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**THE STUDENTS' RIGHT TO GIVE FEEDBACK TO THEIR
TEACHERS. ARGUMENTS AND OPINIONS**

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Abstract

Applied since the school year 2016-2017 and valued as the first document of its type regarding the regulations of student's right and obligations, the Student's Statute (OMENCS nr. 4742/10.08.2016) introduces important aspects with respect to student's educational rights. Among these is the right to assess their professors every semester, by way of anonymous files. Starting with assessing arguments in favour of this right and encouraged by the interest raised within the seminary discussions over Student's Statute topic in classes such as: Educational Management and Pedagogy respectively (Primary and Pre-primary Education students and the ones enlisted for the Teacher Training modules during last academic year at Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiești), we organized a few focus groups for answering some questions, related to this novelty in the lower secondary and upper secondary education: How are the risks/obstacles and the chances offered through using these feedback instruments perceived by the professors/ students future professors? What are the expectations of the professors/students future professors towards using these tools for optimizing education? What do participants feel on these issues? Thus, the feedback offered by students was recognized as a valuable one, because "we always have something to learn from our students". In the end, we remembered to make some practical suggestions on this topic.

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1. Introduction

Teaching without taking the listener into account should remain a myth, because, as one student once confessed to us: “the more a professor is taking more of us into account and is closer to us, the students, the more we respect him/her”. That is why, with the Law no. 87/2006 regarding the assurance of quality in education and the subsequent legislation it is recommended to use an investigation - based on questionnaires and interviews administered to students, graduates and their parents - to highlight the level of satisfaction for the recipients of education, regarding the activity of professors, the level of mutual respect, manifested in the professor-students relation, the quality of the language used and so on. And now, the Students’ Statute/ OMENCS no. 4742 from the 10th of August 2016 brings a series of novelties, in some important aspects regarding student’s rights. Reviewing the student’s rights, specified in the second chapter, draws attention to children’s right to protect their image, dignity and own personality, the right to question the results of written assessments and to assess their professors every semester by way of anonymous questionnaires or the right of students to protest and gather outside the school etc. The right to provide in class anonymous feedback to professors for identifying the most efficient methods of learning (according to article 7, paragraph aa), is the reason behind this article.

2. Problem Statement

We perceive the feedback offered by students as one of the most at-hand means for professors to pursue their continuous improvement, any didactic activity in which the feedback occurs bringing more certainty and satisfaction. At the same time, the absence of feedback may result in a whole series of distortions, misunderstandings that may contribute to the perpetuation of an inaccurate communication. While sometimes the feedback occurs automatically, other times it requires time and effort, although much less compared to the case in which it will be necessary to correct affected processes (Pânișoară & Pânișoară, 2005).

According to DEXI (The illustrated explanatory Romanian dictionary, 2007), the feedback (return, comeback) is defined as a „retro-action manifested at the level of different systems (technical, biological, cybernetic etc.), for maintaining stability and their equilibrium towards the external influences”.

2.1. Why this right? Here are a couple of arguments

The different types of arguments presented below are only supporting the students’ right to provide feedback to their teachers every semester:

- *Value Arguments.* The idea is supported by a series of democratic values which promote, education-wise, an open and transparent relation between teacher and students, cooperation, flexibility and adapting to each other. E. Păun (2017) propose even the concept “occasion to learn” for express the equality, quality and equity in education;
- *Organizational Arguments.* We note the fact that satisfaction of recipients becomes one of the signs of quality in education, this being associated with the category of interface indicators, which involves psychological and social aspects of the educational phenomenon (Neacșu, 2008). The idea, taken from the quality management (see the model EFQM of excellence) which deserves to be remembered (because school is also an organization) by the clients’ satisfaction,

the students' in our situation, should perhaps matter the most for the school (the student being the centre of all school related activities), certainly while not ignoring other indicators (resources, the instructive-educational process itself, activity results, policies and strategies etc.). But also by taking into account some aspects related to organizational climate as positive medium, incentive and engaging for all the members;

