

Student Satisfaction, Teaching Practicum and Academic Achievement

Keywords

*Student satisfaction, academic achievement, teaching
practicum*

Abstract

This research analyses the satisfaction of Adventus University students, taking into account several classes of dependent variables linked to the academic results and how pedagogical practice is executed. Significant statistical differences have been identified for gender, year of graduation and place of pedagogical practice regarding different types of academic results. Several qualitative elements were added to the quantitative analysis to complement the scoreboard and the information obtained. The results obtained provide a solid basis for further research in this area, especially for identifying all factors directly related to the satisfaction of students enrolled at Adventus University, at the study program Pedagogy of Primary and Preschool Education.

1. Review of literature

It has been noticed a permanent pursuit of improving the quality

of the services given by the national educational system. There are serious questions regarding the training quality of the new graduates, and regarding their ability of rapid adaptation to a didactic profession.

Colleges and Universities, as guiding institutions, are making their mark on the direction of the progress of the national educational system, through the new graduates that they are sending in the labour market. The graduates would either bring with them an increase in the quality or would concur to its defacement. On the other hand, every educational system has certain mechanisms of protection against the infusion of large quantities of incongruous elements. If the student's training was found as poor and lacking, the integration into the labour market would be delayed by the low grades got in the main exams that give the access to a didactic profession. If their training was covering their immediate needs, then their abortion in the system would be fast and their accommodation, accelerated.

Searching for the actual level of quality in the educational services provided by a certain program or specialization is an essential stage towards the ongoing strategies of quality improvement. The more accurate of reality is being portrayed, the better the adjustments are made in order fill their immediate needs.

A study in Poland (Sojkin, Bartkowiak and Skuza, 2012) on choices and student satisfaction reveals that the two variables interact in the context of other extremely important variables: the age and the type of students. Older students who work while studying perceive tertiary studies as important help in advancing in their future career and clarifying essential changes to clarify their professional identity. Women who continue their studies tend to seriously consider the prospect of family and lifestyle in making decisions, while men are more pragmatic and career-oriented.

Brown and Mazzarol (2009) are conducting a study in Australian universities to observe the importance of the institution's image for student satisfaction and his loyalty to the institution he is enrolled in. Their findings indicate that student loyalty is strongly correlated with student satisfaction, which in turn is determined by the public image of the university. The institutional impact of the faculty's image is of major importance in this equation. In 2018, research was conducted in thirteen Riau universities to observe the influence of the quality of educational services on student satisfaction and loyalty. The results indicated a positive influence of students' satisfaction on their loyalty, but no remarkable influences of the quality of services offered on students' loyalty were revealed (Chandra, Ng, Chandra & Priyono, 1018).

O'Donovan's research (2017) in the UK focuses on how the student's beliefs about knowing and knowledge influences his satisfaction with the evaluation. The student's outlook on evaluation and feed-back was analysed on the basis of a thematic analysis of student responses, considering the two main categories of beliefs: absolute / dualist vs. contextual / pluralist. It is desired to highlight the implications these two visions have on students' satisfaction with the evaluation in the context of increasing the guidelines of universities towards marketing strategy development strategies. The results demonstrate that students' perspective on satisfaction, assessment and feedback is strongly intertwined with their views on knowledge and teaching. Students with absolute / dualist beliefs consider clear and unambiguous assessments, with well-established criteria as acceptable. Only students who have contextual / pluralist beliefs are satisfied with evaluations that tend to overcome the practice of establishing rigid criteria, demonstrating theories, or establishing measurable facts.

Sockalingam (2012) proposes an assessment of student satisfaction using a mission-oriented approach. It is based on the idea that satisfaction with academic services must be measured

using the declared mission of the university and its vision and not a set of identical standards for all institutions. Since the vision and mission of each institution are unique, the student satisfaction assessment tools must be customized for each university. In 2008, Lim, Kim, Chen and Ryder conducted an empirical investigation into students' academic outcomes and their satisfaction in different learning contexts. The results of this investigation indicate that students who were part of online learning groups and those who were part of combined learning groups had statistically significant higher levels than those in the traditional learning group. A well-designed online course is very important for increasing the level of student satisfaction. Furthermore, it contributes to student retention, an indicator used to measure the effectiveness of a faculty (Howell & Buck, 2012).

Identifying the differences between Caucasian and non-Caucasian students in terms of perception of faculty diversity and satisfaction with this diversity was the subject of a US study in universities where Caucasian students predominate. Their perception, in contrast to that of non-Caucasian students, is that faculty respects diversity among students. The latter believe that diversity contributes to improving their educational experiences, but, in contrast to the former, it does not consider welcoming the fact that the department is run by the Caucasians (Lee, 2010). In regards to teaching practicum Martinez, Miralles & Cabezas (2019), argues the need to establish hybrid spaces in which the relationship between theory and practice can be improved. Initial teacher training is necessary to integrate these spaces through effective reflection and dialogue among all participants in the training.

