AN INSIGHT TO GENERATION Z PERCEPTION ABOUT THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

Suzana DEMYEN[1]

Abstract
The present paper aims to illustrate the results of a study carried out on representatives of Generation Z, regarding their perception on the quality of Romanian higher education system and its future implications. The paper consists in two parts, presenting main coordinates regarding the development of higher education system in Romania, but also the conclusions drawn after studying a sample of representatives of Generation Z.

Keywords: higher education, quality, Generation Z, change

JEL : I21, I23

1. CHALLENGES AND PERSPECTIVES REGARDING HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

Literature states that "education, especially at the tertiary level is a great leap towards achieving robust human capital development for an economy that seeks competitive advantage" (Mubashiru Olayiwola et al., 2016).

After the revolution in 1989, a decisive year for Romania, mutations in higher education have occurred from a year to another, taking place changes that highlight the desire for change and for progress, implicitly. According to the chronicles of the current research, important movements consisted in "the increase of the number of higher education institutions, the creation and development of autonomy and the democratization of the academic management, the global financing, the implementation of the strategic management in universities" (Calisro, 2004).

The development of education is one of the main points on the Europe 2020 Agenda, the proposed indicators aiming both at reducing the dropout rate by 3% and increasing the number of higher education graduates by at least 40%. At the same time, there were developed numerous "empirical studies on the relationship between higher education and human capital development" (Bokana and Akinola, 2017).

The importance of education for the whole society cannot be disputed, nor the impact that the educational policies have on the general level of development. The implications for the development of the present and future society cannot be denied (Barbu, 2010). Investing in human capital is a compulsory criterion for progress (Ozturk, 2001), even though the effort at national level may seem difficult for a state. But a change for the better cannot happen in the absence of a high level

---

[1] Lecturer PhD University „Eftimie Murgu" of Resita, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Romania, s.demyen@uem.ro

of educational, while the refusal to make investments today may have negative repercussions in the future.

The implementation of European policies in the field of promotion of quality in higher education comprises the evolution of two stages, namely:

1. The Sorbonne Declaration (1998), aiming the implementation of the European Higher Education Area.

2. The Bologna Declaration (1999), being formulated objectives regarding the integration of higher education systems until 2011 through the system of diploma recognition, the system of European transferable credits (ECTS), the promotion of students and teachers the mobility programmes, the promotion of the European dimension of higher education (Baciu, 2014).

Studies conducted during the last decade have shown that higher education directly influences the economic growth rate of a country, making an important contribution to the medium and long term economic development.

At the same time, it is important to note that there are also differences of mentality and differences of perception, from one generation to another, the opinions of today's students being different in comparison with those of students from previous generations and also different from those of teachers.

Generation Z, in particular, is much different from that of parents and grandparents, presenting specific characteristics, which tilt the balance towards a much higher level of independence and a much lower level of conformity.

The labor market now faces a "coexistence" of generations, a process that can often lead to conflicts or intergenerational misunderstandings, given that we find representatives of four generations of employees: those belonging to Baby Boomers, Generation X, Generation Y, respectively Generation Z.

Certainly, the perspective of education as a starting point, as well as the successes on the professional level are perceived in a completely different way by the representatives of each of these categories, as well as the differences in attitude towards work and skills.

If the Baby Boomers generation was characterized by a high level of competitiveness, awareness of teamwork, concentration and some dependence on workplace safety, operating on the principle of fairness and personal development, generations X and Y differ greatly.

In the case of Generation X, we notice a greater openness to change and an easier acceptance of it, but also some pragmatism, autonomy, being a result-oriented generation, which values creativity, independence, all based on a confidence in one's own person and a flexible character, emphasizing the balance between professional and personal life.

Generation Y, on the other hand yourself, demonstrates a higher level of optimism, responsibility and sociability, while facing the technological and digital challenges. The challenges that have emerged over time indicate an openness to teamwork, a practical sense and an intense concentration on the career, proposing short-term goals.

According to the research, the differences between generations from the point of view of education mainly consist in the fact that the students' perception of the educational process differs from a year to another, and there are also discrepancies compared with the perspective of teachers.

