

Difficulties in Accommodating Students with the Academic Environment

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Abstract: This article investigates the educational support opportunities which can be given to students in their first years of study in order to accommodate them with the academic environment. The data in the article is based on the research “Students’ accommodation with the university environment carried by Teachers Training Department from National University of Arts, Bucharest (Farca (ed.), 2018-2021). The methods used in the research are the analysis of documents, the analysis of data which come from students. This research highlights the accommodation difficulties that some of the students face when entering the academic environment, it showed their causes and effects as well as the educational changes which are necessary at university level. So far, it has been observed that there is a direct connection between students’ accommodation to the academic environment and the decline of the educational achievement and later, the decline of the professional achievement. The article selects the main accommodation issues expressed by students and the suggestions for academic improvement which have been conceived for them. The data of our research shows that a change in education is needed, that it cannot be left in the students’ responsibility and that their failures are in fact ours, the professors’.

Keywords: *abandonment of studies; educational changes; educational difficulties; professor training; socially extended adolescence; socially prolonged teenage; students’ accommodation.*

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1. Introduction

This study (Farca, (ed), 2018-2021) started from the general observation that when we face major changes in our lives, we channel our energy towards accommodation instead of development (Farca, 2019). In the educational environment, we need students' energy to be used for their own evolution and not for accommodation.

The first year of study represents for most students a major change of environment and of personal development. They are leaving their hometown for the university city and are also at the age of transitioning from adolescence to maturity. Students, facing both internal and external changes, need a university environment which is more stable, more regulated and which can answer their needs and expectations.

In the actual social environment, we observe two opposite tendencies which affect students: on one side, there is the professional environment and that of newly formed families which tend to be more and more demanding and to ask for more involvement and, on the other side, there can be observed a tendency to artificially prolong the teenage period until further age having young people live with their families and being supported by them after becoming of age, after reaching chronological maturity. The student is in between the model of the successful professional who spend all the time at work and the family man, parent, and dedicated partner, and in between the model of the kept young man who remains captive in school until 25-27 years old, afterwards starting other studies. Surely, when we confront the three plans which require total dedication: school, family and professional life, nobody can reach success in all three, and the choice, whichever it may be, is a sore losing.

Exactly this social issue offers school the opportunity to become a link between family and professional life. School is an institution which is part of our existence “school is like life” (Dewey, 1909) and there is no way for it to alienate itself from the daily necessities of humans. What is more, school remains a simple artificial and outdated institution if it does not serve its purpose of helping people discover themselves, growing up and live a fully life. This is because, for students too, “offering help [...] means having trust [...] in the ability to cope with things” (Vatavu, 2015, p. 45).

University training is more solid if it is achieved by supporting young people's professional and familial involvement and not by opposing the natural rhythm of their growing-up process. Therefore, the university

environment must adjust to the young people's development needs in the present-day society.

In this article, we identify those ways in which we can support young people's serious professional becoming starting from the identification of their accommodation issues in the first university years.

2. Aim and methodology of the study

The study (Farca, (ed.), 2018-2021) is based on a quality, lengthwise research-action.

This study expands at university level the research projects which have been carried out in the Institute of Educational Sciences (Farca & Cuciureanu, 2013; Velea & Farca, 2013) as well as (Farca & Velea, 2011).

The methods used in our research are the analysis of documents, the analysis of data which come from students. All students in the psychopedagogical module took part in the research, in average 240 students in every year of study: students aged between 19 and 55; 60% students who have changed their residency once they started university and 40% who have not changed it, 99% Romanian students and 1% foreigners; 76% women and 24% men. The low percentage of foreign students is related to the fact that they do not come to study in Romania in order to become teachers and the female percentage is related to the fact that opting for the didactic profession is more popular with women.

The tools used in the research were: surveys given to students upon admission and then upon graduation, didactic games and free conversations with students; the observation of students' participation in lectures and seminars; consulting school documents to observe students' involvement in certain stages (grades, number of interventions in seminars, number of attendance); expectations raised by students at the beginning of courses; students' suggestions and observations raised anonymously at the end of courses.