2. Methodology

Objectives

For this research there have been established the following objectives:

The evaluation of the institution's capability of training qualified personnel for an easy\fast integration into the labour market.

The identification of the students' level of satisfaction regarding the educational services provided by the pursued study programme.

The analysis of the suggestions given by the fresh outs in order to improve the quality of education provided by Adventus University.

Hypotheses of quantitative research:

There are significant statistically differences between the academic achievement, results for Teacher Tenure Exam and the students' level of satisfaction, depending on the year of the graduation.

There are significant differences statistically between the grades achieved at the finals, results for Teacher Tenure Exam and the students' level of satisfaction, depending on the graduates' gender.

There are significant differences between the grades achieved at the finals, results for Teacher Tenure Exam and the students' level of satisfaction, depending on the place of conducting the pedagogical teachings.

The level of prediction held by graduation grades on the results of Teacher Tenure Exam is extremely high.

Hypotheses of the qualitative research:

What is the graduates' perception regarding different specific aspects related to the quality of the educational act?

What are the suggestions given by the graduates in order of improving the quality of the services provided by Adventus University?

Variables

Taking into consideration the context previously depicted, this research tries to capture/investigate the impact that institution has on the education labour market, by assessing the capacity of providing high-quality human resources and the general improvement of the quality in Romanian education system.

Besides this crucial aspect depicted by influence at the level of an educational system, we will also take into consideration the influence at the individual level, accounted for by focussing on the recipient and on the educational institution's capacity of meeting the expectations and the needs of the primary recipients: students and graduates. The level of satisfaction points to the student's perception over the institution's ability of providing high quality education.

The graduates' level of satisfaction may be considered as a good quality subjective variable, considering the reality of every participant in the research as differently perceived at the root of this. Every record is influenced by the individual's personality, expectations, ideals, life experience and capacity of analysing the reality in a proper way.

The subjective elements of this variable are in perfect balance with the objective elements of the graduates' insertion in the labour market variable. The first one provides information concerning the internal reasons that motivates an individual's choices, whereas the second one provides information concerning the labour market and the graduate's ability of fast integration. This information is highly relevant in the context of the necessity of establishing good connections between the needs the job market and the provider of educational services institution's

capability to train good quality human resource able of fast integration.

In order to define the integration into the labour market variable, a number of indicators have been taken into account: The grade obtained at Teacher Tenure Exam (exam that allows the graduate the access on the labour market) and GPA\average grade of the graduation (which allows the graduate to enter to Teacher Tenure Exam).

The graduate's level of satisfaction regarding the received educational services will be assessed both by quantitative (giving a grade that would be taken as the level of satisfaction) and qualitative means (provision of suggestions, opinions, additional info).

Methods and Tools

The evaluation of the quality of educational services provided by Adventus University (Teacher Programme) through discovering the level of satisfaction felt by the university's graduates from the last two years, and their insertion grade on the labour market.

The method used for investigation the students' group was questionnaire-based inquiry. The questionnaire was submitted online and has been composed of early mentioned variables and hypotheses and includes both close-ended questions, which will be used for the quantitative research and open-ended questions, which will be analysed in the qualitative research.

The questionnaire was developed in Google Docs and was sent via internet to every graduate from the last two years and about one third didn't fill in the questionnaire.

Population

Around 40% of the subjects of research graduated in 2017, 20% less than those who graduated in 2016. Their age range between 21 and 46 years-old, with two well represented age groups: 22-25

years old and 40-45 years old. If the representation in the first and the most student-specific age group is taken as normal, the representation from the second age group can be interpreted considering its associated phenomena: vocational retraining, further learning, late qualifications etc.

Although for centuries males were usually associated with teaching professions, at this moment, the majority of teaching jobs are occupied by women, especially in the Pre-primary and Primary Education. Less than 6% of the last two years' graduates are men. Around 80% of the last two years' graduates have already been integrated in the labour market, in the field they were trained for, 14% of them are currently working in other fields, and about 5% of the graduates haven't found a job yet.

The graduates that are working in an area other than the studied ones have pointed the upcoming reasons: not taking part in the Teacher Tenure Exam, continuing the school education, and others. The graduates that don't currently have a job pointed one single reason: maternity leave.

