

THE POSSIBILITIES OF USING COOPERATION BETWEEN EMPLOYEES AND STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY'S DEVELOPMENT

Bartłomiej Zinczuk
Maria Curie Skłodowska University, Poland
bzinczuk@post.pl

Inga Kaszycka
Maria Curie Skłodowska University, Poland
ingakaszzycka@gmail.com

Abstract:

Modern organizations function in an environment which is characterized by rapid changes and competitiveness. University is an example of an organization which employs adjustment processes in the face of dynamic changes and challenges presented by the market. The basic resource of every university is its teaching staff. The staff's competences result, apart from other factors, from the gathered knowledge and academic experience. A big role is played by students, the recipients of the university's services, in the process of adjustment of the establishment to the changing market requirements. In the face of a demographic low and intensive competition between numerous universities, giving the students an opportunity to participate actively in the university's development process is a task of utmost importance. The experience gathered this way will allow the students to gain practical knowledge which in turn will become an additional asset in their future field of work. This article analyzes the opinions and expectations which could be used to improve the functioning and development of MCSU's Faculty of Economics in Lublin. The article will present synthetic results gathered during the survey addressed to students of the Department of Economics. Conclusions taken from this research may provide recommendations for various universities and educational organizations.

Keywords: cooperation, academic development, education, partnership

1. INTRODUCTION

Universities as schools educating students at a higher level have played, and still play, a very important role in every society. Their role was the key to building the economy and knowledge based-society as well as raising the young generations. The institution of higher education is one of many in the social structure, which is distinguished by a specific set of accepted values (Geryk, 2012, p. 134). It is worth emphasizing that the process of education, implemented through universities, should not only accept the utilitarian goal to supply the skilled labour market but to create conditions for the development of the whole society through the acquisition of knowledge and discovery, mobilization and strengthening of students' intellectual potential (Drapieńska, 2011, p. 17). In public opinion there is a claim that universities play an extremely important and responsible role in the society. It involves, among others, responsibility for promoting the common good, conscious and responsible commitment to the challenges of the modern civilization, and promoting ethical behaviour and social attitudes for both the environment and the university itself (Seweryński, 2004, p. 11-20).

Universities as agents of social life are subject to specific market mechanisms. The broad socio-economic conditions and competition in the market of educational services have caused the universities to undergo a series of changes pertaining to adjustment and enterprise. According to B. R. Clark, the higher education market consists of three markets:

- consumer market – a market in which universities offer their educational services to other entities in the environment (the main group are the students)
- labour market – applies to the academic staff and is determined by the capabilities of employment policies free development by universities and mobility of workers
- market institutions – is a set of network links between the entities in the environment that influence at each other.

B. R. Clark points out that from the point of view of the relationship created by the institution of higher education the key role is employees and customers market (Clark, 1983, p. 162). This claim stems from fact of strong relations existing between the academic staff's competencies and preferences and needs of a wide range of educational institutions customers. When conducting an in-depth analysis of clients market it should be noted that the impact on the number of changes in the life and functioning of institutions of higher education have the attitudes and behaviour of students – the main internal stakeholders, understood as consumers of educational services and active partners of academic staff (Bieliecki, 2010, p. 8).

Students' involvement in participatory management of university stands for the ability to learn and improve their skills, such as: teamwork, decision-making and accountability, conflict resolution, negotiation and many others. Students treated by universities as passive recipients of educational services are placed by them on the margins of the process of studying and is the source of the failure of universities in the lack of ability to exploit the enthusiasm, ideas and engage students in the process of improving academic teaching (Bay & Daniel, 2001, p. 1-19). The basic benefits gained by the university which come from student delegations and participation in the functioning of the university are (Bielecki, 2010, p. 10):

- allowing the students the control of the process of studying and being a partner of the teaching staff,
- creating pressure groups interested in the innovations in the field of teaching and the process of studying at the university,
- creating information channels and new contacts between representation of students from different faculties and universities, in terms of enabling the transfer of knowledge, ideas and good practices,
- providing opportunities for personal growth and the development of interpersonal skills of the students who are take part in extracurricular social activities on the campus.

