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**EVALUATION FROM A STUDENT-CENTRED PERSPECTIVE:
COMPARATIVE STUDY**

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Abstract

The study aims at identifying the perceptions of a group of students from several technical faculties regarding the educational evaluation practices in high school and university from the perspective of a student-centred approach to education. The requirement to develop open, flexible educational strategies that are tailored to social and individual needs and that would foster the development of each child's potential is endorsed by many national and international educational policy documents that promote a student-centred approach to education and a tangible adaptation of the system to the student's requirements and possibilities. In the broad sense, evaluation concerns the efficiency of the education system, seen as a component of the social system, specifically the efficiency of the relationship between the financial and material resources invested by society and the results of the education, results that are materialized in the acquired skills and quality of the labour force. Considered in a narrower sense, evaluation regards the efficiency of the relationship between the proposed objectives and the results obtained by the students. In order to identify the opinions of the students concerning the frequency of student-centred evaluation practices in pre-university and university education we have applied a questionnaire with closed questions and then analysed the items concerning: educating the pupils/students in regards to the criteria and methods of assessing their performance, centring the evaluations on essential aspects of the studied content, access to the recommended studying resources, the presence of practices that would stimulate self-assessment, the objectivity of the evaluation.

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1. Introduction

National and international policies support and promote the principle of adapting school to the needs and abilities of the students through the objectives and directions of actions stated in numerous documents, all with the purpose of establishing a high-quality education system. This is achieved particularly through reconsidering the role of the students and placing their needs, interests, and requirements at the forefront of any educational action and ensuring equal opportunities throughout their years of schooling.

The idea of centring the educational actions on the pupil is revealed in the description of the fundamental dimensions of constructivist learning realized by E. Joița (2006, pp. 62, 65):

- adapting the goals and different methods of encouraging learning based on the individual particularities, aiming at personalizing learning;
- promoting active learning that is not based on merely receiving the information and assimilating it, but on exploration, search and the independent processing of knowledge;
- the newly acquired knowledge of the pupils is a result of their own experiences, actions and interpretations;
- the direct mental and actional involvement replaces the passive attitude of simply listening and receiving the information;
- direct cognitive experiences are dominant, favouring the interpretation of the real, concrete or abstract world, the understanding and attribution of meanings;
- constructing understanding founded on personal experience, which in turn leads to changes in the methodology of learning, the role of the teacher and the student;
- the variation in student's peculiarities, learning styles, learning experiences is respected;
- the role of the teacher is that of facilitator, coach, organizing, coordinating, stimulating, providing support, encouraging questions, formulating individual responses, supporting debates and negotiations, and making final syntheses.

Centring on the student, as a way of approaching the instructional and educational process, aims to capitalize on the student as a subject of learning, being an active strategy that involves building a positive learning experience in a non-directional relationship in which the student is subject, partner, autonomous, creative, heuristic, active, and responsible. The student-centred paradigm has a major impact on maximizing the human resource and increasing the quality of the activities, being a strategic option based on the student's (the subject of learning's) ability in the educational process, their needs, interests, aspirations and potential. (Șoitu, Cherciu, 2006, p.58)

The principle of decentralizing the curriculum and making it flexible, which offers the possibility of designing differentiated, personalized curricula through the school-based curriculum segment, is one of the principles of educational policy that represented the foundation for the generation of the new Romanian pre-university curricula. The school-based curriculum seeks to centre the instructive actions on the needs and interests of the students within the respective educational establishment and can be promoted through various methods: the in-depth core curriculum, the extended core curriculum, the curriculum developed in schools, with the following options: an optional course within the subject area (intradisciplinary), an optional course within the curricular area (interdisciplinary), an optional course between several curricular areas (transdisciplinary) (Tăușan, 2016, Chiș, 2003).

A new type of curricular culture is generated and is characterized by: transforming the school centred on the teacher into a school centred on the student, using interactive learning methods, a flexible curriculum and an inter- and cross disciplinary approach of the curriculum. This new type of curricular culture is in accordance with the paradigm of adapting the school to the needs and possibilities of the students. (Vrășmaș, 2004).

2. Problem Statement

Centring on the pupil/student, as an objective of current didactics, must be reflected and found in the educational practices of our education system, both in teaching and learning activities as well as in evaluation activities.

The main directions for the improvement of academic assessment, promoted by modern didactics and reflecting the application of the principles of the student-centred paradigm in the evaluation process as well, are as follows (Manolescu, 2006, Potolea & Manolescu, 2005):

- Extending the evaluative act from the verification and evaluation of the results to the assessment of the teaching-learning processes that generated the results found, by diagnosing the strengths or weaknesses of the two processes (assessment of pupils, methods, content, objectives, teacher-student relationships, even of the assessment itself);

- Moving the emphasis in assessment from knowledge to intellectual development, the ability to apply knowledge in practice, conduct, student attitudes, the degree of incorporation of certain values;

- Focusing the evaluation on positive outcomes (not on permanently sanctioning negative ones);

- Diversifying evaluation techniques and adapting them to the concrete didactic situations;

- Ensuring each teacher will follow the same requirements and assessment criteria in their relationships with their students;

- Ensuring the students' understanding of the evaluation requirements and criteria, as a basis for the formation of their self-assessment skills;

- Ensuring the students' understanding of the role of the evaluative act: regulating and constantly improving the teaching-learning process;

- Giving more weight to formative assessment.