Compared to previous generations, members of Generation Z express their dissatisfaction more easily, express greater courage, being informed about their rights and having an independent character, oriented largely towards technology,

rejecting the classical learning methods (according to report on the Quality of higher education in Romania: an institutional analysis of current trends, 2011).

The year 1990 represented the starting point of many significant changes, laying the foundations of private universities, offering study programs in various fields: economic, financial, accounting, legal, human resources, etc.

However, the lack of a correlation between the increasing number of students and the overall number of teachers, has led, according to the reports elaborated by the specialized offices in the field, to a decrease in the quality of the higher education. A consequence of this fact was the decrease of the confidence of the employers in the level of preparation of the students, the effects being noticed on the labor market.

"Student-centered education" is the tendency promoted by the Bologna system. The teachers have the role to guide the students throughout the university years. Each has a well-established role in the development of an education focused on the needs of the student, but if a certain factor is not involved in this whole process, this hinders the entire implementation process. The student is not regarded as an inactive person, but in the process of education and training, he is respected, being an important member of the team in the process of building each step for the future.

In Romania, the traditional idea of assimilating too much theoretical knowledge is still being promoted, to the detriment of the applicative part, mainly because the plans made at the higher level do not foresee a balancing of them, while the employers emphasize too much on candidates having a high level of employment experience, even in the case of young people just graduating a faculty programme. The consequences often consist of a "penalty" of students for wanting to work during their studies, although their intention is reasonable, in line with the demands of potential employers.

The perception of quality is most often subjective, individual expectations being different from one person to another.

As a criterion for the transparency of information, universities publish quality reports annually, including information on record control, managerial responsibility, quality planning and objectives, internal communication, managerial analysis, infrastructure, working environment, processes related to customer relations, monitoring, audit, non-compliance control.

2. THE PERCEPTION OF GENERATION Z ON THE QUALITY OF THE HIGHER EDUCATION IN ROMANIA

According to the specialized reports published by the evaluation offices in the field, there are still many problems in the education system, that affect the quality level of the education process. We started the case study from the hypothesis that there is not yet a sufficient harmony between theory and practice, the students considering that there is a lot of unstructured information, and intense training is required. Also, the norms established at national level often limit, through methodologies, the passage to an applicative system.

2.1. Research methodology and objectives

The study mainly aims to obtain relevant, real and representative information on the quality of the tertiary education system in Romania, following

the perception of the Generation Z, that is, of the persons born after 1995, on this aspect.

To outline the research in optimal conditions, we have elaborated below the research methodology, comprising the following aspects:

Table 1 The research methodology

1. preliminary stage	2. design stage	3. realization stage
- identification of the problem under investigation; - establishing the research objectives; - establishing the importance and usefulness of the research, by means of the final conclusions;	- selection of information sources; - identification of the means of data collection; - scheduling research;	- collecting information from the sources previously identified; - data processing; - data analysis and interpretation; - verification of hypotheses; - presentation of the conclusions.

The research focuses on residents of Caraş-Severin, Timiş and Arad counties, born after 1995, surveyed through a pilot sample of 160 people, randomly selected, by unrepeated survey, the respondents offering the answers to the questionnaire independently and voluntarily. Of the 160 respondents, 47.5% were female, 52.5% were male subjects. The research was carried out in accordance with a number of previously established objectives, of which **a main objective** and a series of **secondary objectives**. The latter refer to:
- identifying the respondents' perception regarding the overall quality of the higher education in Romania;
- identifying the most performing form of education;
- identifying the degree of participation of the respondents in consultations or debates;
- identifying the possible proposals of the respondents regarding the higher education system;
- identifying the level of confidence for the Romanian higher education system in terms of preparing students for the labor market.

2.2. Data collection

The questionnaire-based survey was conducted through Google Forms, which had a much higher response rate. The administration period was November 2018 - January 2019, the respondents being both male and female. The questionnaire comprised two main parts:
1. *information regarding the perception of the respondents* in relation to the overall quality of the tertiary educational system;
2. *information regarding the identification of the respondent*.

The number of questions was 15, all closed, of which 12 content questions and 3 identification questions, the answers of the subjects being independent of any intervention of the interview operator.

The respondents were asked to answer questions with a simple choice, respectively to give each element / factor a grade from 1 to 5, the grade 5 being the maximum level and meaning a very good rating.