The process of active engagement of students in the functioning of the university allows not only to take responsibility for their education process in the selected field of study but also mainly increases the value of the practical experience which was gained. The involvement of students in the life and development of their Alma Mater depends primarily on the proper motivation and the protection of their interests. Critical judgments expressed by students about teachers and other university's members must remain within the area of constructive criticism. A key role in the process of creating a list of new teaching and organizational solutions is played by the guarantee of freedom of student's expression

and the right set of motivators to encourage them to participate in the discussion. Any attempt to discriminate students because of their critical views against the university and its representatives taken by the university authorities will provide, without any doubt, an effective mechanism for reduction or even cessation of cooperation by the students in the development of the university.

2. RESEARCH PROBLEMS AND METHODOLOGY

The main aim of this work is to analyze the expectations and possibilities of student's involvement in the process of developing and improving the functioning of a university as well as evaluation of the previous student – teaching staff cooperation at MCSU's Faculty of Economics in Lublin.

In particular, the aim of the paper is to answer the following research questions:

RQ1: Is the Course Assessment Survey an effective tool for improving quality of education in student's opinion?

RQ2: How students evaluate previous cooperation with teaching staff in the process of improving the functioning of Faculty of Economics?

RQ3: Are students interested in such cooperation and what determines their choice?

RQ4: Can the students' cooperation with the academic staff in the university's development influence the future students choice of university?

To verify research questions the authors implemented a qualitative study. The study involved a group of 248 of 989 students (201 women and 47 men) from the 2nd and 3rd year of undergraduate studies at MCSU's Faculty of Economics. The exact outline of the number of individual students according to courses and year of study is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: The number of students included in the study according to directions and year of studies

Course	Year	Number of students	Number of surveys	Percentage
Economy	2	190	38	20%
Economy	3	129	32	24.8%
Accountancy and financial management	2	115	38	33%
Accountancy and financial management	3	193	38	19.7%
Logistics	2	95	33	34,7%
Management	2	154	37	24%
Management	3	113	32	28.3%

Source: Own elaboration on the base of survey.

The questionnaire consisted of a set of questions – both closed and open. The survey was conducted in November and December 2014 at MCSU's Faculty of Economics in Lublin.

3. RESULTS

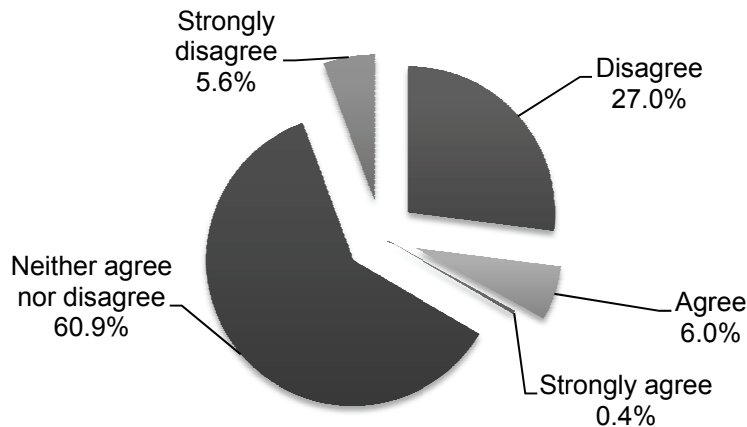
The Course Assessment Survey is used to evaluate the quality of education since the academic year of 2012/2013. The assessment covers all classes determined by the study plan and the main aim is to monitor the quality of classes taught by academic teachers, the identification of strengths and weaknesses of the education process, and indication of the need to take initiatives and implement remedial entire University personnel policy. The assessment is conducted by students at the end of each semester based on anonymous surveys carried out on the website of the Internal System for Ensuring the Quality of Education. Reports showing general results for whole University as well as average results obtained at individual Faculties are made public on the university's official website. Personal results are handed over to the Rector, deans and academic teachers who taught the assessed classes.

