

STUDY REGARDING MANAGEMENT OF LEARNING AND TEACHING PROCESS

Lecturer PhD Silvia PUIU

University of Craiova, Romania

E-mail: silviapuiu@yahoo.com

Abstract:

The paper presents some tendencies of the educational process and the way it is managed. The main objectives are to identify the problems of the nowadays system and propose some solutions in order to increase the outcomes in schools. The research methodology consists in a quantitative study conducted on a number of 156 students from different universities in Romania and also different specializations in June 2016. The results can be useful for researchers and professors interested in improving their teaching methods and adjust them to the students' needs, but also to managers in the educational system that could improve the process by making better decisions.

Keywords: teaching, learning, students, educational process

Introduction

The subject of the teaching process and the interest for improving the educational process is much debated in the professional literature. In order to know how to efficiently teach, you have to understand how students learn.

According to Fry, Ketteridge et al (2009, p. 8), "education deals with specific purposes and contexts that differ from each other and with students as people, who are diverse in all respects and ever changing."

Authors highlight the differences between students and also the complexity of this process which has two parties: teachers on one hand and students on the other hand.

Robinson (2006) rises the idea that schools kill creativity or at least by being too traditional and not flexible at all discourage creativity. He says that if you are not prepared to be wrong (and this could also be applied both to professors

and students), you are not prepared to do anything original. And I agree with him.

Many students tell me that they were and still are afraid to give different answers than those in the handbooks because in many cases they were taught to only memorize facts.

There are lots of ideas moving the focus from traditional schools to modern ones in which teachers and students are equal and partners. Ideas are different and some of them were tested in different countries, regions or schools.

Daphne Koller (2012), one of the founders of Coursera, argue the importance of free courses offered by universities. The content is important, but this should be followed by home assignments, quizzes and other tasks that can offer the students the feeling they made a progress. The final certificate and the deadlines are other important aspects of this system.

Khan (2013) considers that the traditional system should be

reconsidered, because is not efficient anymore. He puts under a question mark the evaluation system and the importance of grades.

A system based on online learning is more efficient because it takes into account the needs of the student. For example, some people learn faster than others, others learn better during the nights or evenings.

Not all students are the same. He also encourages a system where students of different ages help others to understand some concepts or solve some problems.

The same idea of differences between kids is highlighted by Mulgan (2011): "some kids learn by listening, others learn by doing". Another important idea is that professors should encourage their students to ask questions, to be skeptical, to be different, to find uncommon solutions for some problems, to be creative and to trust themselves.

Objectives and the Research Methodology

Starting from the book of Khan, the creator of Khan Academy, I initiated a quantitative research in order to find out the way students want to learn, the way they want to communicate with the professors, the importance of evaluation during the semester and other aspects related to the process of teaching and learning.

The main objectives of the research were the following ones:

- To identify some problems in the actual system of teaching
- To identify the best way to communicate with students.
- To establish a better way for evaluation and teaching
- To find solutions for improving the relation between students and professors.

The survey was conducted in June 2016 on a number of 156 students from Romania, from 6 declared cities (Craiova, Cluj, Iasi, Bucharest, Targoviste, Sibiu) and different specializations. The survey was realized in Google Forms and was distributed online, on Facebook groups of the main faculties and universities in the country.

A specific of the survey was the presence of some open questions not related with the subject of the questionnaire. If these types of questions remain most of the time unanswered, this time, the students were happy to share with me some aspects of their personalities.

Apparently, the questions were for relaxing the students, but I also wanted to make them more open and trust me. The questions referred to their favorite song, something that made them laugh, a dream they have. I was amazed by their profound answers and by the impressive number of suggestions they had for me and for the educational process.

Results

The profile of the respondent was given by the age and by the location or the profile of the studies, the latter being an open question at which everyone wrote in a different way. 87.8 % from the respondents were between 18 and 25 years and the others were between 26 and 30 years (7.1 %) and more than 30 (5.1 %).

The survey can be adjusted and also applied for secondary schools or high schools, because results definitely will vary between these categories of children.

The personalities, the needs and the way they respond to the environment are psychologically dependent on the age. So the results in this study can offer some guidelines for professors teaching

in higher education system. It is risky to create patterns because students are different and the main idea should be the flexibility in teaching.

