EDUCATIONAL PRACTICE – PERSPECTIVES / PRATIQUES ÉDUCATIVES - NOUVELLES OUVERTURES

COMMUNICATION –THE CONDITION OF QUALITY ASSURANCE OF THE STUDENT-TEACHER RAPPORT

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Abstract

The impact that each partner has on the others is related to a number of factors (internal and external), but also to the depth and quality of the interaction. Therefore, it is necessary for teachers to call for operative feedback in order to obtain information on the quality of interaction and the effectiveness of the teaching process. In this respect, at the end of the academic year 2017-2018, we applied several quality assessment tools, among which the Questionnaire for the Evaluation of Student Teacher Interaction. This tool was applied to students from several faculties of the University of Craiova, attending the courses of the teacher training programme. The analysis and interpretation of the students' responses provide an opportunity for reflection for the evaluated teachers, a confirmation of the quality of their own activities, and also the optimization of certain issues related to the relational register. As with the other tools used, the one we introduced in this study was the basis for the development of the Annual Quality Assessment and Quality Assurance Report at the level of The Teaching Training Department (DPPD). From the perspective of developing a culture of quality at the DPPD level, communication is a relevant indicator of the quality of the educational relationship and a standard in ensuring good practice in the field of quality assurance in higher education.

Key words: Interaction; Communication; Quality assurance.

1. Introduction

Social dynamics and the quality of human relationships are reflected in the dynamics of the communication processes. The communication relation between the teacher and the student serves some educational purposes and specific needs of pedagogical and social nature. The awareness and observance of the teaching communication postulates provide a reference framework necessary for the

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pedagogical intervention. Moreover, the quality of the teacher-student communication influences the quality of instruction.

Etymologically, the word "communication" comes from the Latin *communius* (*common*) that formed the verb *communico* (*doing jointly, participate in maintaning of what is common*). A vehicle for social interaction, communication is understood from several perspectives: a process of influence, a transfer of meanings by signs, messages exchange, transmission and reception of value judgments, attitudes, affective states, psychophysical relating activity, co-sharing. From a paradigmatic point of view, the analysis of communication generates several paradigms (Ezechil, 2002, p. 13): systemic, informational, cybernetic, psychological, psychoanalytic, semiotic, psychosocial, socio-linguistic and pedagogical.

The quality of the teacher-student interaction depends largely on communication. It tends towards the status of value, along with other values (good, truth, beauty). Culture and communication must be understood in relation to one another. Didactic communication is a type of inter-human communication that aims to produce, provoke or induce a change in the behaviour of the "receiver". It is also a fundamental means of psychosocial interaction that is based on a set of authentic values For example, freedom and autonomy in communication are essential in education quality assurance at the university level.

We might say that student academic *freedom* can only bear one meaning: the freedom to be a participant in an academic endeavour, to partake of the freedom of the university in the pursuit of human understandings. Students are entitled to some other freedoms, namely the legal ones, and we are bound to observe them in the university" (Magsino, 2010, p. 36).

By contributing to the achievement of strategic management, *autonomy* supports the exercise of communication at the level of the University. Communication strategies help students develop their sense of autonomy, trust their own forces, express themselves freely, and formulate value judgments. "A recent experimental study shows that there is a 45 % correlation between the degree of autonomy and the student's success" (Lerma and Kreinovich, 2015). More self-dependent/ independent than addicted to others, academic learning cultivates student autonomy and sends it to the paradigm of the self-management of learning. Therefore, "the learning-centered paradigm triggers changes of the roles that the teacher has to assume in conducting learning (...)" (Frăsineanu, 2012, p. 29, our translation).

From a pragmatic perspective, "an educational system should: help the learner learn what he wants and what he needs, allow him/her to learn *how to learn* more effectively, motivate him/ her to learn especially those things he needs to satisfy his own desires and be socially useful" (Ackoff, 1974, p. 79).

The word "quality" comes from the Latin "qualitas" that has the meaning of "property" or "kind of being". It has been used since ancient times, and nowadays it involves a number of features that meet certain requirements. There is a "science of quality" among its founders being (apud Molan, Alecu, Cherciu & Cazacu, 2006, pp. 10-11, our translation): J. Juran (use abilities, usage), Ph. B. Crosby (compliance with the requirements), K. Ishikawa (the universe of adverse influences or losses

caused to society by providing a product/ service). When quality is appreciated differently from one country to another, the circulation of products in general and the educational ones in particular is obstructed.Therefore, it is necessary to relate to the universally valid aspects of quality education: focusing on the beneficiaries of educational services, empowering institutions, pursuing the proposed finalities, valorizing the human resource andthe existence of authentic leaders, stimulating innovation, encouraging originality, promoting communication.

