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PERFORMING EXCELENCE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

Gabriela Kelemen, Ph.D.
„Aurel Vlaicu" University of Arad
Faculty of Science of Education, Psychology and Social Work
gabrielakelemenuav@gmail.com

Abstract: *This article tries to underline aspects of university teaching activity related to the initial training of future teachers for preschool and primary school education. Our concerns for an efficient professional activity in training future teachers is emphasized by out attempt to search and find optimizing didactic strategies. They aim for an efficient and thorough training of future teachers for preschool and primary school education from theoretical and practical perspective.*

Key words: *initial training, proficiency, competence, knowledge, abilities, skills, performance*

1. From high school to university

Nowadays, academic education faces an unprecedented expansion in our country and abroad. Until recently, only few high school graduates had the opportunity to attend academic education. Now, this type of education is no longer the privilege of elite. High school students can choose and attend a university programme provided that they pass the Baccalaureate exam. The university enrols a variety of students coming from different high schools, with different training levels, with or without the abilities and training required to attend the study programme they have chosen. Academic education aims to train competent specialists in a certain field. This involves thorough study, acquisition of knowledge, development of skills and abilities necessary for the profession they have chosen. Thus, students are guided throughout their academic path to develop qualities required by their future profession and to give up activities that are not connected to their field of study. Sometimes, after enrolling in a university, students give up their studies because of the difference between their level of training and the academic demands. They cannot face the educational challenges or realize that their choice is not suitable for them. When referring to the study programme Pedagogy of preschool and primary school education from the Faculty of Educational Sciences, Psychology and Social Work we emphasize our concern for training professionals for preschool and primary school education with a thorough theoretical and practical training. In this respect, we want to underline certain aspects. First of all, students should be aware of the importance of theoretical as well as practical knowledge required by the didactic profession. The main objective of academic education is to allow students reach a standard of knowledge, understanding and competence, detectable in their performance. Besides knowledge, skills and abilities, the students,

future teachers, should have a proper attitude, motivation to learn, to improve their skills and to change failure into success. We try to change students from passive listeners into active players, participants in their own development through modern learning strategies. Learning autonomy is one of the main objectives of academic education (Pennycook, 1997). A student can reach learning autonomy if s/he possesses knowledge on the topic, abilities to process information and knowledge. The student has to acquire skills and abilities required by individual study, to deepen the information auditioned at the course. This fact requires metacognition but also adequate learning and study methods. The teacher is the facilitator, the mentor who guides the learner`s steps, but without sustained personal effort no one can achieve performance. The choice should be the student`s, s/he can chose between the teacher`s guidance and individual study. Autonomy should not be confused with libertinism or caprice.

2. A pragmatic approach

The question which concerns us all is what we should do to have well prepared students that would succeed on the labour market. The students` interest for thorough study should be constant if they want to perform at the expected level. Shallow learning can be overcome through thorough study, which involves understanding the studied concepts, linking them to previous knowledge and putting them into practice. Educational sciences, pedagogy and didactics offer methods by means of which one can access learning, knowledge, understanding and practical usage of theory. Knowledge acquisition is not a goal in itself; it is used only to replicate the concepts that have been learnt. Its aim is to know the objective reality. Knowledge is about being able to respond to the challenges of this reality. Through knowledge, one is capable of changing it into efficient practical actions. This paradigm brings about proper understanding of the fact that each action involves social implications.

Our faculty aims to train future teachers, capable of excellent performance. Therefore, emphasis is laid on theoretical but especially on practical application of theoretical concepts. They are used in the seminars but also during the students` teaching practice. Courses in pedagogy, theory and methodology of training and theory and methodology of assessment teach them the concepts of theoretical training. Didactics of speciality reveals didactic methodology specific for each subject. Educational research is the subject that offers our students, future teachers the possibility to put into practice various assumptions of scientific research. Students attend the teaching practice classes, observational and applied weekly; here they have the opportunity to link theory to practice (Roman, A., Dughi, T, 2007). The aim of the studies is to train students to be good practitioners with remarkable results in the institutions where they work. Specifically, future teachers should be able to teach a subject in an intelligible manner for each pupil in a group/classroom of children/pupils. Thus, methodological training is an aim of our faculty, where students are taught to apply the most proper methods and procedures used by the educational practice. They should be able to approach issues related to the educational process.[1] What concept can