2.3. Presentation of the obtained results

The results obtained using the questionnaire were presented in graphical form, with the exact illustration of the percentages representing the answers of the respondents who formed the basis of the sample. Thus, the obtained results can be illustrated in the following way, the verification of the results being realized by estimating the degree of homogeneity of the answers offered by the respondents. It is necessary to test the results by means of statistical methods, following further verification by calculating indicators as: weighted arithmetic mean, mode, dispersion, mean squared deviation, coefficient of variation.
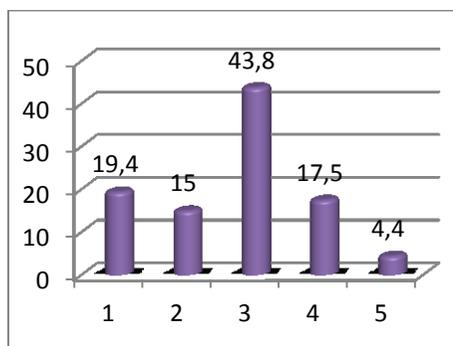

Figure 1 - Assessment of the overall quality of the educational system in Romania
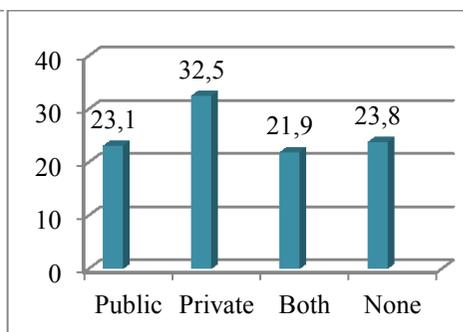(Source: computation made by author)

Figure 2 – The form of education considered the most performant
(Source: computation made by author)

Following the centralization of the results, we observe that most of the respondents indicate an average quality of higher education in Romania, 70 respondents out of 160 estimating a grade 3, in a proportion of 43.8%, while the maximum grade 5 is attributed in the smallest proportion: 4.4%. Most of the surveyed subjects still declare a high level of confidence in the Romanian universities in terms of training students for the labor market. The lowest score: 1, is selected by a number of 31 persons, respectively 19.38% of the respondents.

The obtained results showed that the preferred form of education is the private one, to a greater extent of respondents, registering a weight of 32.5%, but close is the public education also (23.1%), while a part of the surveyed subjects state that they do not wish to attend further a form of higher education (23.8%).

Table 2 Statistical verification of results

Points awarded	1		2		3		4		5	
Frequency	Nr	Percentage	Nr	Percentage	Nr	Percentage	Nr	Percentage	Nr	Percentage
TOTAL = 160	31	19.38%	23	14,42%	70	43.8%	28	18%	7	4.4%
Indicator	$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{m}(x_i * n_i)}{\sum_{i=1}^{m} ni}$		Mo		$\sigma^2 = \frac{\sum(xi-\bar{x})^2 * ni}{\sum ni}$		$\sigma = \sqrt{\sigma^2}$		$v = \frac{\sigma}{\bar{x}} * 100$	
Value	2.73		N=3, f=70		1.20		1.10		40.29	

(Source: computation made by author)

Statistical verification using statistical indicators, shows us that by calculating the weighted arithmetic mean, we identify a value of 2.73, above the standard average of 2.5. On the other hand, by calculating the coefficient of variation we observe an average level of the scattering of the answers, implicitly a relative level of representativeness.

The answers are also influenced by the current position held by the respondents, respectively by conjunctural factors, the quality of an educational system being evaluated differently by a person who has found a job and is currently employed in the field in which he/she graduated their studies, compared to a person who works in a completely different field.
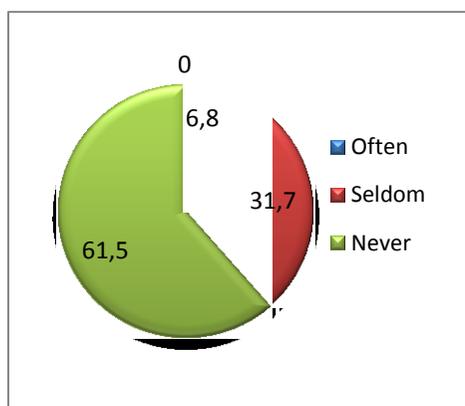