2. Standards in evaluating and ensuring the quality of education

A term used in all areas of activity, quality is an essential factor in achieving and maintaining organizational performance. The main *senses* of the term "quality" (Harvey and Green, apud Molan, Alecu, Cherciu & Cazacu, 2006, p. 11, our translation): excellence (it refers to the highest objectives); "zero errors" (they can not be achieved in education because students are not identical); threshold (level achieved by an institution based on rules and criteria in order to be considered "quality"); financial value (it focuses on the balance sheet and efficiency and it aims to reduce the public expenses), added value or improvement (it has the disadvantage that improvement is difficult to identify and measure).

The paradigm of quality education is promoted by UNESCO at the level of education policy. Education quality assurance is based on communication, but it depends on various factors. The quality is related to the values and expectations of several groups of users: participants in the process of learning, employers and society (in its wholeness). It is said that "the evolution of the concept of quality in education reflects the amplitude of the promoted evaluation strategies, expressed in terms of: quality assessment (quantitative assessment, typical of traditional, pre-modern pedagogy), quality assurance (assessment centered on some areas considered more important, typical of modern pedagogy), total quality management (through global and open evaluation, committed to the entire system and learning process, with the participation of all the actors of education/ training – typical of postmodern education, developed in the sense of the curriculum paradigm)" (Cristea, 2008, p. 108, our translation).

The pedagogical quality paradigm is centered on the interaction between the actors of education, communication being one of the factors that ensure the achievement of the quality of the educational act. The quality of education is defined, promoted, assured and evaluated based on the values expressed at the social level, at the level of the school system,of the school and community based on communication.

The paradigms of approaching quality in higher education are important (*apud* Dumitru, 2007, pp. 10-11, our translation):

a) *The Traditional Paradigm*: the accomplishing and the assurance of the quality of education at the university level assumes the acquisition and preservation of a certain institutional prestige, of an image that gives the graduates the possibility of favourable employment on the labour market by obtaining more prestigious and better paid jobs;

b) *The Consumerism Paradigm*: The quality of the services provided by universities is appreciated in terms of the wishes of the "consumer" of these services, of the opportunity to obtain diplomas and certificates to give their holders the possibility of acceding to jobs and social positions of a certain level;

c) *The Scientific Paradigm*: the quality of education is determined by reporting the educational services and their "products" to certain rigorously established standards, periodically reviewed, in accordance with the scientific criteria;

d) *The Democratic Paradigm*: the quality of education takes into account the demands (needs) of the community, the society as a whole; the community participates, through its representatives, in establishing the educational policies of the university institution, formulating its claims and supporting, inclusively financially, the university concerned;

e) *The Eclectic/ Integral Paradigm*: the achievement of higher quality education must take into account the wishes and aspirations of the beneficiaries (of the students) as well as the needs and demands of society, in an equation which, through an efficient management, brings the university a high social and professional prestige and creates a good image.

In economic terms, the "clients" of the educational services are the students or the adults who are integrated into a short or long-term educational programme at an institutional level. Because education is a "service", it influences the way of quality assurance. Quality management encompasses a set of activities aimed at achieving objectives, through the optimal use of the resources. This includes planning, coordination, organization, control and quality assurance. One of the resources involved in the instructional-educational activity is communication, an important ingredient in the art of offering to others what we would like to be offered.

At the level of the institutional structure dealing with the training of trainers in the field of education (The Teacher Training Department – romanian acronym DPPD), the following *observational indicators* are to be noted: the existence of infrastructure, the provision of equal chances, the teaching activity provided to the teachers, the articulation of the curriculum, the provision of material resources, to mechanisms for quality evaluation and self-evaluation, the contribution to the field of research, carying out teaching practice, the participation in continuous training.

At Teacher Training Department level, *the principles of quality management* are:

1. Student-orientation, taking into consideration the individual peculiarities their needs, requirements and interests;

2. Developing a participative management and a quality educational leadership at the DPPD level;

3. The systematic approach to the directions concerning the process-based training and research;

4. The involvementof all human resources by maximizing the potential of each DPPD member;

5. The continuous improvement of the existing practices and the development of a good practice system.

Having communication at the core, *the Committee for the Assessment and Assurance of Quality* fulfils different tasks, including: the notification of working committees on various issues related to the specificities of teacher training on criteria, standards, performance indicators, methodology and quality assessment procedures, quality assessment instruments; it ensures the relationship and communication with the other quality assurance and evaluation committees at the University level; it disseminates the use of quality assurance documents and tools at DPPD level; it accomplishes the Annual Operational Plan on the basis of which the Quality Evaluation and Quality Assurance Report is carried out at the DPPD level; it develops proposals for improving the quality of education at the DPPD level.