[1] Wickman, P.-O., & Ligozat, F. (2011). Scientific literacy as action: consequences for content progression. In c. Linder, L. Östman, p.-O. Wickman, D. A.Roberts, G.Erickson, & A. Mackinnon (e

be taught at a certain age? Can it be learnt by any student? How can it be assessed? These are questions the future teacher has to deal with. The teacher selects the concepts to be taught but also the strategies required by the implementation of the educational process. The student, future teacher, should be aware that the curriculum objectives are compulsory and so is the syllabus. The teacher`s task is to select the contents that match with the pupils` age. S/he shouldn`t forget that children/ pupils in a classroom/group don`t have a homogenous psychical development; they have different skills, different learning styles and learning pace.

Individual features of pupils should always be taken into account throughout the educational process. Educational objectives should be set individually for each class/group.[2] Teachers should know their group/classroom of children/pupils very well and s/he should teach the contents according to the level of the group. The teacher starts with a simple learning situation and gradually introduces elements of different complexity. Each pupil has to understand the concept and solve the task. These aspects should be always considered by the teacher.

According to A.de Peretti, the teacher has various roles: expert, resource, facilitator, actor, methodologist, consultant, controller, evaluator, user, technician, and experimentalist. Proper training is required in order to be abler to perform all these tasks:

- Thorough knowledge of the subject;
- Professional skills;
- Enthusiastic, stimulating and motivational attitude;
- Good communication skills;
- Sociability and empathy.

These are only a few aspects related to a teacher`s qualities. When taechers are assessed based on these qualities, the assessment can be subjective and influenced by different factors. The image of a model teacher is built based on different education theories, from skills to their authority among learners.

Scientific approaches to teachers` assessment are made according to standards developed according to the requirements of educational policies but all of them aims for professional efficiency.

3. Methodology of search

Our concerns are focused on the improvement of the educational process in terms of efficient training of future teachers. In our study we have also been interested in the degree of our students` satisfaction, namely the students of the study programme Pedagogy of preschool and primary school education. Therefore, we have applied a questionnaire whose aim was to observe the students` satisfaction on course content and organization. The following aspects were questioned:

– The subject taught;

ds.), Exploring the landscapes of scientific literacy(pp.145–159). New York: Routledge.

[2] Sensevy, G. (2011). Patterns of didactic intentions, thought collective and documentation work. In G. Gueudet, B. pepin & L. trouche (eds.), From text to 'lived' resources: Mathematics curriculum materials and teacher development (pp.43–57). New York: Springer.

- Course content;
- The topicality level of knowledge;
- Approach and structure on hours and chapters;
- Information load;
- Time management during the course;
- Resources used for teaching;
- The relationship between the new subject and the previously taught subjects.

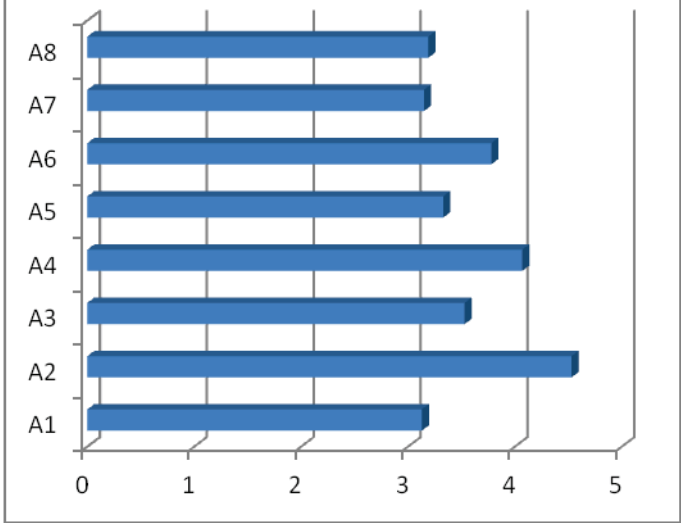
The study was applied on a number of 85 students from the study programme Pedagogy of preschool and primary school education, from 1st, 2nd and 3rd year of study.