The purpose of the study is to create a coherent strategy of structuring a climate which allows the increase of quality in education in the psychopedagogical module so that more and more students will be able to become responsible and successful teachers.

The main objective of the project is to highlight the main difficulties which students face, and the support means which universities may adopt.

The specific objectives of the project are:

- identifying the main support elements for students in order to accommodate with the university environment

- supporting professors in understanding students and being able to create and maintain an educational environment which is beneficial for future teachers

- supporting collaborative relations among students
- ensuring an appropriate environment to communicate difficulties in order to solve them without stress.

The recipients of the study are those educational factors that want an improvement of the training environment.

The limits of the study:

- Our project does not have a broad representation because it is based on qualitative research conducted only with students from the National University of Arts in Bucharest. We considered only 250 respondents, which is too small for a quantitative interpretation. Additionally, all respondent students included in the study have an artistic training profile. This indicates that the results obtained cannot be extrapolated to other university training environments. Furthermore, the research being conducted in the capital, the data cannot be extrapolated to other regions.

- Our project was carried out in a very special study context because it was based on longitudinal research conducted between the years 2018-2021. Thus, the project has the advantage of covering 1.5 years of normal study (2018-2020) and 1.5 years of study during the pandemic (2020-2021), which allowed us to compare the problems that arose in different contexts. However, for the relevance of the study, it is also a disadvantage that the study included 1.5 years of pandemic. During the pandemic, the students' study context was very special and not very specific to a normal student life. Moreover, the pandemic created a special psychological pressure on students, which made some of the usual difficulties they faced either irrelevant or exacerbated.

- The international relevance of our research is limited to general elements related to the age of students and the characteristics of the university environment. This study highlighted the specific problems faced by our students in our university environment. However, in university environments in other countries, they face different problems, and some of the ones that are pressing for our students have been solved with local solutions. Indeed, we also sought local solutions, suitable for our students. If these can inspire other universities, their application will certainly have to fit the local context.

3. Results

3.1. Causes of the difficulties students face when accommodating to the university environment

The change of residency environment

Most students, on average 60% in each school year, come from other towns and the rural area. We have few foreign students (1% on school year) who attend the psycho- pedagogical module but for them, the cultural and linguistic changes are major and this, being a quality study, focuses on each students' accommodation.

In all these cases, the admission at the university implies a major change in students' lives. They live in dorms, in a tenement or they commute. Students start to take care of themselves, they start to manage their financial and time resources, they start to make decision on the training opportunities. Also, the contact with a big, noisy city, with lots of temptations, makes the adjustment more difficult.

These students are obliged to mature unexpectedly, everything around them changes and they no longer benefit from the support of the familial environment.

The risk is for students to spend too much energy for accommodation, and they no longer have enough resources and neither the availability for professional training nor for discovering new educational opportunities. Also, the students' struggle to adjust to the conditions they found upon entering the university to be trained, generates a frustrating mood and an injustice feeling which generate various outbursts ranging from simple discontentment to aggressive behaviour towards colleagues and professors, to school leaving. There can be noted some survival attempts through the establishing of interest relationships among some students and even professors thus generating pressure groups which hinders even more an institutional functioning beneficial for development.

The change of the school environment

In high school, there is a strict guidance of children while in university the body of professors expects a certain responsibility and accountability from students which they had never experienced before. Students in the first year come after 12 years of study in which they have been taught to carry out professors' requests, to learn the given materials without critical spirit, to comply with some expectations, to compare themselves. Surely, they cannot suddenly doubt, inquire, ask for help, to

discover various solutions, to enjoy experimentation, to analyze the information themselves, to study individually without a specific guidance. these skills must be shaped in time and with patience.