The most important *tools for quality assurance* are: the applied needs analysis questionnaire, the evaluation questionnaire for teacher-members of the department interaction, the evaluation questionnaire of the teaching staff by the department manager, the verification questionnaire for meeting the standards, the questionnaire for the evaluation of the course/ seminar and teaching staff by the students, the quality assessment questionnaire of the training programme, the questionnaire for assessing the students' satisfaction.

3. Aspects of communication in the teacher-student interaction

One of the conditions for educational quality assurance is communication. Didactic communication is, by its very nature, a predominantly verbal form of communication that reflects the qualities of the teachers, students, and the quality of the curriculum. At the same time, it depends on the register of paraverbal and non-verbal components that support both the formative-constructivist interaction and the process of modeling the students' personality.

In this respect, "during the process of interaction in the teaching context, each subject internalizes and processes the information about people, benefits, results, tasks, role behaviours according to their own scheme, according to an individual psychological matrix. According to this individual perception-evaluation criteria, with a strong affective-motivational load, the teacher and the students decode the reality of the context, regulate, motivate and value their own interpersonal or group behaviours" (Dumitru, 1998, p. 120, our translation).

Interactive vision and transactional vision are preferred to linear vision. The latter is based on the telegraph model; communication is partial and the feedback is non-existent. Interactive vision ensures feedback and provides effective communication.

The transactional vision focuses on the following aspects (Ciobanu, 2003, p. 29, our translation): the messages are emitted and sent simultaneously; most of E and R are reunited due to co-participation; communication may be interrupted (temporarily or permanently) (...); it offers increased opportunities for interpersonal relationships.

In the communication between the teacher and the students it is necessary to take into account certain *methodological specifications* (Ilie, 2015, pp. 292-293, our translation):

1) When the teacher is open and encourages communication, the students feel encouraged and respected. They feel appreciated when the teacher gives them the opportunity to contribute or, in other words, when the teacher asks for a notice (which usually does not involve students). In this situation, the teacher does not give up control, but rather, he/she shares control with the students and encourages interactions that are agreed upon (open and supportive communication).

2) The teacher maintains a close relationship with all students being helpful for those students who are shy, introvert (who find it hard to speak in front of the others) or for those who have low self-esteem. The tension of these students may decrease or disappear when they trust the teacher, when they feel support and stimulation from him/her (tight, cohesive communication).

3) Having feedback is important, and from this perspective the teacher must establish a positive, emotional relation with the students and learn more about his/her students. Respect for students generates, most of the time, a sense of excitement. If, on this basis, we use multiple channels of communication in transmitting and receiving messages, there is an increase in the appeal of the communicative act (lateralized, bidirectional and/or multidirectional communication).

4) In achieving communication, it is important that the teacher uses teaching materials and teaching aids (traditional and modern) to ease, facilitate the spread of knowledge, to demonstrate, to motivate, to inform, but mostly to build and support students in building – ideas, arguments, theories, solutions etc. (constructive communication).

5) The communication of positive expectations favorably influences the academic performance of the students. It is important for teachers to communicate behavioral and academic expectations roughly-tuned for all students, not only for those at a higher level of performance (positive, multimodal communication – carried out frontally, in the group/team and individually).

6) The teacher can avoid communication barriers by the correct identification of the limitations and by knowing and valuing the stimulating ones (anticipative, flexible communication).

7) The opinions, views, divergent ideas that sometimes appear during teaching activities can cause confusion, uncertainty and even the refuse to receive, decode and process the content transmitted. Therefore, it is necessary for the teacher to resort to a communication pattern, which is able to facilitate understanding the messages and carrying out different tasks, contributing, among other things, to time and energy saving (complex, convergent communication).

The communication between the teacher and the student should be assertive and persuasive, responsive and empathetic. The involvement of the students in the teaching process consists of three dimensions: behavioural (presupposes the avoidance of negative and disruptive behaviours), emotional (it is related to the attitudes of the students and the affective responses to education), and cognitive (it refers to the students' investment in learning and it is defined both as their desire to overcome the requirements as well as their motivation or their self-regulation capacity) (Fredricks, Blumenfeld, Paris, 2004, apud Kraft & Dougherty, 2011, p. 6).