4. The research results[3]

Study programme: *Pedagogy of primary and preschool education*
Year of study: I, II and III
Academic year: 2013-2014 – 1st semester
Assessed subjects:.....
A. Contents and course organization

Contents and course organization								
DESCRIPTORS	*A1*	*A2*	*A3*	*A4*	*A5*	*A6*	*A7*	*A8*
Mean	**3,13**	**4,53**	**3,53**	**4,07**	**3,33**	**3,78**	**3,15**	**3,19**
Standard Error	0,11	0,08	0,09	0,11	0,08	0,10	0,11	0,16
Median	3	5	3	4	3	3	3	3
Mode	3	5	3	5	3	3	3	5
Standard Deviation	1,00	0,77	0,85	0,99	0,71	0,94	1,05	1,48
Sample Variance	0,99	0,59	0,73	0,97	0,51	0,89	1,11	2,20
Kurtosis	0,00	1,73	-0,70	-1,43	1,58	-1,74	0,12	-1,33
Skewness	-0,19	-1,57	0,85	-0,37	1,83	0,47	0,00	-0,18
Range	4	3	3	3	2	2	4	4
Minimum	1	2	2	2	3	3	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	266	385	300	346	283	321	268	271
Count	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
Largest(1)	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Smallest(1)	1	2	2	2	3	3	1	1
Confidence Level(95,0%)	0,22	0,17	0,18	0,21	0,15	0,20	0,23	0,32

[3] Data have been processed by Junior lect. Dana Timar Balaş, PhD candidate.



A1	For me, the subject taught at the lecture was:
A2	For my training as specialist, the course contents were:
A3	The topicality level of knowledge was:
A4	The structure of the subject on hours and chapters was:
A5	The volume of information was:
A6	Timing during the course were:
A7	Materials used during teaching (course, schemes, foils, slides) were:
A8	The subject overlapped/repeated was has been taught in previous subjects:

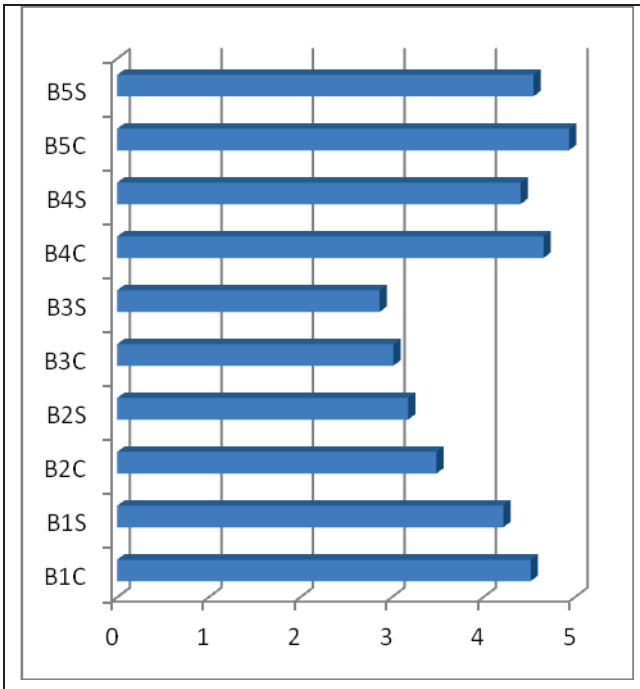
After analysing the answers of the feed-back questionnaire on students` satisfaction regarding the course contents and organization we notice that:

- The subject was partly familiar to the students,
- The course content was very interesting,
- The topicality level of knowledge was high,
- The structure of the subject on hours and chapters was very good,
- The volume of information was high,
- The time was used properly,
- The materials used during teaching (course, schemes, foils, slides) were very good,
- The subject overlapped the content of previously taught disciplines.