The students were asked about the way things are and the way they would want to communicate. The options for

communication were: e-mails, Facebook, phone, face to face or no communication. In table 1, we can see the differences and we can analyze the impact we, as professors, have on our students.

Table 1

Communication between students and professors

Communication type	The present state (%)	The desired state (%)
E-mail	57.1	30.8
Phone	7.7	11.5
Facebook	16	19.9
Face to face	14.1	37.8
No communication	5.1	0

We can notice the most used communication channel is the e-mail, but most of them want a face to face communication. It is easy to understand that, because written communication has its disadvantages, compared with the oral one.

Still, the e-mail is considered a useful way of communication by 30.8 % of the respondents. We also observe that students would like to communicate more on Facebook or phone. From my experience, I can say that communication on Social Media has a lot of benefits and the barriers between the students and their professor is diminished.

We, as professors, deal with Generation Z and we have to take into account its presence on the online environment and mostly on social

media. Tulgan (2013, pp. 6-7) mentions five characteristics for GenZ:

- Social media is the future
- Human connections are more important than ever
- Skill gaps
- Global mindset, local reality
- Infinite diversity

I agree that social media is the future and we should focus more on this trend specific to GenZ (youngsters born later than 1995).

Students were asked to give a grade from 1 (not wanted) to 5 (the most wanted) to three types of teaching: monologue (with or without a video presentation), debate and a practical part of the course (case studies, exercises, applications). We can see their preferences in table 2.

Table 2

Preferences of students on the teaching manner

Grade	Monologue (%)	Debate (%)	Applicative (%)
1 (not wanted), 5 (the most wanted)			
1	13.5	1.3	1.9
2	23.1	2.6	2.6
3	37.8	12.2	16.7
4	17.3	27.6	24.4
5	8.3	56.4	54.5

We can see that the respondents prefer the debates (84 % gave grades of 4 and 5), followed by applicative courses (78.9 % gave grades of 4 and 5). Monologue is not appreciated, because students are passive and not involved in the process of teaching-learning.

Khan (2013) mentions in his book the average time in which students can pay attention. This time varies between 10 and 18 minutes, depending on the age and the subject. That is the reason for which most presentations at Ted Conferences are limited to 18-20 minutes.

People lose their concentration beyond a certain time. But we still require from our students to pay attention for 2 hours. The educational system in Finland is one of the most successful and literature was written on this subject. Sahlberg (2007) mentions Finland as one of the most advanced knowledge societies.

Asked if they would like to work individually or in a team during the class, 62.2 % of the respondents mentioned they prefer working in a team. So, this information is useful for teachers in order for us to organize the class in the way our students would like.

Khan (2013) recommends that students should read the courses alone and during the class, they should ask questions to the teacher and require clarifications. But the respondents in my research prefer listening the course from the teacher and interact with him/her during the class for clarifications (78.2 %). We can outline that students are different. But with all these differences, they all want to be heard and interacted with.

For evaluation, 45.5 % of the respondents chose essays, 42.3 % applications, 41.7 % case studies, 41 % tests during the semester, 27.6 % artistic projects, written projects 25 %, 19.2 % video projects and 14.1 % only the final

exam. They could choose maximum three options. We can see that they prefer an evaluation during the semester which takes into account practical activities or creative ones.

Regarding the technology used in class by students and teachers, the situation is good for computers and video projectors (93.6 %), but not so good for tablets, for example (only 7.7 %). This should be encouraged but we have to correlate this with the fact that few students have a personal tablet.

Anticipating this result, I also asked them to think at a hypothetical situation in which the teacher asks them to bring at school a personal device to work on (a laptop or a tablet). Surprisingly, 68.5 % of the respondents gave grades of 4 and 5, agreeing with such a request. This is encouraging and should be used in their favor, adjusting the way of teaching to these trends specific to an "online" generation.

Asked about the presence at the course, 60.9 % of the respondents said they want that their presence be taken into account by the professors. At the same time, 54.5 % of them appreciate the liberty to come and leave the courses whenever they want. Maybe, flexibility is the key. And the teaching process should adjust to this state of being.