As a form of interaction, communication involves the acquisition of communicative competence, an expression that designates the knowledge that participants need for social interaction and the success of communication, that is, the ability to adapt to communication situations.The personalization of didactic communication is one of the reasons why, in the same educational institution (in relation to the same human potential), it is desirable to explore and address educational situations differently. Each teacher has his/her vision, a certain personality structure, and acts according to the philosophy of education to which s/he adheres.

4. Elements of research on student-teacher interaction

At the end of the academic year 2017-2018, the following quality evaluation tools were applied to the final years students (Bachelor – Level I and Master – Level II) of several faculties of the University of Craiova: *The Questionnaire for the assessment of student-teacher Interaction*, the Questionnaire for the assessment of the course/ seminar and teaching staff by the students, the Quality Assessment Questionnaire of the training programme and the Questionnaire for Student Satisfaction Assessment.

Table no.1. The distribution of the number of students per faculty and of the applied tools

Faculty	Instrument 1		Instrument 2		Instrument 3		Instrument 4		Total stud.
	Niv. I	Niv. II	Niv. I	Niv. II	Niv. I	Niv. II	Niv. I	Niv. II	
Agronomy	-	-	-	6	-	-	-	-	6
Automatics, Computer Science and Electronics	-	24	-	-	-	4	-	-	28
Economics and Business Administration	29	8	-	-	-	-	27	-	64
Physical education and Sports	63	-	-	-	-	-	49	-	112
Horticulture	-	-	-	57	8	-	-	6	71
Electrical Engineering	5	-	7	-	-	3	-	-	15
Letters	82	-	-	-	-	-	71	48	201
Mechanical Engineering	8	-	6	2	-	-	-	-	16
Theology	24	-	-	-	-	-	-	8	32
Science	30	45	-	-	51	24	39	-	189
Social Sciences	-	-	4	-	-	50	28	-	82
Total no. of applied tools	241	77	17	65	59	81	214	62	
	318		82		140		276		**816**

The questionnaire for the assessment of student-teacher Interaction was applied to students in the following faculties: Economics and Business Administration, Physical Education and Sports, Electrical Engineering, Letters, Mechanical Engineering, Theology and Sciences.

The tool comprises a number of aspects that are configured in a specific structure:

The name of the evaluated teacher:

1. What is your attendance to this course?

Mark 1	Mark 2	Mark 3	Mark 4	Mark 5	Mark 6	Mark 7	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
0-10 %	11-20 %	21-30 %	31-40 %	41-50 %	51-60 %	61-70 %	71-80 %	81-90 %	over 90 %

2. What is the teacher's attendance to this course?

Mark 1	Mark 2	Mark 3	Mark 4	Mark 5	Mark 6	Mark 7	Mark 8	Mark 9	Mark 10
0-10 %	11-20 %	21-30 %	31-40 %	41-50 %	51-60 %	61-70 %	71-80 %	81-90 %	over 90 %

3. Were the lectures presented in a logical sequence

1 - very badly planned ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ *10 - extremely well planned*

4. Does the teacher inspire students to learn?

1 - very poor motivation ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ *10 - very strong motivation*

5. Are the notions explained clearly?

1 - very unclear explanation ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ *10 - very clear explanation*

6. Does the teacher present the subject of the course attractively?

1 - completely unattractively ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ *10 - very attractively*

7. How is the interaction and communication with the students?

1 -very poor ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ *10 - very good*

8. How do you appreciate the impact of your course on your professional training?

1 - non-existent ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ *10 - very strong*

9. Is the recommended bibliography accessible and useful?

1 - very useless ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ *10 - very useful*

10. How do you morally assess the teacher's performance?

1 - very bad ⎯⎯⎯⎯⎯→ *10 – excellent*

Question / Score	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1										
2										
3										
4										
5										
6										
7										
8										
9										
10										

Total: ...

This questionnaire is anonymous, confidential and it is based on voluntary cooperation.

The Scale that transforms marks into grades is as follows:

Mark	9-10	7-8,99	5-6,99	lower than 5
Grade	very well	well	satisfactory	unsatisfactory

The purpose we have set is to get information about the teacher-student interaction. In assessing the answers given by the students we took into account the accreditation obtained by the teachers evaluated by the students.

The goals we have followed are:

O1: The related documents in the field of assessment and quality assurance at the university level and the use of specific instruments (with emphasis on the teacher-student interaction);

O2: The analysis and interpretation of the students' answers as a result of filling in the *Questionnaire for the assessment of student-teacher Interaction*;

O3: The formulation of suggestions and directions to follow in order to maintain or optimize the communication relationship between the students and the teachers.