- *Communication Arguments.* Guiding principles for an efficient and genuine communication are valuing at Abric (2002) even the creation of relational context to facilitate expression and receptivity, taking into account the point of view of the other, using the feedback for quality control and relevance of the message and the processes likely to infest the interaction; if we consider the communication relations in the classroom, the obvious sign of their quality is precisely “the degree of school and personal satisfaction students got from meeting with the teacher”.
- *Psycho-social Arguments.* For “if the professor is not trying to understand the manner in which the student represents his school experience and the initiator and leader, then he will neither be able to understand the internal mechanisms in which the life of a class of students works” (Lițoiu, 2005, p. 95);
- *Class Management Arguments.* Teacher has to prove himself as a participative manager of the class for the students with which he is working. Even though it is recognized as „the psychological threshold most difficult to pass”, teachers deserve to be explicitly oriented to the feedback offered by students, since this proves to be a strategic ally for coordinating the efforts of both partners towards the common goal of the didactic activity, for a genuine analysis of the previous management cycle, for satisfying the need to monitor any managerial initiative or for encouraging the solving of internal problems, without resorting to third persons; so, the student become an active actor, contributing to creation of educational field (Stan, 2009);
- *Pedagogical Arguments.* Not least, exercising this right, would develop in students skills of diagnosis, assessment, identification of weak points or drawbacks in the activity and the relationship with the teacher, but also some solutions for improvement; abilities for offering support or messages for their teachers, efficient in maintaining and optimizing the communication; the spirit of initiative, participation in their own training, seen as a common action, together with the professor; cooperating skills, direct communication in the teacher – student relationship, in light of its optimization for the both parties; the feeling of being true partners for their teacher, the feeling of team work; but also the motivational force for change, self-improvement, and success for the professor.

3. Research Questions

Primary beneficiaries of education (students, pupils) are seen as “data sources” in teachers' assessment, even “the most qualified source to determine the extent to which the learning experience has been productive, satisfactory and valuable”, and the students' evaluation of the teaching quality (Student Evaluation of Teaching) as a topic that sums up over 70 years of research, with 2000 articles and books, although it is more common in universities where the method is institutionally prepared (Ghiațău, 2016).

In the pre-university education, our discussions about the students' right to provide feedback to their teachers every semester have started from one of the following proposals, launched in the focus-group: How are the risks/obstacles and the chances offered through using these feedback instruments? What are the expectations of the professors/ students future professors towards using these tools for optimizing education? What do participants feel on these issues? Etc.

4. Purpose of the Study

So, we aimed at: identifying the light in which the professors/ future professors perceive this right of the students, this dimension of relationship with pupils within schools, drawing a picture of the effects of observing this right in educational practice, and also admitting the strengths/ weaknesses or the opportunities/ threats in the way of applying this type of feedback instrument.

5. Research Methods

We wanted to conduct a qualitative small study regarding this novelty introduced by the Student Statute (see the right of students to give feedback to their professors). In order to attain the proposed targets during this micro investigation we resorted to the *focus-group method*.

5.1. Participants

Thus, *three group meetings* were organized: one with active teachers from lower secondary and upper secondary (in which 8 teachers attended) and other two group meetings, attended by students from Primary and Pre-primary Education students and the ones enlisted for the Teacher Training modules – the first year of studies, during the last academic year, from Petroleum-Gas University of Ploiești (32 participants totally, were aged 19-36 years). Also, we were fully aware that additional organization of some interview groups with pupils as participants would have been useful, for possible comparisons.

5.2. Instrument

The *interview guide* we used (containing 12 open, one-dimensional questions, with unequivocal indications of response, without a prior testing of the questions) aimed at gathering relevant information on the attitude of the teachers/ future teachers related to using tools for investigating the feedback offered by students, on the impact of using this type of tools, on advantages and drawbacks, but also on risks, barriers in the way of frequently applying these tools in the class.

6. Findings

The feedback offered by students was recognized as a valuable one, for considering the necessities, interests and taking into account the demands of the recipients regarding quality in education, encouraging a positive interpersonal communication in schools (“a bonding between professor and the students”), and for facilitating the continuous development of professors as professionals in education (because “we always have something to learn from our students”). First, the group interviews highlighted the fact that *these type of tools for investigating students were used by teachers in the classroom up until this time*, among the examples being: drawings, essays with the title “My Teacher”, the five minutes

essay, the diary (appreciated as “fashionable”), questionnaires (“suggestions on tickets”), but also free discussions with the students (from the first hour, related to questions such as: “What are your expectations from me, Professor X or what rules would you wish me to comply with?”). Yet, all the participants in the organized group interviews, considered that *students are certainly more receptive in currently using some of these types of tools as compared with teachers*, even though students are not familiar with them (the first anticipated reaction towards these tools being one of “surprise, of astonishment”). Their interest in these tools was interpreted as “thus they feel as if they were important, they perceive these tools as a method by which we intend to understand them”, “by which we are giving them the opportunity to tell exactly what they expect from us, the professors”, by which they see themselves “our (the professors’) equals since they are also assessing us”. Most participants also agree that the rather reluctant attitude of teachers towards the usage of the already discussed instruments is determined by schools still focusing on information, instead of focusing on the student – as it should be; consequently, teachers “forget to accept students’ ideas, and bend around them.”