There are a lot of debates regarding the importance of grades or their relevance for the potential of a student. Success in career is not given by the grades of a person. 64.7 % of the respondents considered there is no connection between the grades and their potential. This should teach us not to have misjudgments regarding our students.

For delivering some home assignments, most of them prefer the presentation in front of the class (75 %), followed by e-mail (49.4), Facebook (16.7 %, but still impressive), Skype or video calls (3.2 %). The professors

should be flexible and use different ways for communicating with students, depending on each specific case.

At a hypothetical situation in which the professor asks them to address questions, 50.6 % of the students said they would require clarifications regarding the course, 23.1 % would be afraid not to say something stupid, 22.4 % would be quiet because they already understood and 3.8 % would be quiet because they did not pay attention to the course.

The percentage of those afraid not to ask something stupid is worrying because reflects a lack of self-trust and also a lack of trust in their professors and a barrier in communication.

If the professor would ask them to read a few pages from a book they can find in the school library, 66 % of the students partially and totally agreed, 9.6 % partially or totally disagreed and 24.4 % of them were neutral. This fact is also encouraging for teachers.

If they could choose the type of the book, 37.2 % would choose a personal development one, 31.4 % a book presenting the subject of the course, but other than the handbook, 17.9 % the handbook, 10.9 % the biography of a successful person, 2.6 % no book, because they do not like reading.

Another question was addressed to them in order to understand which characteristics of the professor could help students learn more for a subject. 79.5 % of them said that a communicative and open teacher, 53.2 % a professional one, 50 % a funny teacher, 39.1 % an understanding one, 34.6 % an encouraging one, 19.2 % a professor who tries to help the student beyond the school, at a personal level, 14.7 % an exigent one.

We see how impactful we are, even if sometimes we do not fully understand the extent of our attitude towards our

students. In my career, I also was amazed when my students revealed to me that they did something because I trusted them and encouraged them.

For us, a few encouraging words can seem not very important, but for them, they are. If we want them to do wonderful things, we should start with giving them credit.

The last question was aiming to find out what apps students use in education purposes. 55.1 % of them said YouTube videos, 25 % Duolingo, 17.9 % online courses, 10.9 % The Digital Garage of Google, 6.4 % Simformer, 3.8 % Khan Academy, 2.6 % Lynda courses, 2.6 % YouTube Creator Academy, 12.8 % other apps and 19.9 % none.

So, as teachers, we can use YouTube more in educational process of teaching and learning and recommend our students online courses to extend their knowledge and also interact with them in order to find out which other apps they use and prefer and afterwards these could be integrated with the course. "The needs for education are constantly evolving, as the entire international context is evolving" (Nastase and Gligor-Cimpoieru, 2013, p. 192). For achieving performance, "the entire staff of the university should be aware of their involvement" (Hobeanu Vacarescu, 2012, p. 1).

Conclusions

It is difficult to extend the results of this study but it can offer valuable guidelines to researchers, professors and those responsible with the management of the educational process. We have to understand and accept that students today are different than students from years ago. We face a new generation, one that is more present in the online environment, so we

should adjust our courses, the way to communicate and teach.

Besides a traditional course, professors should use online tools in order to cope with the new requirements, this meaning not just using a video presentation.

Students want to be part of the process, to interact and to be heard. Even if we do not see their full potential, maybe encouraging them to be more proactive will gradually lead to this.

Khan believed that working in a team is useful and we saw that our respondents also like to be part of a team, so professors should focus more on organizing projects and analyzing case studies in groups of 4-5 students.

We all know that brainstorming is an exercise where ideas are encouraged and not criticized but few of us really apply this to each course and seminar.

There is no perfect model or a model that will work no matter what; students are different, professors are different, cultures are different and regulations vary a lot. Because sometimes, flexibility and creativity are in opposition with traditional and conventional patterns of the educational system.

The key to a better educational system with an improved process of teaching and learning is flexibility, openness, motivation of both parties (teachers, on one hand and students on the other). Sometimes, the lack of motivation becomes a dangerous circle, because, for example, if one party is demotivated, that leads to a demotivation of the other party, too.

So, managers of the educational system should leave room for flexibility and creativity. Teachers should encourage original ideas, different ideas and try not to have prejudgments

regarding students, based on a grade system, which is not perfect.