Figure 3 - Frequency of participating in consultations on the issue of education
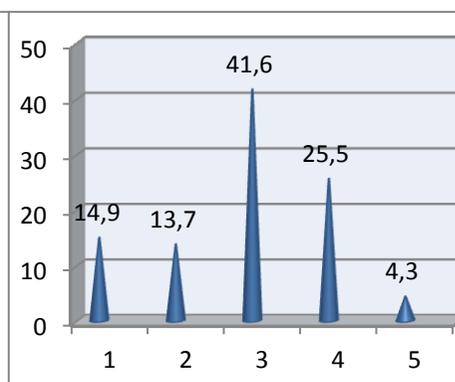*(Source:* computation made by author)

Figure 4 – Appreciation of the overall quality of the Romanian higher education system
(Source: computation made by author)

The results showed that the most part the respondents never participated in debates regarding the issue of Romanian education (61.9%), while the people who attended these consultations represent 6.8% of the total responses. A proportion of 38.5% consider that to a small extent, their ideas may influence certain aspects of the higher education system, while a proportion of 3.7% considers that their proposals result in the modification of certain aspects of the educational system at national level.

An opinion shared by a large percentage of respondents is that the research system in Romania does not rise to international performance standards (62.5%).

Following the centralization of the results, we note that most of the respondents indicate an average quality of higher education in Romania, 67 respondents out of 160 giving a grade 3, a proportion of 41.6%, while the maximum number of points: 5, is assigned in the lowest proportion - 4.3%, and the lowest score - 1, is selected by a number of 24 persons, respectively 14.9% of the respondents.

Table 3 Statistical verification of results

Points awarded	1		2		3		4		5	
Frequency	Nr	Percentage	Nr	Percentage	Nr	**Frequency**	Nr	Percentage	Nr	Percentage
TOTAL = 160	24	14.9%	22	13.7%	67	41.6%	41	25.5%	6	4.3%
Indicator	$\bar{x} = \dfrac{\sum_{i=1}^{m}(x_i * n_i)}{\sum_{i=1}^{m} ni}$		Mo		$\sigma^2 = \dfrac{\sum (xi - \bar{x})^2 * ni}{\sum ni}$		$\sigma = \sqrt{\sigma^2}$		$v = \dfrac{\sigma}{\bar{x}} * 100$	
Value	2.89		N=3, f=67		1.15		1.07		37.02	

(Source: computation made by author)

The verification of the results through statistical indicators, shows us that by calculating the weighted arithmetic mean, we identify a value of 2.89, above the standard average of 2.5. Regarding the calculation of the coefficient of variation, we observe an average level of the scattering of the answers, implicitly a relative representativeness, but which tends towards a homogeneity character. There are differences on several aspects, related to the fact that: the surveyed people appreciated the overall quality of the higher education in Romania differently, because some people acquire a higher degree of realism from their personal experiences and also objectivity, induced by the personal evolution and individual development and education process.
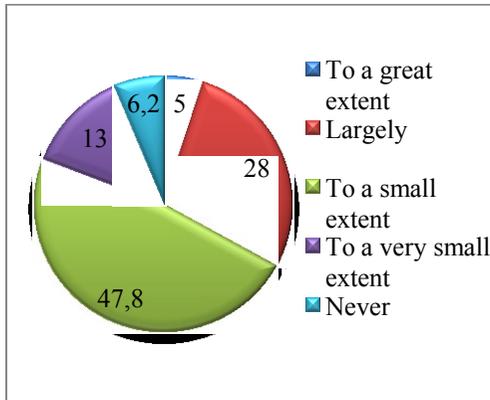

Figure 5 - Concentration of higher education on market requirements
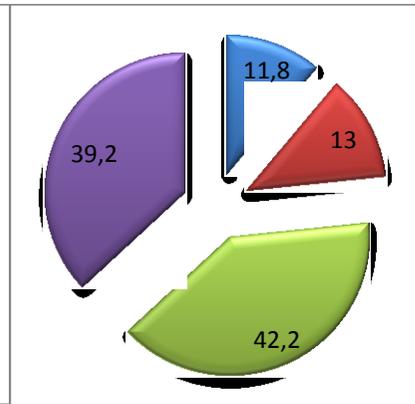*(Source*: computation made by author)

Figure 6 – The capacities that a performing teacher must possess
(Source: computation made by author)

Following the centralization of the results, we note that most of the respondents considered that the higher education concentrates to a small extent on the market requirements, 77 out of 160 respondents granting grade 3, in a proportion of 48.1%, while the maximum mark 5 it is assigned in the smallest proportion - 4.38%, and the lowest - 1, is selected by a number of 10 persons, respectively 6.25% of the respondents.