The negative consequences which have been pointed out during the study are students miss the opportunity to enrol in certain training modules, they miss the opportunity to participate in some activities and sometimes, they even miss some exams because they are not used to reading a schedule or because they expect to be announced personally. There are students who learn by heart, without being used to understanding contextually some of the contexts. They fail educationally despite making great efforts to participate and to memorize. Therefore, they feel frustrated and wronged and sometimes, they become demanding and aggressive. Sometimes, these students can impress their professors through their work volume and through their constant interest but their success, in this case, reinforces a non-functional and non-creative work manner and, here, the loss is even greater.

The frustration of expectations

Pre-university training, as childhood in general, generates numerous frustrations which lead to the idealization of maturity and of the future. Children often feel wronged, misunderstood, guided by adults' interests and they are looking forward to the moment in which they are freed by all of these. Most come to see university as an ideal place in which one can study what they like, in which they have only amazing people as professors and they enjoy learning from them, a place in which they have total decisional power, and nothing can restrict them.

In this context of idealization, the first year of university is a brutal disappointment for most of the students who discover they cannot always do what they want, that there are consequences for their actions, which were previously supported by adults, that they must face numerous inabilities and lack of knowledge. So, adult life is not as rosy as it may seem!

Also, professors from university as not superhumans, each having their negative traits as any other human being. Not all are good professionals in the domain, and few are also good pedagogues. If, when working with little children one cannot succeed unless they are good educators, in university the psycho-pedagogical training is often formal.

The students' frustrations in their expectations, some idealised, others natural, has a negative impact in their professional training. One can lose their enthusiasm, their interest and even their trust in an existence in which one can succeed on their own, on the right ways.

Our study has stressed out that, in the second year of study, this students' disappointment leads to a decrease in their active involvement in courses and seminars, a decrease in courses attendance (by 30%) as well as school leaving (25% on average for all training cycles).

The competition

A competitive environment is an energy consuming environment which sets students to observing other more than focusing on discovering their own potential. Also, the competition implies setting a hierarchy, a tense, tense fighting environment which can hardly become an environment based on collaboration, cooperation, and enjoyment for others' accomplishments.

The entire educational system is established this way by the scholarships system which encourages this coemption and chasing marks which can be obtained through any means.

The competition shifts people's focus from their personal training to others' accomplishments which are seen as a risk factor for personal development. This leads to neglecting their own training and the concern for the others' failures which generates an environment of tension, envy, hostility, intolerance, and lack of support.

Comparison makes people relating to others and not paying attention to themselves, to guide their development after a model in which they ignore self-discovery, fulfilling their own potential in creative behaviour. Also, the custom of comparative evaluation makes students judge other based on their "Ideal of the ego" (Lacan, 1975) which makes them less tolerant with others as well as with themselves, to be revengeful and unappreciative, generating a judgemental environment on subjective criticism.

The consequences of a competitive training environment follow quickly: focusing their interest in the grade and appreciating professors at the expense of their thorough training; focusing on others' achievements at the expense of their personal evolution; the prevalence of some negative effects as envy, incapacity, anger, feeling wronged as opposed to positive feelings like admiration, the collaboration interest, the confidence; missing the moment in which they can establish collaborative relations with their colleagues which may be very useful in the future.

Big training and age gaps among students

In the first year, students come from high schools with different training profiles and their specialized training includes very big gaps which

become deeper instead of improving in university. Students who come from high schools with a profile close to the one in university feel they are wrongfully held back by the students who do not have such a thorough training and they behave in a hostile manner and with superiority towards them.

Also, students who come for a second university either because they did not feel accomplished or because they are at the end of a career in a domain chosen out of necessity and now, when they no longer must support their children, they want to do what they have always dreamt of, something for themselves. And these students are also treated badly by their younger colleagues who do not understand why people that do not want to do the job are being trained and by their professors who do not consider it is worth it to invest their energy without seeing purpose.

The consequence is that there appear situations of injustice, missing some training opportunities, tension in the relations among students who would have bigger chances if they took advantage of the different experience of those who come from different domains or after a lifetime of working.