Referring to the evaluation strategies, in accordance with the requirements of the student-centred paradigm, these are: formative assessment - as a didactic way to make learning more effective, 'forming' assessment (assessment-based training or *évaluation formatrice*) - ensuring the student's involvement and contributing to a personalized formative assessment, and self-evaluation - as an integral part of the formative assessment.

The formative evaluation consists of measuring and evaluating the results, throughout the training period, systematically, at short intervals of time. It has the role of a diagnosis and improvement tool, in the sense that if the results found are not the ones expected, a diagnosis shall be established specifying the difficulties, the failures, in order to adopt the necessary corrective measures. Formative assessment permanently accompanies the process of training, is involved in the process, and aims to timely identify all difficulties, gaps, and allow the teachers to act accordingly to improve the process. It also provides feedback for both students and teachers (Radu, 1999, Cucuș, 2008).

Unlike the summative assessment, which conducts a survey, the formative assessment involves assessing all the pupils and the assimilation of the whole content and informing them about the findings. The students are immediately informed of the results and the degree of achievement of the learning objectives.

Formative assessment is characterized by a much higher frequency of checks over a training period and a shorter interval between checks and improvements to the process. Being involved in the process, it assesses not only the results of the learning activity but also the process by which a certain result has been achieved, allowing for its improvement in the future.

Starting from the idea that the essential function of evaluation is regulation and self-regulation of learning, the forming evaluation - as a perfected type of formative evaluation - fulfils as a basic function the support of the learning activity, by ensuring that the student takes responsibility of their own learning: initially, this is done by achieving awareness of the objectives to be attained and then through the integration of the data provided by the assessment into the management of their own learning path (Potolea & Manolescu, 2005).

Evaluation becomes formative when it transforms into self-evaluation and regulates the learning process. In the case of formative assessment, regulation is achieved through the strategies used by the teacher, while in the forming assessment the pedagogical approach focuses on the regulation provided by the student himself. In the forming assessment, evaluation becomes a training tool at the learner's disposal, so that he may pursue his personal goals and build his own learning path.

The modern, constructivist perspective on education implies the active involvement of the pupil in the act of learning, giving him responsibility over his own learning. Modern assessment means increasing the student's accountability in learning. In the context of school assessment, shared responsibility is achieved through the student's involvement in the regulation of learning, using forming assessment and self-evaluation. Self-evaluation can be considered as an integral part of the formative assessment, but also an aim of it, an educational goal of formative nature. In this way, students will be able to understand and use the criteria by which they are evaluated to identify the differences between their acquisitions and the results expected from them (Tăușan, 2017).

Evaluation becomes effective when it turns into self-evaluation. In order to prove its effectiveness, self-evaluation should not be reduced to self-correction situations, based on a teacher-provided scale, but it should be based on the knowledge and understanding of assessment criteria by the students, which will provide them with information on expected behaviours, and which can be used as a reference in performing their tasks. Ensuring the conditions for the formation and development of the self-evaluation ability implies: the pupil's knowledge and acceptance of the objectives to be achieved, knowledge of the evaluation criteria and evaluation modalities. Thus, the students will set up their own learning, plan their own actions, organize their self-evaluation, regulating and self-regulating their learning. Defining precisely the objectives and the criteria for assessing a task ensures the prerequisites for the success of said learning task. Self-evaluation thus becomes a tool for managing errors and the self-regulation of learning. According to some research (Potolea & Manolescu, 2005, p. 148), the involvement of pupils in the elaboration of the evaluation criteria leads to the improvement of the learning outcomes.

From the perspective of a learner-centred approach and in accordance with the requirements of the constructivist paradigm, these are the modern, complementary methods of evaluation: the systematic

observation of the student's behaviour (using tools such as: the psycho-pedagogical characterization sheet, the classification scale, the assessment checklist, the assessment grid), the portfolio, the project, the investigation. As an alternative to traditional methods, they complement the evaluative information obtained by the teacher through classical methods (Bocoș, 2013). They contribute to achieving the fundamental goal of assessment: supporting students in learning and making the learning process more effective. They aim towards a qualitative assessment, focusing specifically on the learning process, not on its products. They also facilitate the cooperation and communication between teachers and pupils, encouraging autonomy and initiatives.

By using the formative and forming assessment, by providing the conditions for the formation and development of self-evaluation skills, by the alternative application of the complementary evaluation methods, the premises of a modern student-centred evaluation process are assured, which: aims at adopting some ameliorative decisions; addresses the learning outcomes but, more importantly, the teaching and learning processes involved as well; is an integral part of the instructive-educational process; provides a permanent feedback to students and teachers; uses criteria previously formulated and known by the evaluator and evaluated; involves the diversification and context-friendliness of evaluation methods and techniques; aims at focusing on positive results, avoiding permanent sanctioning of the negative ones.