The sample included 318 students (level I: 241 and level II: 77) and 6 teachers belonging to DPPD (University of Craiova) were evaluated.

5. Processing and interpreting results

After the analysis of the data and the interpretation of the students' answers, the following are observed:
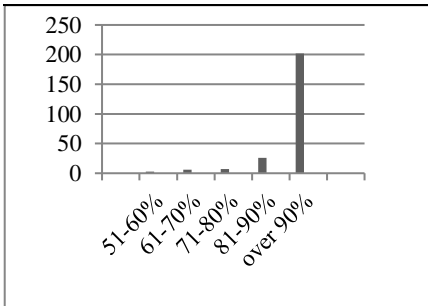
Item 1: Students' attendance

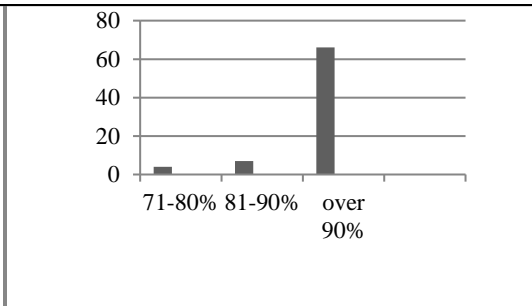| Mark 1 0-10 %	Mark 2 11-20 %	Mark 3 21-30 %	Mark 4 31-40 %	Mark 5 41-50 %	Mark 6 51-60 %	Mark 7 61-70 %	Mark 8 71-80 %	Mark 9 81-90 %	Mark 10 over 90 %
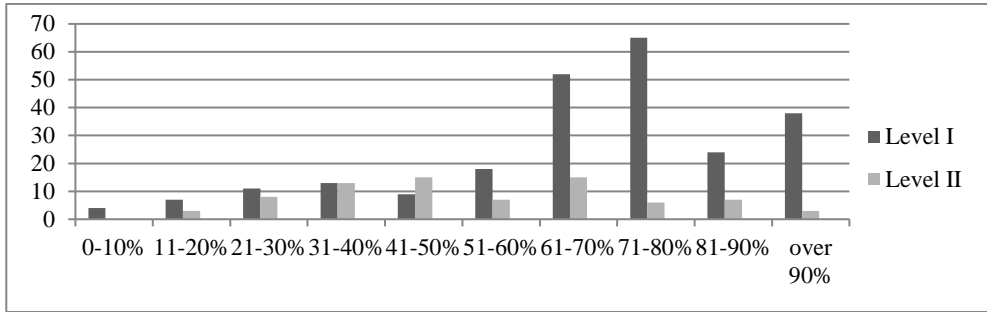
Out of the total number of Level I students (241), 197 (81.74 %) attended the course more than 50 %. Out of the total number of Level II students (77), 38 (49.35 %) attended the course in proportion of over 50 %. There is a decrease in the attendance of teaching activities for Master's students, the percentage of those with higher attendance being below 50 %. This is especially dependent on objective factors, many students being employed (in the field where they have specialized in their Bachelor's programme or other fields of activity).

Item 2: Teachers' attendanceof the course

Mark 1 0-10 %	Mark 2 11-20 %	Mark 3 21-30 %	Mark 4 31-40 %	Mark 5 41-50 %	Mark 6 51-60 %	Mark 7 61-70 %	Mark 8 71-80 %	Mark 9 81-90 %	Mark 10 over 90 %

Figure no. 1. Answers of Level I students

Figure no. 2. Answers of Level II students

Of the total number of Level I students (241), 201 (82.78 %) state that the teacher's attendance is over 90 %. Of the total number of Level II students (77), 66 of them (85.71 %) state that the teacher's attendance is over 90 %. Both categories confirm the presence of the teachers in specific activities (over 80 %).