Approximately 57% of the graduates are currently working in Primary Education. Because of its non-mandatory value, the Pre-primary Education provides less employment compared to the Primary Education. Another plausible theory might be the three-year arrangement of Pre-primary Education system, meanwhile the Primary Education system is a five-year plan.

The lowest GPA, according to the info shared by the subjects, was 7. Approximately 40% of the graduates have a GPA between 9 and 10. Only 20% reported a lower GPA than 8. Regarding the grades obtained at Teacher Tenure Exam, things are slightly different. Since this difficult exam embodies a national competition for the jobs available in the educational system, the grades are acquired as a result of a much thorough examination, compared to the final exams. Only one individual reported a grade lower than 5, the lowest grade that allows the graduate to have a job in the

educational system for a certain period of time. There is also a maximal grade and two intervals where majority of grades are concentrated: around grade 6 and grade 9.

Every graduate student was asked to pick a figure between 1 and 7 reflecting the level of their satisfaction concerning the educational services provided by Adventus University (UA), The majority give a maximal grade.

Around 15% of the last two years' graduates have already got their masters' degree. Another 17% are enrolled in a master's program. Less than 20% haven't made a decision regarding further studies yet, and the rest, around 50%, are hoping to enrol in a master's degree in the not-too-distant future.

The majority of graduates have stated an attendance of 20 courses per semester, the main reason of non-attendance being their busy work schedule. So, for this reason, more than half of the graduates did their pedagogical practicum on their own.

3. Results

Influence of the year of graduation

These are the results from the Student's t-test for independent samples:

- There are found significant differences for the graduation grade according to year of graduation: $t(29) = 2,78$, $p = 0,01$. The grades acquired by the 2016's graduates were significantly higher ($M = 8,92$, $MD = 0,75$) than grades acquired by 2017's graduates ($M = 8,17$).
- There's significant differences on the grade obtained at Teacher Tenure Exam, according to the year of graduation: $t(17) = 2,19$, $p = 0,04$. The grades obtained by 2016's graduates were significantly higher ($M = 8,19$, $MD = 1,60$) than 2017's graduates' grades ($M = 6,59$).

- There are no significant differences in the graduates' level of satisfaction on the UA's educational services depending on year of graduation: $t(30) = 0,51$, $p = 0,51$. The level of satisfaction stated by 2016's graduates wasn't significantly higher ($M = 6,15$, $MD = 0,23$) than the 2017's graduates ($M = 5,92$).

Gender's influence

These are the results from Student's t-test application on independent samples:

- There are significant differences on the graduation's grade depending on graduates' gender: $t(29) = 6,28$, $p < 0,01$. The grades got by males were significantly higher ($M = 9,57$, $MD = 1,06$) than females' grades ($M = 8,51$).
- There are no significant differences on the grade taken at Teacher Tenure Exam: $t(17) = 0,57$, $p = 0,58$. Grades got by males weren't significantly higher ($M = 8,50$, $MD = 1,04$) than females' grades ($M = 7,46$).
- There are no significant differences on the level of satisfaction depending on the graduates' gender: $t(30) = 0,51$, $p = 0,58$. The level of satisfaction stated by males wasn't significantly higher ($M = 6,50$, $MD = 0,62$) than the level of satisfaction stated by females ($M = 6,03$).

The pedagogical practice place's influence

These are the results found after applying Student's t-test on independent samples:

- There are no significant differences regarding the pedagogical practice depending on graduation's grade: $t(28) = -1,51$, $p = 0,14$. The grades acquired by the graduates who did the practice on their own weren't significantly different ($M = 8,43$, $MD = -0,45$) from the grades acquired by graduates who did their practice in an

organized group (M = 8,89).

- There are significant differences at Teacher Tenure Exam grade depending on where the pedagogical practice took place: $t(17) = -2,76$, $p = 0,01$. Grades acquired by graduates who did pedagogical practice on their own were significantly lower (M = 6,70, MD = -1,94) than the grades acquired by graduates who did their practice in an organized group (M = 8,64).
- There are no significant differences of the level of satisfaction depending on where the pedagogical practice took place: $t(29) = 1,13$, $p = 0,27$. The level of satisfaction stated by those who did the practice on their own wasn't significantly different (M = 6,31, MD = 0,51) from those who did practice in an organized group (M = 5,80).

Graduation's GPA and Teacher Tenure Exam's grade

In order to verify the grade of prediction held by the Teacher Tenure Exam, was used linear regression. The results were statistically significant, $F(1, 16) = 25,48$, $p < 0,01$.

Teacher Tenure Exam grade = - 6,72 + 1,66 x graduation grade

The value of the adjusted R^2 is 0,61, which means that 61% of the grade variation can be explained by the graduation grade.