B. The assessment of teachers` activity for transfer of knowledge at courses (c) and seminars (s)

The assessment of teachers` activity for transfer of knowledge at courses (c) and seminars (s)										
DESCRIPTORS	*B1C*	*B1S*	*B2C*	*B2S*	*B3C*	*B3S*	*B4C*	*B4S*	*B5C*	*B5S*
Mean	**4,52**	**4,22**	**3,49**	**3,18**	**3,02**	**2,87**	**4,66**	**4,41**	**4,94**	**4,55**
Standard Error	0,10	0,14	0,09	0,11	0,07	0,09	0,07	0,13	0,03	0,11
Median	5	5	3	3	3	3	5	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	3	3	3	3	5	5	5	5
Standard Deviation	0,88	1,26	0,83	1,04	0,62	0,86	0,68	1,18	0,28	1,01
Sample Variance	0,78	1,58	0,68	1,08	0,38	0,73	0,47	1,39	0,08	1,01

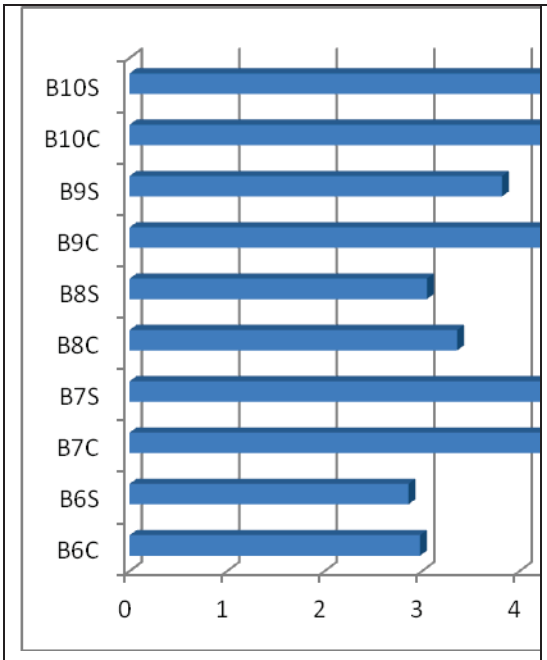
Kurtosis	4,60	1,72	-0,46	0,54	4,96	1,60	1,51	2,94	30,10	4,85
Skewness	-2,09	-1,69	0,93	-0,04	0,30	-0,56	-1,75	-2,02	-5,30	-2,38
Range	4	4	3	4	4	4	2	4	2	4
Minimum	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	3	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	384	359	297	270	257	244	396	375	420	387
Count	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
Largest(1)	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Smallest(1)	1	1	2	1	1	1	3	1	3	1
Confidence Level(95,0%)	0,19	0,27	0,18	0,22	0,13	0,18	0,15	0,25	0,06	0,22



B1C	The explanations given by the teacher were:
B1S	The explanations given by the teacher were:
B2C	The teaching pace:
B2S	The teaching pace:
B3C	The effort to increase the subject`s attractiveness and accessibility was:
B3S	The effort to increase the subject`s attractiveness and accessibility was:
B4C	The degree of interaction and the students` opportunity to speak freely was:
B4S	The degree of interaction and the students` opportunity to speak freely was:
B5C	Did the teacher accept questions?
B5S	Did the teacher accept questions?

The assessment of teachers` activity for transfer of knowledge at courses (c) and seminars (s)										
DESCRIPTORI	*B6C*	*B6S*	*B7C*	*B7S*	*B8 C*	*B8S*	*B9C*	*B9S*	*B10 C*	*B10 S*
Mean	**2,98**	**2,86**	**4,62**	**4,44**	**3,36**	**3,05**	**4,25**	**3,82**	**4,59**	**4,33**
Standard Error	0,07	0,09	0,09	0,12	0,07	0,10	0,10	0,13	0,11	0,14

Median	3	3	5	5	3	3	5	4	5	5
Mode	3	3	5	5	3	3	5	5	5	5
Standard Deviation	0,65	0,79	0,82	1,09	0,65	0,91	0,90	1,17	1,02	1,27
Sample Variance	0,43	0,62	0,67	1,18	0,42	0,83	0,81	1,36	1,03	1,60
Kurtosis	4,19	2,00	8,12	3,09	1,19	1,34	-1,58	-0,17	5,90	1,77
Skewness	-1,54	-1,08	-2,70	-1,98	1,58	-0,29	-0,51	-0,71	-2,59	-1,77
Range	3	4	4	4	2	4	2	4	4	4
Minimum	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	1	1	1
Maximum	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	253	243	393	377	286	259	361	325	390	368
Count	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85	85
Largest(1)	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Smallest(1)	1	1	1	1	3	1	3	1	1	1
Confidence Level (95,0%)	0,14	0,17	0,18	0,23	0,14	0,20	0,19	0,25	0,22	0,27