Item 3: The logical sequence of the course lectures (very poorly planned – extremely well planned)
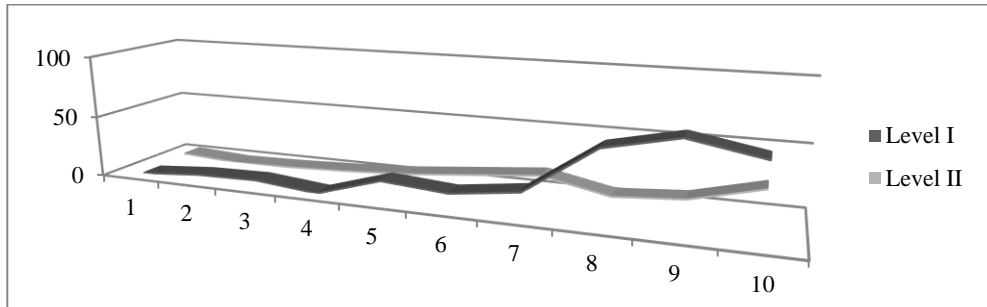

The percentage of the students who consider the lectures to be very good is distributed as follows: 53.11 % (level I) and 41.56 % (level II). The percentage of those who consider the lectures good is distributed as follows: 31.54 % (level I) and 27.27 % (level II). There can be seen that lectures are appreciated positively (level I students: 84.65 %, level II students: 68.83 %). The percentage difference between Level I and Level II students can be put on the extra knowledge and experience of Master's students and the high level of expectations.

Item 4: Students' motivation (very weak motivation – very strong motivation)
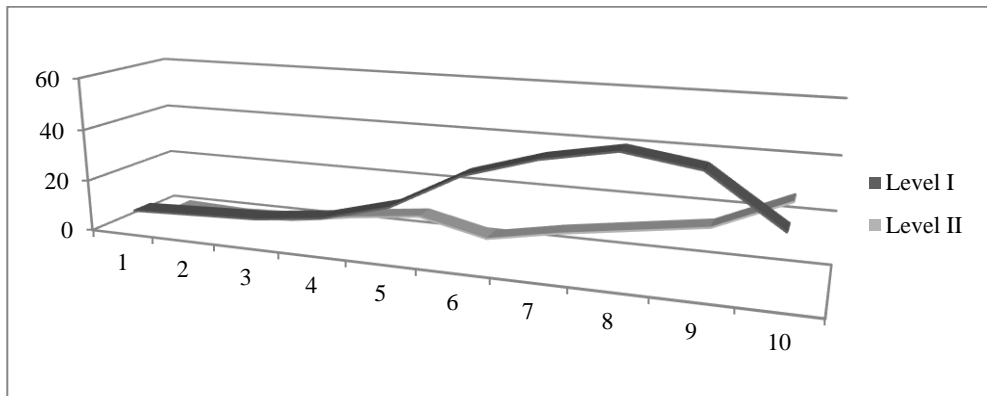
The percentage of students who assert that the teacher builds their motivation to learn very well is of 27.39 % (level I) and 54.55 % (level II). The percentage of those who assert that the teacher induces good motivation to learn is 36.09 % (level I) and 23.37 % (level II). The answers given by both categories of students are positive: 63.48 % of the Bachelor's students consider that the teachers induce the motivation to learn in higher conditions and those from the Master's degree in proportion of 77.92.

Item 5: The clear presentation of concepts (very vague explanation – very clear explanation)
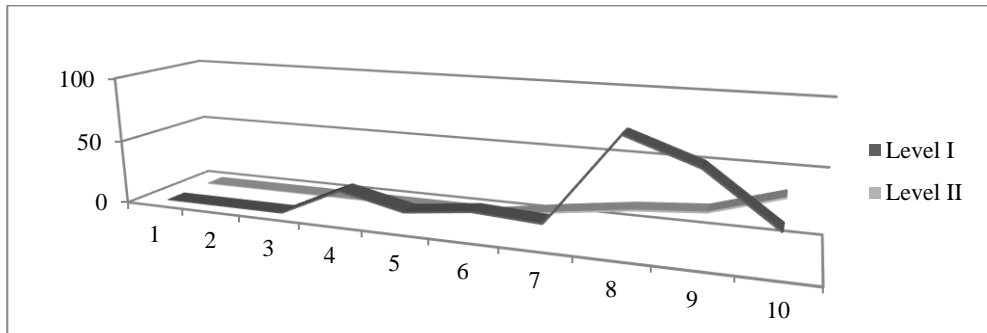

A clear presentation of the knowledge is an important condition in the teaching process. The students attending the Bachelor's degree gave the "good" and "very good" grades in a proportion of 78.01 %, and the ones attending the Master's degree, in a proportion of 100 %. This partly confirms the quality of the teachers' discourse, taking into account that the percentage of those who give the satisfactory grade is less than 10 % (for Level I students).