The interviewees considered that the important qualities that a performing teacher must possess are: good professional training (42.2%), respectively the ability to easily and adequately establish relationships with others (11.8%) and the ability to communicate effectively with students.

Table 4 Statistical verification of results

Points awarded	1		2		3		4		5	
Frequency	Nr	Percentage	Nr	Percentage	Nr	**Frequency**	Nr	Percentage	Nr	Percentage
TOTAL = 160	10	6.25%	21	13,13%	77	48.1%	45	28,14%	7	4,38%
Indicator	$\bar{x} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{m}(x_i * n_i)}{\sum_{i=1}^{m} ni}$		Mo		$\sigma^2 = \frac{\sum(xi-\bar{x})^2 * ni}{\sum ni}$		$\sigma = \sqrt{\sigma^2}$		$v = \frac{\sigma}{\bar{x}} * 100$	
Value	3.11		N=3, f=77		0.82		0.91		0.29	

(Source: computation made by author)

By calculating the coefficient of variation, we observe that there is a very high degree of representativeness of the answers, and the average is perfectly usable, the results of the research possible to be extrapolated to a larger population.

In conclusion, regarding the relationship between educational institutions and the business environment, from the perspective of the graduates' employability on the labor market, we are dealing with an important image gap. On the one hand, we have the image built by the perceptions of teachers and students that the educational offer in higher education sector corresponds to the demands of the labor market, and universities prepare graduates to meet the challenges at the workplace. We also note the image built by employers' perceptions, which shows a relative lack of confidence in the capacity of educational institutions to provide well-trained graduates for the labor market.
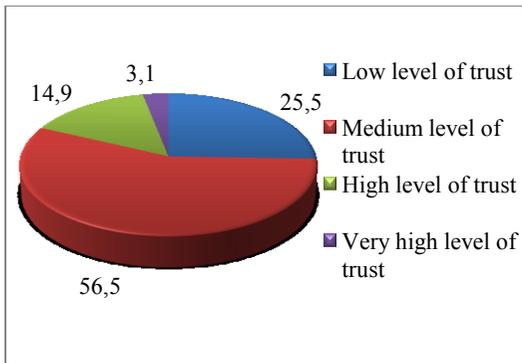

Figure 7 - The confidence level in the Romanian higher education system regarding the preparation of students for the labor market
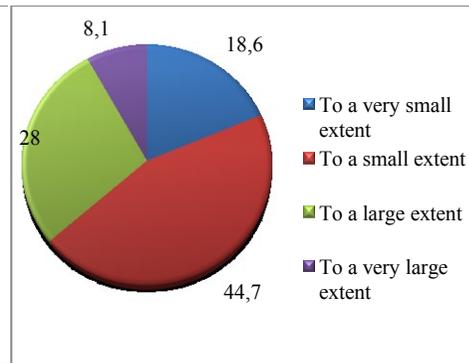*(Source*: computation made by author)

Figure 8 – Comparison between Romanian and North-Western European education
(Source: computation made by author)

Following the centralization of the results, we find that the respondents have at least an average level of confidence in the higher education institutions in Romania in terms of preparing students for the labor market. A positive aspect mentioned by most respondents is the possibility to participate in extracurricular activities.

3. CONCLUSIONS

Education in general needs to be based on a system entirely and properly developed, consisting of important factors, which contributes to the development of a country. We cannot forget the aspect of small funding in this area in the case of Romania, which cannot lead to long-term performance. To this, we can add the fluctuations regarding the number of people included in various forms of education, issue which creates periodically gaps of well-trained personnel in various fields of activity.