The size of the effect has been calculated by this formula:

$$d = \frac{r}{\sqrt{1 - r^2}}$$

The obtained value was $d = 1,24$. In Cohen's interpretation, this value shows a very strong and sizeable effect.

The influence of attendance

In order to verify whether there are statistically significant differences regarding attendance at courses, we used the Anova One Way statistical test. Based on the results obtained, it can be stated that the reported differences are not large enough to be statistically significant: $F(3,15) = 3,15$, $p = 0,06$.

Teachers and preferred subjects

The graduates were asked to indicate the names of the teachers whose contribution they consider important to their professional training. Each mentioned professor received a number of nominations. There is a group of 5 professors with multiple nominations and a group of 3 professors with only one nomination.

Another concern of the study was the discovery of areas where graduates believe that they should have made more effort, but they only became aware of it after graduation. The champions are the three most important disciplines in the field: Curriculum Theory, Training Theory and Assessment Theory. The Foundations of Pedagogy, Age Psychology and Didactics are also mentioned.

It is noted that although graduates have indicated some disciplines that they think they have not been sufficiently prepared for, when it comes to disciplines where they have not received enough help, the information provided changes. Different subjects are indicated in this area. This time, the main focus on the didactics

The challenges of the first year of teaching

Graduates have identified the most important challenges they faced in the first year of teaching. Their knowledge is important for preparing strategies to prepare young graduates to cope with the problems often faced by debutants in the teaching profession. Problems indicated by graduates:

- Lack of a mentor or guide who can be consulted when needed;
- Mentally sustained effort;
- The large number of children in a class;
- Maintaining classroom discipline;
- Slowly collaboration with parents;
- Addressing children with special problems;
- Inappropriate parenting attitude towards school and learning;
- Lack of patience (on the part of the teacher);
- The large volume of school documents;
- Teaching materials preparation;
- Finding attractive teaching methods;
- Class management;
- The inconsistency between theory and practice;
- Designing activities,
- Class organization;
- Unrealistic expectations of parents;
- Relations with colleagues;
- Translating the curriculum into daily lessons;
- Differentiated teaching in numerous classes;
- Applying the theory learned during the years of study;
- Making didactic projects;
- Time management;
- Making activity projects integrated in one day.

After identifying the challenges of the first years, graduates were asked to indicate what they think are the most appropriate student learning situations that can help them succeed in the early years of work. The subjects indicated the following:

- Applying different theories and methods to classroom practice;

- Participation in several demonstrative lessons;
- Class management;
- Knowledge of the program and its application;
- More practice;
- Leading the students, disciplining the class;
- Work with children with special needs;
- Methods of communication with parents in different conflict situations;
- Differentiated Teaching;
- Ability to understand students' psychology;
- Pragmatism in teaching the content;
- Design skills;
- Evaluation skills;
- Capacity to coordinate a team;
- Time management;
- Communication skills;
- Better knowledge of specialized theory;
- Designing an integrated project.

As can be seen from the indications offered by the graduates investigated, they do not refer strictly to the competences they wanted to form, some refer to activities that they wanted repeat more frequently during their studies.

The main cause of criticism in the absence of the necessary skills for the first years of teaching was indicated as insufficient pedagogical practice. The initiative to supplement pedagogical practice in 2016 was a very welcome measure in this context. Even if the benefits will only be felt in 2019, attending to more hours of pedagogical practice will result in a reduction in the severity of problems occurring in the first year of teaching.

At this point there is a concordance between qualitative and quantitative research. Graduates who reported having completed their pedagogical practice on their own received lower grades in

the Teacher Tenure Exam than those who reported that they did so under the direct supervision of the practice coordinator. It is known that students who do the pedagogical practice on their own tend to give much less attention to accomplishing all the required tasks. This category of students later regrets this attitude and admit that if they were more focused on pedagogical practice, they would have had a smoother debut in the teaching profession.

Useful practices for the initial preparation of future teachers

The graduates offered several examples of practices that they consider useful for their professional training. These are centralized in the following, with the exact preservation of the form in which they were offered:

- More practical homework, portfolios instead of exams focusing information dumping.
- Teachers should also have practical and demonstrative parts in their courses, as much as the content presented allows.
- Better didactic training of the students, methods of teaching, offering of more opportunities for involvement in assistance and teaching, clear feedback after each hour of assistance and teaching - the teacher who assists and is assisted by the student to provide guidance; classroom management techniques; planning exercises.
- Didactics courses for geography, history, plastic and musical education should be moved to another year, not to the terminal.
- Making students aware of the fundamental subjects for their initial instruction and necessary training for Teacher Tenure Exam or Final Exam.
- Put more emphasis on the practical side of pedagogy.