B6C	The teacher`s availability in the relationship with the students was:
B6S	The teacher`s availability in the relationship with the students was:
B7C	The scientific language used by the teacher was:
B7S	The teacher`s availability in the relationship with the students was:
B8C	The teacher`s enthusiasm and interest were:
B8S	The teacher`s enthusiasm and interest were:
B9C	The teacher`s professional confidence and reliability were:
B9S	The teacher`s professional confidence and reliability were:
B10C	The assessment and grading methods (projects, tests, papers) were:

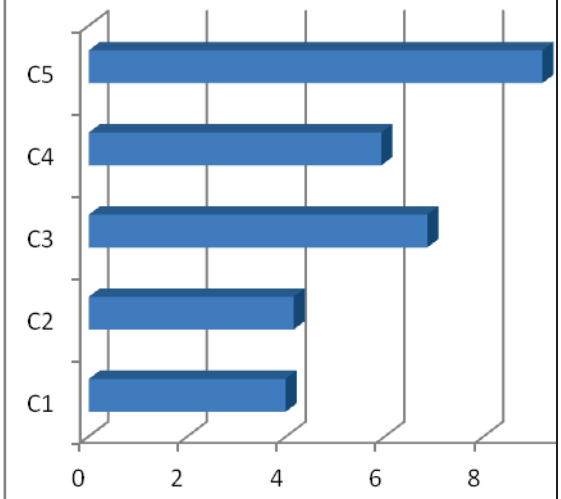
	B10S	The assessment and grading methods (projects, tests, papers) were:	

In terms of information transfer, the 85 questioned students assessed their teachers and placed them at the upper limit of the scale. Thus, the explanations given by the teacher were very clear, the teaching pace was proper, the effort to increase attractiveness and availability was adequate, the degree of interactivity and the teachers` availability were proper, the scientific language used was fully accessible, the teachers' enthusiasm and interest were adequate, their confidence and reliability were high and the methods used for assessment and grading were adequate and communicated in advance.

Efficient learning involves the acquisition of concepts, skills, abilities, which are inter-connected by a coherent bond. This bond involves understanding and interpretation. If properly acquired by students, each concept can be discussed and interpreted by them and not just imitated.

C. Academic demand

Academic demand					
DESCRIPTORI	*C1*	*C2*	*C3*	*C4*	*C5*
Mean	**3,99**	**4,15**	**6,86**	**5,93**	**9,19**
Standard Error	0,13	0,10	0,38	0,38	0,11
Median	4	4	6	5	10
Mode	5	5	10	4	10
Standard Deviation	1,20	0,94	3,46	3,49	0,98
Sample Variance	1,44	0,89	12,00	12,19	0,96
Kurtosis	0,77	1,20	-0,61	0,99	2,04
Skewness	-1,20	-1,09	0,69	1,37	-1,16
Range	4	4	12	13	5
Minimum	1	1	2	1	5
Maximum	5	5	14	14	10
Sum	339	353	583	504	781
Count	85	85	85	85	85
Largest(1)	5	5	14	14	10
Smallest(1)	1	1	2	1	5
Confidence Level(95,0%)	0,26	0,20	0,75	0,75	0,21