Thus, we observe that the education in general, the higher education in particular, is characterized by a significant level of dynamism, trying a process of double perspective adaptation, both to the demands of the labor market and to the Western quality criterias.

The results obtained in this field have a maximum level of importance, considering that today's graduates are tomorrow's employees, a hypostasis in which it is necessary to face the challenges at the workplace. The human resources policies of the companies envisage the training activity of the employees, but the basis in terms of knowledge is represented by the activity during the university studies, therefore, ensuring a high quality educational service represents the foundation of a future career.

One of the characteristics of the Z generation is the dynamism that the representatives prove. This dynamic nature, as well as the flexibility, also manifests itself in terms of the possibilities of professional conversion, so that there are people who, after graduating a certain educational programme, choose to reorient themselves to another field, if the initial one does not fit to the plans for the future.

Generation Z is the youngest on the labor market so far, the employees who belong to this category have a maximum age of 25 years, being at the first experiences in work. This causes organizations to face an infusion of fresh workforce, with a new and different vision from that of previous generations, but which also has different expectations and aspirations. Aligning organizations to these new patterns of behavior can be difficult and challenging, while for young people just entering the field of work, their sometimes overly sensitive personality can lead to more difficult adaptation. Therefore, the role of higher education is increasing in terms transition from school years to the role of employee, the quality of practice during the years of study playing a catalyst role.

It is therefore necessary to adapt the educational system and especially the teaching methods used in the classroom, so that the representatives of the new generation can productively use their talents and abilities, taking into account their individual characteristics and aspirations, without annihilating them.

Unlike previous generations, Z representatives are more familiar with technology, which would be a strong point in increasing productivity in the workplace, benefiting from more opportunities than their predecessors, in many cases studying in an intercultural environment, outside the country. In this way, they may develops working skills in various environments, even during studies, by accessing specialized scholarships, developing proficiency in several languages.

The impact at the organizational level, on the other hand, is a considerable one, the main wishes of the Z youth, according to Iorgulescu (2016), being those to benefit of flexibility, insurance, the possibility to work in big companies, with fast possibilities of promotion and high salary level.

REFERENCES

Barbu L. (2009). "Managementul calităţii în învăţământul preuniversitar". **Sfântul Ierarh Nicolae Publishing**

Bokana K.G., Akinola G.W. (2017). "Productivity effects of higher education human capital in selected countries of Sub-Saharan Africa". *Preliminary communication* UDC 378:005.61>(66/67)

Gaidhani S., Arora L., Sharma B.K. (2019). "Understanding the attitude of generation Z towards workplace". *International Journal of Management*, Technology and Engineering. vol. IX, issue 1

Iorgulescu M-C. (2016). "Generation Z and its perception of work. Case Study". *Cross – cultural Management Journal*, vol. XVIII, issue 1

Mubashiru Olayiwola M., Musiliu Dada R., Rasheed Olawale A. (2016). "Tertiary Education and Human Capital Development: Implication on the National Development", *International Journal of Academic Research in Progressive Education and Development*, vol. 5, no. 2:14-24

Ozturk I. (2001), "The role of education in economic development: a theoretical perspective", *Journal of rural development and administration*, vol.. XXXIII, no. 1

***UPCEA (2019). An insiders guide to generation Z and higher education, available online at https://upcea.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/04/Generation-Z-eBook-Version-4.pdf

***Strategia Naţională pentru Învăţământ Terţiar 2015 – 2020, Ministerul Educaţiei Naţionale, [online at] https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/fisiere%20articole/Strategie_inv_tertiar_2015_2020.pdf

***Strategia educaţiei şi formării profesionale din România pentru perioada 2016 – 2020, [online at] https://www.edu.ro/sites/default/files/_fi%C8%99iere/Minister/2016/strategii/Strategia_VET%2027%2004%202016.pdf

***European Semester: Assessment of progress on structural reforms, prevention and correction of macroeconomic imbalances, and results of in-depth reviews under Regulation (EU) No 1176/2011, Country Report Romania, 2018, [online at] https://ec.europa.eu/info/sites/info/files/2018-european-semester-country-report-romania-en.pdf

***https://ec.europa.eu/education/policies/european-policy-cooperation/et2020-framework_ro