and individual study skills (2.28); the use of IT resources (score of 1.89) and “access to course materials in digital format” (1.78) are considered important, the average score being 1.84 which is not far from the average score obtained (2,42) for the most important practices necessary to ensure academic success. These results lead us to appreciate the fact that students consider equally important all academic learning practices as pillars of academic success.

The values of the average score and the place assigned to the analyzed indicators signal the following aspects: students are aware of the importance of their responsibility for ensuring academic success. According to this fact, it is found that "the correct allocation of time required for study" and "study skills" directly condition academic success. The learning outcomes of students are described in the context of professional and transversal skills. The following indicators were considered: advanced knowledge in the field of discipline, correct application of correct knowledge, responsible attitude of

students to the use of knowledge, and ability to integrate the knowledge acquired in different professional situations. The distribution of the answers is as follows.

It is found that a significant percentage of students are interested in the instrumental skills necessary for the professional field in which they are trained. There is also a strong concern about the possibility of applying the knowledge acquired in different situations required by the professional context. This leads to the following conclusion: students approach vocational training from the pragmatic perspective of learning and are oriented towards improving the professional framework since college. The values of the average score can integrate the following conclusions: an average score of 3.06 obtained for "the ability to integrate the knowledge acquired in different professional situations" is located at a very close distance from the "correct application of knowledge" (2,45). Between these two values is the “advanced knowledge in the field of discipline” (average score 2,59) which places the indicator on the second place in the hierarchy of descriptors specific to professional and transversal competences. Recognition of situations of academic incompatibility is an indicator of academic accountability and the development of future value-driven professional behaviours. Asked to admit a situation of incompatibility, the students acknowledged the conflict of interest in the proportion of 45%. It was found that 45% of them do not know if the conflict of interest is sanctioned. This aspect is justified in the context in which most people do not know the issue of ethics and academic integrity, the respondents being students enrolled in undergraduate programs where the discipline "Ethics and academic integrity has optional status". It is recommended to conduct workshops that will train skills and allow the development of attitudes that will avoid situations of "conflict of interest".

Conclusions

In accordance with the research objectives, we conclude the following:

a) students identify in didactic communication elements that contribute to the efficiency of the teaching process and implicitly to the increase of quality;
b) students from all specializations know the importance, place and role of e-learning platforms;
c) students identified specific online Blended-Learning methods: interactive discussion method, virtual classroom, Broadcast method, online reference materials method, written test method;
d) students appreciate that empathy, personal integrity and expressiveness are necessary and mandatory in the personality profile of the teacher;
e) the academic environment offers students a teacher with a pedagogical profile described by: expressiveness, empathy, integrity; all teachers engaged in the training and assessment process use digital teaching aids which leads to the creation of an attractive teaching environment for students;
f) the most important criteria regarding the quality of learning at the level of students' perception are given by “constant participation in courses and seminars” and “compliance with academic rules”;
g) compliance with the rules can be considered a pillar of academic quality and academic success.

At the rank level, the above mention dimensions rank first in importance, followed by “learning autonomy” (second place), ensuring an adequate learning environment (third place) and providing support services for students (fourth place). Students are aware of the importance of taking responsibility for their own academic success. Also, students approach vocational training from the pragmatic perspective of learning and are oriented towards the improvement of the professional framework since the faculty. It is recommended to conduct workshops in order to develop the skills and attitudes necessary to avoid situations of "conflict of interest".

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