Item 6: The attractive presentation of the course subject (completely unattractive – very attractive)
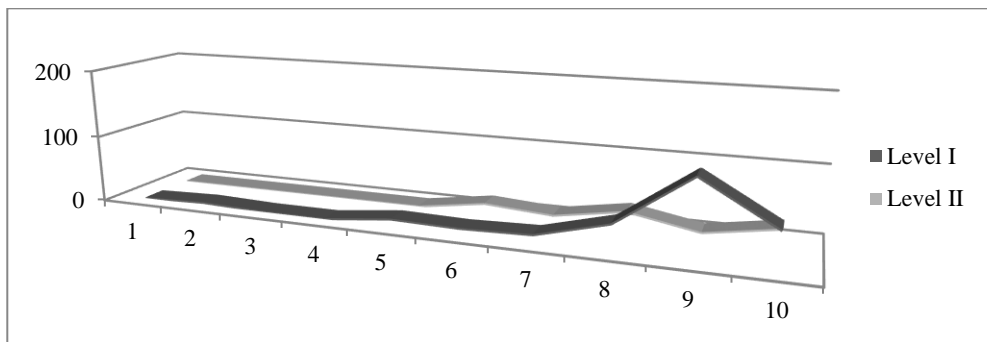
69 % of Level I students consider the course subject very attractive, while 37.66 % of Level II students say the same thing. However, there is no student who considers the presentation of the courses unattractive, the percentages being distributed in the upper part of the evaluation scale.

Item 7: Interaction and communication with the students (very poor – very good)
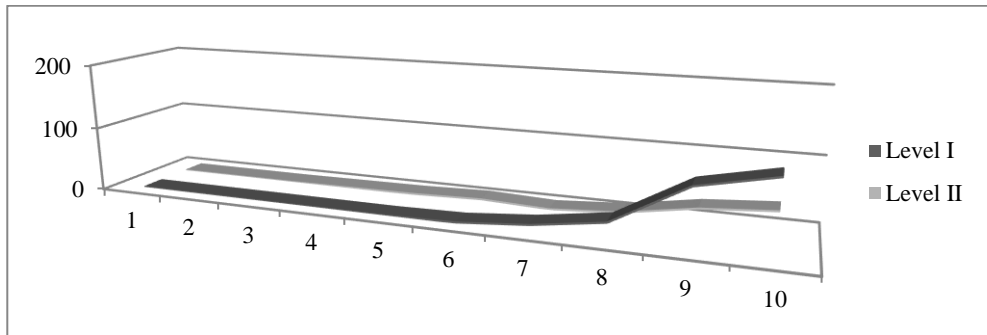
The percentage of those who gave the grade very good in the interaction between the teacher and the students is distributed as follows: 83.40 % (level I) and 77.92 % (level II). Admittedly, we can say that there is effective communication, which students appreciate and which contributes to assuring the quality of teaching at the level of the teacher training programme.

**Item 8**: The impact of the course on the students' training (non-existent – very strong)
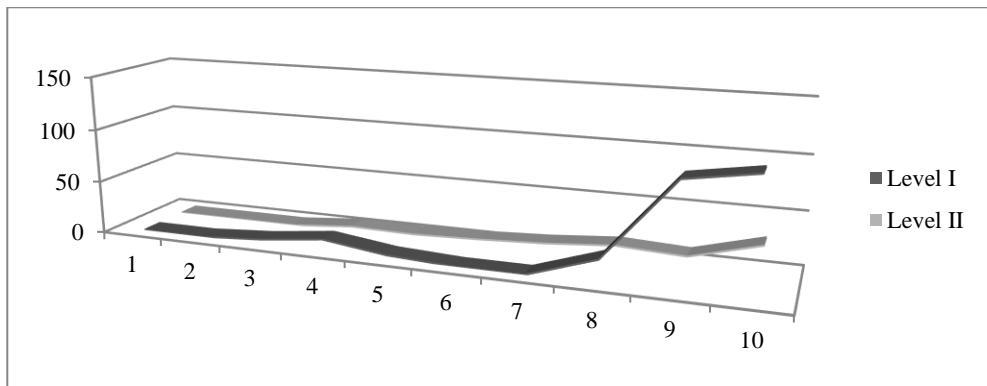
83.82 % of the undergraduate students consider the course impact on their professional training to be very strong. Master's students consider the same in a proportion of 50.64 %, which may involve rethinking the proposed curriculum content at the Bachelor's level, identifying that content that relies more on the students' interests, and meeting the demands of the labour market.