Too good of an adaptation

Education involves the formation of personality in its entirety, but the university course only deals with the thorough and specialized training of young people, neglecting the fact that real success in real life does not only depend on intellectual and technical skills, but especially on the level of socio-affective maturity that a person has.

Intense and prolonged demand which is required by the university training (3 years for bachelor's degree, 2 years for master's degree and 3 years for PhD studies) makes the young person focus on their academic success which no longer leaves time for something else. Most young people who are well adapted to the university environment have delegated their parents with all tasks for care and maintenance. These students reach academic success but at a superficial level. They have big grades, professor's appreciation but we understand that "the evaluated person has a certain level of knowledge at the moment of evaluation and in a few months or years, this knowledge can be richer, poorer or inexistent." (Voicu, 2019). That is why many students with academic success experience a feeling of loss of meaning with each completion of an educational cycle, tend to prolong their education and reinforce their dependence on teachers and parents.

After graduation, they are faced with difficulties of getting a job and if they do obtain it, they are not content with their jobs, they feel restricted,

unappreciated, and overwhelmed by responsibilities. Most of them do not plan on having a family.

The consequences of the delay between school-intellectual development and the socio-affective one lead to an inability to accept responsibilities, an inability to validate their own potential. The too good accommodation to the school environment is paid with sacrificing the adult life in which the young person misses the start. In this case, school loses its purpose of supporting independent becoming and the too good accommodation is in fact a masked difficulty.

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The difficulties of accommodating to the university environment, no matter the causes, create an impediment for a serious professional training in which the students are involved in an assumed manner, with responsibility and joy. Therefore, the university environment should take the students' specific issues into consideration and to support their accommodation so as most of their energy to be used towards training and towards achieving personal potential.

3.2. Solutions which can be taken by university in order to accommodate students

In order to support students to acquire the skills necessary to succeed in academic life, it is needed to know what they are faced with and how they can be helped.

Our study has pointed out more support opportunities which can be used to help professors. The evaluation of effects can be done only after finishing the study, in the implementation stage of the supporting measures for accommodation. As we are dealing with a research-action, the implementation of some measurements has already started at the level of our department.

The safety environment

A safe environment with simple, clear rules is an environment which is easily anticipated which favours students' accommodation no matter the environment they come from. Romania is a well-regulated country, with European laws which ensure equal rights for citizens. All universities have clear rules included in the set of rules for students and professors. The problem is at the level of the way we see things, and this makes us see these rules as limits which we can overlook if we have subjective reasons which seem relevant to us.

For instance, on rules is the non-smoking rule in university...but, sometimes, under certain conditions, we can forget about this rule; there surely some rules with regards to attendance and examination but, sometimes, for some students, these may not be applied; surely there is a rule about the set of rules of tolerant behaviour towards all categories of students but sometimes, the professor does not consider it is their duty to stop bullying among students when they happen.

It is a matter of mentality which the professor should change starting with themselves. It would help us understand that being tolerant does not mean subjectivism, it does not mean looking the other way when infringements take place. Also, bearing the normal consequences of one's own deeds does not mean punishment, does not mean that we are "good" if we allow these consequences not to be accepted. Eluding rules destabilizes the safety frame which we must ensure for all students and create a void of authority in which fear, uncertainty, and the need to create an arbitrary order come to happen.

All in all, having a safe environment supported by obeying the rules should not be optional.

The psycho-pedagogical skill of professors

Over time, we had a lot of colleagues who had been our students in the psycho-pedagogical module which they had to graduate. from the level of their personalities, being at a full level of professional accomplishment, they hardly understood the need of this training. It seemed humiliating and frustrating to them to be in a training module when they considered themselves as high level professors and with a great teaching experience. They were the most resistant and least open students possible, so it doesn't surprise us that the education system in Romania doesn't have great performance at the university level.