With reference to *picturing the impact of using these tools in the educational practice*, the first three places in order of the importance given by the participants outlined the following effects (precisely in this order):

- Promoting mutual trust and high understanding between teacher and students;
- Open communication and respect among the parties, respectively, the mutual professor – student support in the educational act;
- On the last place (from a total of 8 consequences, nominated by the participants): promotion for the employment of students’ skills, such as critical thinking, evaluative thinking, and value judgements.

A *comparative image* of the strengths and weaknesses respectively, but also of the barriers identified in applying these feedback tools, is detailed in the table below (Table 01).

Table 01. Strengths/ weaknesses and opportunities/ barriers of teachers’ assessment by the students, by way of feedback tools

Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Barriers
<p>It supports the identification of some possible solutions with an eye to positive overrun of the dysfunctional situations generated in the relationship and the didactic activity;</p> <p>The possibility to generate diagrams and to visualize the intersection area between the expectations of students and the ones of the teachers, regarding the activity developed together;</p> <p>The possibility to generate</p>	<p>Complicated analysis/ interpretation of the results offered by applying these tools, taking into account that “you have to review 500 paper works per semester”;</p> <p>Missing any practical aspect, since it is not specified “what follows after these tools being administered”, being offered very few indications regarding the practical use, by every teacher, of the results obtained from administering these tools;</p>	<p>The emphasis on quality in education, client satisfaction, teacher “opening a new door to a student”, making a greater step in their relationship and succeeding , a significant approach to him;</p> <p>“Motivating the teacher further”, when the feedback received by the students is positive;</p> <p>Training the student for positive relationships with his peers when “he will need to speak openly,</p>	<p>The risk of promoting labelling for some professors or students;</p> <p>The fickleness of the student” and “the impossibility to respond according to everyone’s expectations”;</p> <p>Subjectivity, but also frivolity, shallowness, exhibited by students in filling in these tools, even though they are able to make a good analysis of activity and the relation they developed with the teacher;</p>

<p>diagrams and to visualize the intersection area between the expectations of students and the ones of the teachers, regarding the activity developed together;</p> <p>Their “Format” and their “accessibility”, which allows “promoting students to speak”, capitalizing on the idea of “interactive learning”;</p>	<p>The high subjectivity of these tools, the issue in itself being a subjective one;</p> <p>The shallow, non-essential character of some of the information supplied by students (“who might pay more attention to you as a person, and not as a teacher”);</p>	<p>assertively, assess his own behaviour and that of others”;</p> <p>The opportunity offered to the teacher to learn new things, to support them and trigger the self-adjustment;</p>	<p>The risk that the professor will administer these tools “only since he/she needs to have a portfolio, without taking them into account seriously, without stimulating/encouraging him/her to change”.</p>
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So, the half-yearly use by teachers of some tools for investigating the feedback offered by their students was 100% appreciated as an interesting and helpful idea, the teachers remaining with the necessity to use the results for their own interest and to prevent these tools to be used as a way to blackmail the professor.

7. Conclusion

Applied since the school year 2016-2017 and valued as the first document of its type regarding the regulations of student’s right and obligations, the Student’s Statute (OMENCS nr. 4742/10.08.2016) introduces important aspects with respect to student’s educational rights. Among these is the right to assess their professors every semester, by way of anonymous files.

The general conclusion of our study is that the frequent usage, in classroom, by the teacher, of some tools for investigating the feedback which may be offered by the students, represents *the real manifestation of a constructive partnership attitude between professors and students*, on the condition of managing/ capitalizing efficiently the information required and received from the students. This happens because a good communication relationship includes the “transacting, mediating and building continuously” and because „in a certain way, the teacher is educated by his students” (Ezechil, Albu, & Pănișoară, 2008). We believe that the weaknesses/ identified barriers in the administration of these tools in the classroom might be overcome by *proposing a portfolio for these types of tools, available in every school, from which the teacher might select, according to his own preferences* what is suitable to students’ age, the envisioned target, the time available for data processing etc. By offering students some hints for their answers, related to their activity with the teacher, a *diversification and combination* of these tools might be desirable in light of enhancing the advantages offered by each tool, so for a real gain in terms of nuanced feedback: the anonymous worksheets may as well be represented by questionnaires, evaluation grids, but also essays, diaries etc.

In the end, here are a couple of *recommendations* for the teachers:

- Always promote receiving feedback from your students, for building trust and a positive image of yourself!
- Share with your students the data regarding the received feedback, focusing on the most important parts and explaining how their answers help and modify the perspective of working together, asking for additional commentaries if necessary;

- Be open, treat the feedback offered by the students with attention and seriousness, but also be aware that it is an utopia believing you will be able to meet all students' expectations!
- Be creative and surprise your students by always ask for their feedback!

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