Item 9: The accessibility and usefulness of the recommended bibliography (very useful – very useless)
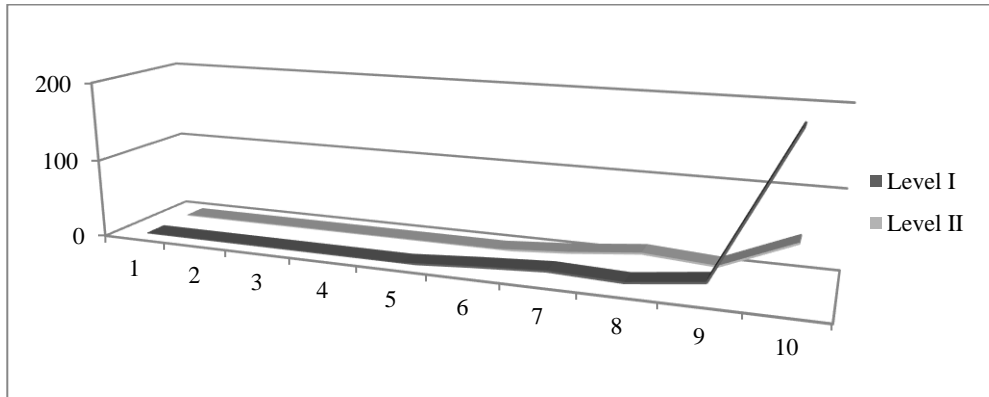
From the analysis of the chart, we find that most students consider the bibliography recommended by their teachers useful and very useful: 96.68 % (level I) and 100 % (level II). The recommended scientific papers can be found in the list of the latest studies on the contents of the course and seminar, and can be accessed at the library of the University of Craiova. This is one of the reasons that explain the percentages obtained for the top level ratings of the scale.

Item 10: The moral performance of the teacher (very poor – excellent)
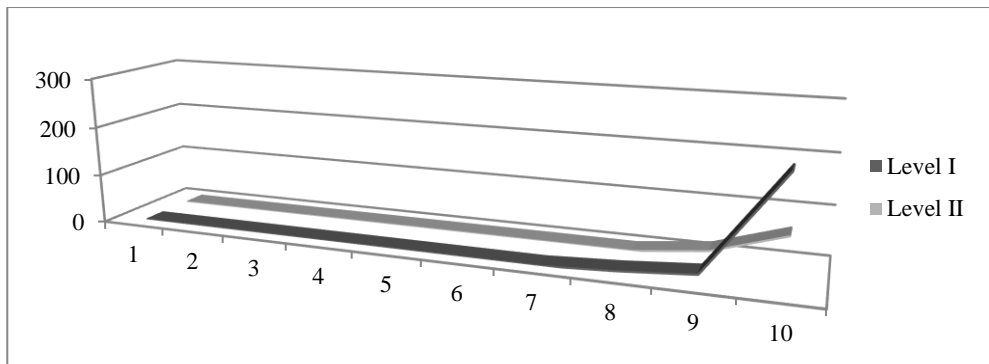
All the students surveyed appreciated the moral performance of their teachers as very good and excellent, which is why we can say that the relationship between the teacher and the students is an open, positive, constructive one.

6. Suggestions and conclusions

The students need teachers as communication partners. In the context of quality education, the latter builds a pleasant and safe learning environment. The students want to feel that someone is taking care of them, that they belong to a

learning community (each student has values that contribute to the development of the community s/he is part of). They want to feel strong (experimenting power means contributing to their personal development, increasing the quality of life and leading to the achievement of the goals). They need time to gain success and support in choosing the learning strategies.

Referring to the items of the previously reviewed evaluation tool, the following suggestions and recommendations are outlined:

- It is necessary to identify the needs of the students and to develop the most effective training strategies;
- Awareness of the personal and professional interests of the students should be at the heart of the teacher training process;
- A greater motivation of the students to participate in the teaching activities (drafting/ presentation of practical tasks, intervention in the teaching process, etc.) is required;
- It is desirable to increase the attractiveness of the courses by referring to concrete situations, by capitalizing on the previous experience of the students;
- The foundation of the usefulness of the courses can be achieved through seminar activities of a more applied nature, which can be found in various situations encountered in the school and class of students;
- The common contribution to the achievement of a successful educational relationship is the starting point in the teaching process;
- Through his/her professional performance, the teacher must remain a model to ensure effective communication and set an example.

Human resources (teachers and students) play an important role in the development of the University. The quality of educational services is ensured through communication. It can motivate the presence and participation/ involvement of the students, it can reduce absenteeism, and prevent their dropping out. The close collaboration, materialized in raising interest and assuming responsibility, contributes to the professionalization of the teaching career. We consider that our concern for the communication between the teacher and the students is a necessary condition for education quality assurance at the university level.

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