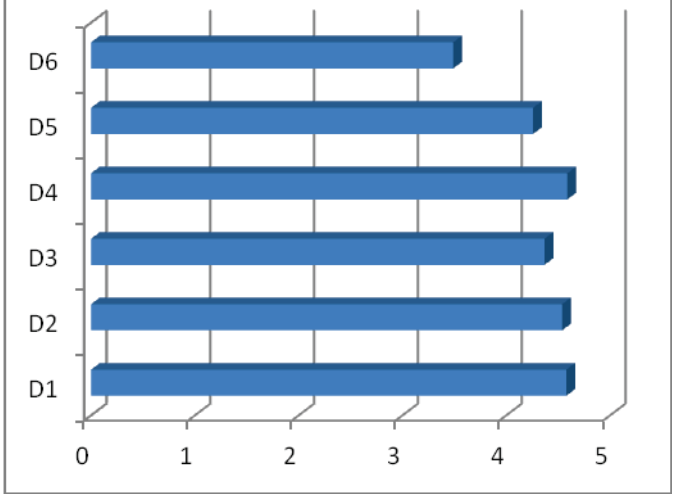


C1	Compared to other courses, the intellectual challenge offered by this course was:
C2	Compared to other courses, your effort to acquire the subject (tasks, individual study, attendance) was:
C3	On average, how many hours have you allotted to this course weekly (attendance, task preparation or other activities connected to this course)?
C4	From the above mentioned number of hours how many do you consider useful for your education?
C5	What grade do you expect to get at the final examination in this course?

For items involving academic demand, the students` answers highlight the following: a high degree of intellectual challenge, the effort made to acquire the subject was high; the weekly average hours allotted to a course (attendance, task preparation or other activities) is of 6 hours. They consider the time fully useful for acquiring the concepts. The grading expectations are centred on the grade 9.

D. Assessment of specific conditions for the conduct of the course:

	Assessment of specific conditions for the conduct of the course					
DESCRIPTORS	*D1*	*D2*	*D3*	*D4*	*D5*	*D6*
Mean	**4,58**	**4,54**	**4,37**	**4,59**	**4,26**	**3,49**
Standard Error	0,06	0,07	0,08	0,06	0,09	0,13
Median	5	5	5	5	5	4
Mode	5	5	5	5	5	5
Standard Deviation	0,77	0,77	0,94	0,74	1,01	1,51
Sample Variance	0,59	0,60	0,88	0,55	1,03	2,28
Kurtosis	7,17	2,50	0,03	1,71	1,70	-0,83
Skewness	0,50	-1,64	-1,18	-1,65	-1,46	-0,67
Range	6	4	3	3	4	5
Minimum	3	1	2	2	1	0
Maximum	9	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	641	635	612	642	596	457
Count	140	140	140	140	140	131
Largest(1)	9	5	5	5	5	5
Smallest(1)	3	1	2	2	1	0
Confidence Level(95,0%)	0,13	0,13	0,16	0,12	0,17	0,26

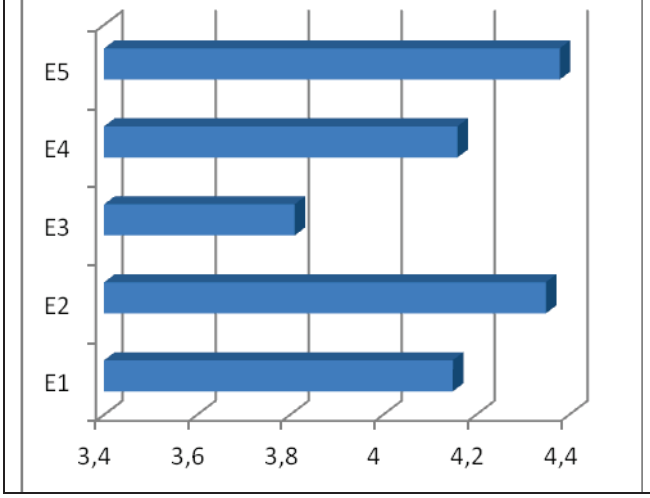


D1	Assessment of specific conditions: The Lecture Hall
D2	Assessment of specific conditions: The Seminar room/ Lab
D3	Assessment of specific conditions: materials and equipment
D4	Assessment of specific conditions: The Schedule
D5	Assessment of specific conditions: The available bibliography
D6	Assessment of specific conditions: The possibility to make library research

The assessment of specific conditions for course unwinding: lecture hall and seminar rooms, materials and equipment, schedule, available bibliography and the possibility to make library research were very good, the average grades being placed at the upper limit of the scale.