Of all the surveyed students the vast majority (74.19%) declares participation in the Course Assessment Survey. Such an attitude is mostly motivated by the desire to express their views and possibility to evaluate the teaching methods in order to improve the quality of education. Many students appreciate the opportunity to have influence on how the classes are taught and the way of keeping in touch with the employees. Some evaluators pointed out that they perceived the survey as a tool to express only negative opinions on classes and their teachers. People who did not participate in

the Course Assessment Survey have argued that their attitudes usually resulted from the lack of time but they also pointed to other aspects, such as: fear of lack of anonymity, lack of motivation, too many unnecessary questions and lack of belief in the possibility to influence the quality and course of the learning process.

Despite the positive attitude towards the idea of the Course Assessment Survey and the willingness to participate in it, only few of the surveyed students saw the change in teaching classes by the academic teachers. The exact results are showed in figure 1.

Figure 1: Do students see the changes in the quality of classes



Source: Own elaboration based on responses of the participants.

More than half of the respondents found it difficult to clearly determine whether or not any changes occurred in the quality of teaching. A large number of students, as many as one-third of them, are even convinced about the lack of impact of this tool on the quality of education. Such changes are noted by only 6.45% of the surveyed students and they pointed out such things like improved methods of imparting knowledge, timely start of classes and more easily determined forms of assessment.

The Course Assessment Survey has a chance to become an effective tool to improve the quality of education due to the attractiveness of the forms to submit opinions by students. At the moment, its effectiveness is questionable due to the changes going unnoticed by most students.

Our second research question (RQ2) provides an overall assessment of the existing cooperation between students and academic staff of the Faculty of Economics. More than half of the respondents (52.8%) have the knowledge of the possibility of such a cooperation for the development of the Faculty. For most of them (76%) the source of information about such activities was the Facebook profile of the Economics Student Union. Many of them found out about the possibility of cooperation on the website of MCSU's Faculty of Economics (35%), the dean's profile on Facebook (36%) and through friends (39%). As other sources, respondents indicated Student Associations and their profiles on social networking sites.

Just a small group of the surveyed students (15.3%) took part in activities aimed at the development of the Faculty of Economics. Most of them became involved in the implementation of practical projects, e.g. those realized through the SYNERGY project¹ (71%). Those students were less interested in organizing the conference and in promoting the Faculty of Economics (37% and 24%, respectively). Only some individual students helped change the general appearance of the building of the Faculty. Most of the students justified their participation in such projects by the desire to gain practical experience, as well as the possibility of personal development. Among those who have not yet participated in initiatives aimed at the development of Faculty of Economics the most common cause of non-involvement was the lack of free time. The study, however, allowed to obtain the information that some of the respondents did not know about such possibilities or received the information about

¹ SYNERGY – project of MCSU Faculty of Economics student's competences development by gaining practical knowledge. Project was realized from October 2009 to September 2014 as a part of Operational Programme Human Capital and was co-financed by the European Union from European Social Fund.

them too late, some of them did not see the proper motivation or incentives – these are the reasons which, at least partially, can be fairly easily eliminated.

Most students, who participated in the activities leading to the development of the Department of Economics, appreciated the cooperation with the teaching staff – they constituted 63% of the respondents. One third of the surveyed students were unable to clearly assess the course of the existing cooperation, and only one person described it as bad.

The results of the analysis carried out in connection with RQ3 showed that the majority of surveyed students (53.3%) were willing to engage in activities aimed at the development of the Faculty of Economics. They justify their desire by the need to gain practical experience which they could use when looking for work in the future, the possibility of having influence on the educational process, functionality and the look of the Faculty’s building, desire to improve the University’s image as a student-friendly place, and the possibility of contact with potential employers. Students who were not capable to clearly determine their willingness to become involved (31%) make their decision dependent on the form of the cooperation and the amount of time they would have to devote to it. Students negatively disposed towards engaging in such activities were the smallest group of the respondents (15.7%) and the arguments they provided to justify their attitude were: limited amount of time, lack of motivation or interest in this form of activity.

Among the types of activities in which the students, both willing to cooperate and undecided, would like to be included, the most popular were the types of activities involving promoting the Faculty of Economics and those connected with deciding on the design and functionality of the Faculty’s building. Almost half of the undecided respondents would not want to become involved in the organization of the conference. The results of determining the propensity of students to engage in certain types of activities are presented in Table 2.