A report of European Commission from 2014 summarizes a few recommendations for defining a new way of learning in teaching. The study was aiming mainly the higher education system.

Erasmus+, MOOCs (massive open online courses) platforms are a few tools needed for expanding the universe of a student. The integration of digital technologies is another important aspect. Romania is recognized as having a very fast Internet speed, but the usage of computers is not so extended as in other European countries.

So, we have to define and afterwards implement a national strategy which has to take into account various aspects of the system and the digitalized part cannot be ignored anymore.

Digital skills should be developed for both teachers and students and integrated in the educational process in order to make it more challenging and enjoyable. Funding is another sensitive problem of the system because without funds, education is maintained at a very elementary level.

In 2015, World Economic Forum in collaboration with Boston Consulting Group prepared a report on the problem of education and established different ways to unlock the potential of technology. So, there again appears these terms related to the nowadays digitalization of education.

The entire system, together with all the actors involved in the process (teachers, students, managers, government and other officials) should embrace the new changes occurred in this century and valorize them in a more efficient way.

The labor market needs more competencies from the graduates so the

new education should prepare them for the offer on the market. The report of the World Economic Forum (2015, p. 3) mentions the most important categories of skills that the education should develop:

- core skills for everyday tasks (literacy, numeracy, scientific, ICT and financial literacy, culture and civic literacy);
- complex competencies (critical thinking, creativity, communication, problem solving);
- character qualities for interaction in a better way with the dynamic environment (curiosity, initiative, persistence, leadership, cultural and social awareness).

In conclusion, we should understand that the learning and teaching process is a very complex one and in a continuous change. This process should be managed like any other process and different views have to be combined in order to recreate the educational system.

Many countries have the problem of an obsolete educational system and not through the information taught in schools but through the way this is

communicated to students. Students today are different than those from yesterday and will be different from those from tomorrow.

So, the education should be redesigned for the new generations. The traditional school is not sufficient anymore and many professors applied different techniques in order to include technology as an important part of the system.

Generation Z is different than Millennials or Baby Boomers and we should not judge them through the eyes of our generation or create a system that is not proper for them.

Youngsters have different interests and learn in different ways. Some of them prefer to read, other prefer to listen and other want to watch. The information should be delivered from the teacher to the students in the way they prefer and understand more.

They are different and we should encourage this, not create barriers. These changes should be accepted and integrated into a strategy by both professors and managers at a local, regional or national level.

REFERENCES

- European Commission (2014), *New Modes of Learning and Teaching in Higher Education*, http://ec.europa.eu/education/library/reports/modernisation-universities_en.pdf.
- Fry, Heather, Ketteridge, Steve and Marshall, Stephanie (2009), *A Handbook for Teaching and Learning in Higher Education*, New York: Routledge.
- Hobeanu Vacarescu, Loredana (2012), "Perspectives on Professional Performance Growth in the Field of Economics in the Higher Education Institutions", *Management & Marketing*, 1, 133-152.
- Khan, Salman (2013), *O singura scoala pentru toata lumea*, Ed. Publica.
- Koller, Daphne (2012), *What We're Learning from Online Education*, www.ted.com/talks/daphne_koller_what_we_re_learning_from_online_education.
- Mulgan, Geoff (2011), *A Short Intro to the Studio School*, www.ted.com/talks/geoff_mulgan_a_short_intro_to_the_studio_school.

- Nastase, Marian, Gligor-Cimpoieru, Diana Corina (2013), "A Plea for the Importance of Business Ethics Education for Future Managers in an International Competitive Environment", *Review of International Comparative Management*, 14(2), May 2013.
- Robinson, Ken (2006), *Do Schools Kill Creativity?*, www.ted.com/talks/ken_robinson_says_schools_kill_creativity.
- Sahlberg, Pasi (2007), "Education Policies for Raising Student Learning: The Finnish Approach", *Journal of Education Policy*, 22(2), 147-171.
- Tulgan, Bruce (2013), *Meet Generation Z: The second generation within the giant "Millennial" cohort*, <http://rainmakertalking.com/assets/uploads/2013/10/Gen-Z-Whitepaper.pdf>.
- World Economic Forum (2015), *New Vision for Education*, www3.weforum.org/docs/WEFUSA_NewVisionforEducation_Report2015.pdf.