The teachers involved in the process of forming and training preservice teachers must be aware of the importance of transversal competences and should help students to develop this category of competences, alongside with the professional ones (Langa, 2015).

3. Research Questions

Considering the importance of the student-centred paradigm characteristics at the level of educational practices, we intend to investigate, based on students' perceptions, specific aspects of the performance assessment of pupils/students at pre-university and university level. The research questions are: Are the characteristics of the pupil/student-centred paradigm in terms of educational practices present in our education system? What is the ratio of educational practices in terms of pupil/ student-centred assessment in pre-university education compared to university education?

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study is to identify the perceptions of a group of students enrolled in programmes of technical faculties concerning the educational practices of evaluating school / university performance in high school and university, from the perspective of view of pupil / student-centred education. The objectives of this paper are: 1. Identifying the directions for the modernization of assessment at the level of the educational practices in the pre-university and university education; 2. Identifying the ratio in which the principles of the student-centred approach are present in the assessment practices in the pre-university and university education.

5. Research Methods

The research has a nonexperimental, quantitative design. The research method used is survey based on a questionnaire. In order to identify the students' perceptions of the weight of educational practices

specific to pupil/student-centred education in pre-university and university education, we used a closed questionnaire, which includes items referring to: educating pupils/students about the criteria and methods of assessing their performance; centring the assessment on the essential aspects of the studied content; access to the recommended learning resources; encouraging the use of self-assessment practices; the objectivity of the evaluation.

The questionnaire was applied to a sample of 100 students of technical faculties from Cluj-Napoca.

6. Findings

Regarding the item aimed at the clear and timely information of the pupils / students on the criteria and methods of assessing their performance, we recorded the following results: most of the investigated subjects (53%) consider that, during their university studies, they are "always" informed in time and unequivocally on the criteria and methods for assessing their work and their professional results. Concerning the pre-university environment, a considerable number of subjects (41%) appreciate that informing pupils about the criteria and modalities for assessing school performances is only "sometimes" done. (Table 01)

Table 01. Informing the pupils/students on the criteria and methods of assessment

	Pre-university education	University education
Always	24	53
Frequently	35	38
Sometimes	41	9

Another dimension of assessment, characteristic of the pupil-centred education that has been investigated in our research refers to centring assessment on the essential, important aspects of the subject. In the opinion of the investigated subjects, this characteristic is found in the university environment "frequently" (55%) or "always" (36%), while, with regards to the pre-university environment, only 38% appreciate the presence of this characteristic as being "frequently" encountered and 34% consider it is "always" present. (Table 02)

Table 02. Evaluating the relevant, essential aspects of the subject matter

	Pre-university education	University education
Always	34	36
Frequently	38	55
Sometimes	28	9

Concerning studying for the exam/other types of assessment and the access to the recommended learning resources, the ratio between the students' perceptions regarding the pre-university and the university education is seemingly balanced, most of the investigated subjects considering that they "frequently" have access to the learning resources, both in pre-university education (68%) and in university education (63%). (Table 03)

Table 03. Access to the recommended learning resources

	Pre-university education	University education
Always	29	32
Frequently	68	63
Sometimes	3	5

In terms of encouraging the evaluation of their own performance as well as that of other colleagues by stimulating the formation and development of their self-assessment skills, there are remarkable differences in the perceptions of the investigated subjects regarding the two environments: it is considered that these practices for the training and development of their self-assessment skills are met "frequently" in pre-university education (63%) and only "sometimes" in university education (58%). (Table 04)

Table 04. Developing self-assessment skills

	Pre-university education	University education
Always	6	4
Frequently	63	38
Sometimes	31	58

Regarding the assessment of pupil/student performance objectively, reflecting the real stage of their knowledge, skills, abilities, capacities and competences of each individual, a significant percentage of the total investigated subjects (62%) considered that the objectivity in the evaluation at the level of university education is "always" present and 45% of those investigated appreciated the presence of this feature in pre-university education as "frequently" encountered. (Table 05)

Table 05. The objectivity of the assessment

	Pre-university education	University education
Always	23	62
Frequently	45	35
Sometimes	32	3

7. Conclusion

Analysing the results of the investigation, we note the characteristics of the pupil/student-centred paradigm can be found at the level of educational practices in our education system, with a higher presence in university education than in pre-university education. According to the questioned students' perceptions, educational practices for assessing school/university performance from the perspective of the pupil/student-centred education, such as informing pupils/students about the criteria and modalities for assessing their performances, centring the evaluation tasks on the essential aspects of the studied content, the objectivity of the evaluation, are all obviously part of the characteristics of the evaluation process, especially in the university environment, while characteristics such as access to the recommended learning resources and

stimulating the formation and development of practices of self-assessment are more likely to be found in the educational assessment practices in pre-university education.

Although current educational policy papers and theories promoted in modern didactics highlight the necessity and advantages of applying the principles of the pupil/student-centred paradigm, in practice we can notice limits and reluctance in designing, conducting and evaluating educational activities in the pre-university and university education from the perspective of this paradigm. In this situation, offering further training programmes for the teachers that would aim at approaching the teaching, learning and assessment processes from a learner-centred perspective could be a solution for optimising educational practices and academic performances.

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