Even though the professor is a master of their domain, they need psycho-pedagogical skills in order to be able to create a safe, fair, the discovery of the self-potential and creative becoming environment for their students. These things are not intuitive, they cannot be learnt anyhow especially in the context in which society is constantly changing and education fails to reproduce old patterns. Yes, education is a field like any other, in which one needs training if they want to practice it! The professor continues to be a model in the university environment as well and therefore they cannot ask more of their students than they offer themselves.

All in all, the psycho-pedagogical training of any professor, no matter the level of teaching, must be seriously done and with the conscience of the importance of this training.

Our colleagues - professors, despite joining with a bigger resistance, have observed in time that the covering of the psycho-pedagogical module is not an approach of a traditional school, but it is one based on the joy of discovery, on playing, on the respect for each person's work and involvement. We have tried ourselves to implement some new educational theories in the psycho-pedagogical module and we do not dictate them to be learnt by heart.

The connection with the practice of university training

The Romanian education has a tradition in being theoretical and as disconnected from the real world as possible. This aspect should be revised at all levels, but it is necessary at university level. In order to be the future professionals in the domain in which they train, our students need to be prepared to apply what they learn. It is time we stopped the empty practical drills and the workshop and even the seminars to be held in real working units where students can have contact with the real professional life and they can also be paid and later, even hired.

This openness of university towards the real professional life is also a financial solution for both universities and students. The university would no longer have reasons to pay for workshops, sterile spaces for practice, and for materials when all these can be solved through some contracts with companies which are interested in hiring very well-trained graduates. There are numerous companies which are interested in getting involved by paying the practice of the students and for the services they will provide and for the fact that they have the opportunity to know and train future candidates for whose training they would have to invest after hiring them. The university could drop the scholarships (which generate a hostile competition among students) and it could pay only for social scholarships.

Students would have the opportunity to apply what they learn in various environments directly on the job market, they would observe the opportunities at graduation, they would observe their training needs in order to boost their development. When graduating university, they would be more familiar with multiple hiring opportunities from which they would choose knowingly. In addition, being paid for their practice would not need to hire in different domains than the ones they are trained for, and they would not be tempted to be supported by their parents more than it is the case.

The individualization of the educational process

Students' differentiated treatment is a very popular topic but, in fact, it is little put into practice as professors have too little work experience in this direction. Or the university education has a frame in which this thing is possible. There is the possibility of forming more seminar groups in order to have 15-20 students who can be involved in teamwork and individual work under careful guidance. What is more, there is an individualized work program with students that can cover a few hours a day. Also, the practice should be carried out in very small, well-monitored groups. All these are opportunities to know the personal potential of each student in order to be able to develop it. One can give up the unique standards, the comparisons among students, at the competition among them and can simulate the successful involvement of each one of them according to their level and interests.

Evaluations should be learning opportunities for students and also opportunities to show what they have accomplished, what they have succeeded in. For professors, the evaluations are opportunities to discover their own flaws in their didactic communication, in order to be able to correct themselves, to explain what was not understood in a different manner. It is time we gave up those scary evaluations in which professors are always looking for mistakes, lack of knowledge and incapacity.

4. Conclusions

The data of our research shows that a change in education is needed, that it cannot be left in the students' responsibility and that their failures are in fact ours, the professors'. Students' accommodation with the university environment has negative effects on their school involvement and therefore support is needed so that this happens as fast and as efficiently as possible.

A university environment with ensuring rules and more development opportunities help students feel like this environment fits them. And in a fit environment, accommodation is natural.

The old pedagogical customs cannot support universities in training the professionals of the future. If society no longer needs crowds of people with a unitary thinking, then the schools must also exit the industrialised period and focus on the learning needs of the people it trains. In a society in which the individual and their creativity matters, conditioning, rewards, comparisons, fear and competition are no longer accepted. It is time we had real educational relationships with our students in which we support them to discover their creative potential and we support their individualized training,

we help them not be afraid of mistakes, to take responsibility for their decisions and to enjoy.

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