- Afternoon classes.
- It would be better to do several more hours of practice and assistance because they are necessary to acquire practical knowledge.
- Less disciplines outside of pedagogy.
- More emphasis should be put on practical things, namely more emphasis on Didactics and working methods for a classroom where children who have different learning difficulties (ADHD, dyslexic, disabilities, etc.) are integrated.
- More examples of practical activities supported by teachers and more practical homework. More pedagogical practice.
- Make more pedagogical practicum, but ensure that it has taken place in real terms.
- The evaluation should be more rigorous.
- Greater consistency from teachers in applying the regulation regarding presence.
- More emphasis should be placed on pedagogical practicum hours.
- Put more emphasis on the idea of management within a class / group.
- Put more emphasis on Romanian language, grammar, training theory and pedagogical practice; taught by teachers in their own respective field of study. Involvement for students' pedagogical practice. Put more emphasis on practice and less on theory. The theory is forgot, not practice.
- More focus on: integration of faith in teaching, education and Christian values, the philosophy of Christian education.

4. Discussions and Conclusions

Graduates from 2016 and 2017 from the Primary and Pre-school Education Pedagogy Specialization, Adventus University, present several important features that provide valuable insights into the quality of education services provided by the UA:

1. Graduates have a very high degree of integration into the labour market (Less than 7% do not have a job due to being in the maternity leave period).
2. A large percentage of graduates have finalised, are in the process of finalizing or are planning to start a master's program as soon as possible (Only 20% have not yet considered the possibility of attending a master's program).
3. Most graduates indicate very high or high levels of satisfaction with UA's educational services (more than 80% of graduates show high and very high grades).
4. Graduation marks are correlated with Teacher Tenure Exam results, with a very predictable value ($d = 1.24$), indicating a strong relationship between the UA education direction and expectations at the level of the education system, assessed through official examinations (Teacher Tenure Exam).
5. The need for greater concentration on pedagogical practicum (both quantitative and qualitative research) has been highlighted. That supports the decision taken in 2016 to supplement the hours for this subject.
6. Suggestions, information and shared ideas indicate a high degree of responsibility, involvement, and ability to evaluate and analyse lucidly, extremely valuable features for promising professional development.
7. It is necessary to repeat the research on an annual basis, in order to check whether there is a tendency of regress concerning the marks for graduation and Teacher Tenure

- Exam results, identified in the quantitative research phase.
8. It is recommended to compose specific strategies to encourage students to perform pedagogical practice under institutional supervision. Quantitative research reveals very clearly that graduates who have done pedagogical practice on their own have received lower grades, thus diminishing their chances of obtaining long-term jobs in primary or preschool education.
 9. The formulation of future institutional development strategies should take into account suggestions and centralized information in qualitative research. The retrospective analysis carried out by graduates includes a rich formative load and a huge inspirational potential.

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Tables, figures and appendices

Operating the variables and hypotheses

Variables	Type	Scale	Values	Operationalisation	Statistic probation
Graduation year	VI	nominal	2016 2017	1 2	Student's T-test
Graduation grade	VD	interval	1-10	1-10	
Graduation year	VI	nominal	2016 2017	1 2	Student's T-test
Teacher Tenure Exam Results	VD	interval	1-10	1-10	
Graduation year	VI	nominal	2016 2017	1 2	Student's T-test
level of satisfaction	VD	interval	1-7	1-7	
Gender	VI	nominal	B F	1 2	Student's T-test
Graduation grade	VD	interval	1-10	1-10	
Gender	VI	nominal	B F	1 2	Student's T-test
Teacher Tenure Exam Results	VD	interval	1-10	1-10	
Gender	VI	nominal	B F	1 2	Student's T-test
level of satisfaction	VD	interval	1-7	1-7	
The place of pedagogical practicum	VI	nominal	On their own	1 2	Student's T-test
Graduation grade	VD	interval	1-10	1-10	
The place of pedagogical practicum	VI	nominal	On their own	1 2	Student's T-test
Teacher	VD	interval	1-10	1-10	

Tenure Exam Results					
The place of pedagogical practicum	VI	nominal	On their own	1 2	Student's T-test
level of satisfaction	VD	interval	1-7	1-7	
Graduation grade	VI	interval	1-10	1-10	Linear regression
Teacher Tenure Exam Results	VD	interval	1-10	1-10	
The class attendance	VI	nominal	daily 5/week 5/month 20/sem 10/sem At the exam	1 2 3 4 5 6	ANOVA ONE WAY
Teacher Tenure Exam Results	VD	interval	1-10	1-10	