Table 2: The propensity of students to engage in cooperation by types of activities

Types of activities	Students decided to cooperate			Undecided students		
	Yes	Maybe	No	Yes	Maybe	No
decisions about Faculty’s building design	77.3%	14.4%	8.3%	66.2%	19.5%	14.3%
decisions about Faculty’s building functionality	73.5%	22.7%	3.8%	53.2%	28.6%	18.2%
Faculty promoting	78%	15.9%	6.1%	61%	19.5%	18.2%
organization of the conferences	57.6%	15.9%	25.8%	20.8%	36.4%	42.9%

Source: Own elaboration based on responses of the participants.

Among the ideas for activities provided by the students who would like to be involved, some of the respondents included: improving the organization of work at the dean’s office, possibility to organize student’s event, open lectures, projects, trainings and workshops.

Students from both groups would like to be involved in such activities mostly once a semester or once per academic year. Slightly more than half of the students willing to engage in work for Faculty could engage in such activities once a month. For both groups it was not preferred to offer to engage in such cooperation more frequently than once a month.

Students willing to engage in development activities would like to collaborate most often in the form of meetings in groups or with the project coordinator. For students who were undecided, the most attractive form of cooperation was through the form available on the University’s website or via e-mail, as well as group meetings. Accurate results of this aspect of the study are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Forms of cooperation preferred by students

Forms of cooperation	Students decided to cooperate			Undecided students		
	Yes	Maybe	No	Yes	Maybe	No
meetings with project coordinator	78,0%	15,2%	6,8%	48,1%	31,2%	20,8%
meetings in project groups	93,2%	5,3%	1,5%	71,4%	15,6%	13,0%
individual meetings with academic teachers	53,8%	28,0%	18,2%	33,8%	39,0%	27,3%
e-mail contact	67,4%	14,4%	18,2%	72,7%	14,3%	13,0%
form on the University's website	63,6%	15,9%	20,5%	84,4%	16,9%	11,7%

Source: Own elaboration based on responses of the participants.

All forms of gratification proposed in the survey would provide an incentive for students willing to cooperate, however they would be particularly satisfied with credentials, certificates or the possibility of improving the grades in the classes related to their activities. For undecided students the most attractive form seemed to be the opportunity to improving the grades, while the least encouraging would be to receive a written commendation in the student's record book and receive gadgets. As other forms of rewarding such activities students proposed: paid internships, cash prizes and extra points when applying for an MCSU's Rector's scholarship.

The vast majority of the surveyed students (80.2%) believe that the cooperation of students and academic staff of the Faculty of Economics in the development of the Faculty would affect the choice of university for future students. In their arguments they suggested that many students, besides seeking interesting educational offers, also pay attention to the additional opportunities for engaging in different activities and for personal development, which could provide an excellent form of promoting the University. They also pointed to the fact that such activities would encourage the growth of the attractiveness of the university among future and current students, who are often the link between the candidates for students and the University.

4. CONCLUSION

The Course Assessment Survey seems to be an interesting tool for improving the quality of education and is willingly used by the students. However its effectiveness requires an in-depth analysis to obtain the answer to the question whether the survey contributes to introducing any changes, or does it simply go unnoticed by the students.

The existing cooperation between the students and the academic staff of the Faculty of Economics is assessed positively by students, but many respondents who are willing to join such activities did not have access to the information concerning the possibilities of joining or learned about them too late. In order to avoid such situations in the future, the use of channels of communications with students should be improved to allow them to easily find information and details regarding such a cooperation.

More than half of the surveyed students were willing to become involved in activities aimed at the development of the Faculty of Economics. Focusing on people decided to do this activity should lead to greater effects than taking into account also the undecided students, who were initially encouraged by appropriate gratification, but later may feel that the level of motivation is inadequate to continue their activities – for them it is recommended to create an opportunity to submit their ideas, e.g. via the form on the university's website or by e-mail.

Most students are able to see the opportunity to improve the functioning of the Faculty of Economics and a very good way to promote it by cooperating with the teaching staff, which is aimed at the development of the department. They especially appreciate the opportunity to gain valuable experience which is, without a doubt, an advantage and can raise their value in the challenging and competitive labour market.

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