E. Assessment of general conditions:

Assessment of general conditions					
DESCRIPTORS	*E1*	*E2*	*E3*	*E4*	*E5*
Mean	**4,15**	**4,35**	**3,81**	**4,16**	**4,38**
Standard Error	0,11	0,10	0,13	0,10	0,10
Median	5	5	4	4	5
Mode	5	5	5	5	5
Standard Deviation	0,97	0,86	1,16	0,90	1,07
Sample Variance	0,93	0,74	1,35	0,82	1,15
Kurtosis	-1,04	-0,61	-0,07	0,47	5,08
Skewness	-0,61	-0,91	-0,76	-0,87	-2,17
Range	3	3	4	4	5
Minimum	2	2	1	1	0
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	295	296	316	320	512
Count	71	68	83	77	117
Largest(1)	5	5	5	5	5
Smallest(1)	2	2	1	1	0
Confidence Level(95,0%)	0,23	0,21	0,25	0,21	0,20

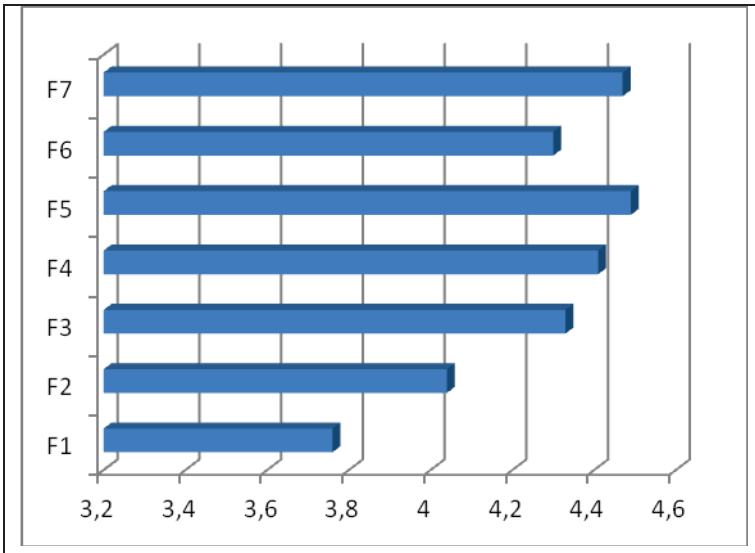


E1	Assessment of general conditions: Student Hostel
E2	Assessment of general conditions: Canteen
E3	Assessment of general conditions: Library
E4	Assessment of general conditions: Reading room
E5	Assessment of general conditions: Cleaning of lecture halls

The assessment of general conditions focused on: student hostel, canteen, library, reading room and cleaning of lecture halls. The students` average answers are placed at the upper level of the scale, the general conditions being considered good and very good.

F. The assessment of university personnel`s availability

The assessment of university personnel`s availability							
DESCRIPTORS	*F1*	*F2*	*F3*	*F4*	*F5*	*F6*	*F7*
Mean	**3,76**	**4,04**	**4,33**	**4,41**	**4,49**	**4,30**	**4,47**
Standard Error	0,12	0,17	0,09	0,08	0,07	0,10	0,08
Median	4	4	5	5	5	5	5
Mode	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Standard Deviation	1,43	1,25	0,93	0,86	0,83	1,01	0,82
Sample Variance	2,04	1,55	0,87	0,74	0,69	1,02	0,68
Kurtosis	-0,69	1,43	2,31	0,09	0,71	1,71	1,72
Skewness	-0,77	-1,50	-1,49	-1,17	-1,40	-1,49	-1,46
Range	5	4	4	3	3	4	4
Minimum	0	1	1	2	2	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	522	222	502	503	557	482	505
Count	139	55	116	114	124	112	113
Largest(1)	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Smallest(1)	0	1	1	2	2	1	1
Confidence Level(95,0%)	0,24	0,34	0,17	0,16	0,15	0,19	0,15



F1	Assessment of availability: The faculty`s secretariat
F2	Assessment of availability: Distance learning secretariat
F3	Assessment of availability: The Rector`s secretariat
F4	Assessment of availability: Accounting service
F5	Assessment of availability: Cashier's office
F6	Assessment of availability: Library
F7	Assessment of availability: Administration

The average answers for assessment of availability are placed again at the upper level of the scale. They consider that: the availability of secretariats is good, the availability of personnel in accountancy office, cashier`s office, library and administration is good and very good.

Conclusions

The feed-back received through this study shows us the degree of our students` satisfaction. We notice that our students, future teachers, are capable of performing an objective and rigorous assessment. They know their rights and obligations and their expectations in terms of training are very high.

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