

THE IDEAS AND EXPECTATIONS OF NEW UNIVERSITY STUDENTS TOWARDS UNIVERSITY TEACHERS

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Abstract

The article presents the results of an inquiry focused on new university students' ideas and expectations about their schooling, and especially about the university teachers during their first days at university. The method of inquiry - "unfinished sentences" technique - was used to collect data. There were 208 respondents aged from 19 to 47, including both males and females. The results gained describe the situation on this matter at the Faculty of Materials Science and Technology of Slovak University of Technology in Trnava, and they can also serve as self-reflection material for all university teachers. Two possible ways of further continuing the research work are described by the author.

Key words

university students, ideas and expectation inquiry, unfinished sentences, university teacher, quality of schooling

Introduction

Quality of education is very often discussed in conferences and contemporary educational literature. What is its core?

The quality of the educational process is based on the reaching of instructional goals, achievement of educational standards and requirements of its customers, and especially reaching of students' satisfaction [1].

The first step to achieve the satisfaction of students is recognising their expectations.

But what are the expectations of students at our universities? There are many good examples of students' evaluation of their university studies, but there has still been a special group of university students here that has not been attracting the attention of our researchers

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yet: the new students at universities (“novices”). Our faculty – the Faculty of Materials Science and Technology of Slovak University of Technology in Trnava – offers to all new undergraduates at the beginning of their university career an intensive course called “*An Introduction to the University Studies*”. This academic year (2009/2010) we used the frame of this course to do a qualitative study – an analysis of new university students’ ideas and expectations about their schooling. We have specifically focused on their ideas and expectations about university teachers.

Methods

We decided to use the projective method of inquiry – the “unfinished sentences” technique. Our respondents – 208 new university students, aged from 19 to 47 – were asked to complete a set of 7 unfinished sentences specifically designed for this purpose. The printed form of the items was distributed by their teachers to them in the beginning of their first seminar. Our respondents completed writing the sentences in 15 minutes.

The next steps were analysis of the verbal categories of the conclusions (words, phrases and sentences filled in), sorting them according to their similarities, and creating consistent groups. This was a quite difficult part of our research work. We have found two books, which are listed in the bibliography, very helpful [2, 3]. The distribution (percentage) of the respondents of the inquiry, according to their demographic profiles, is presented in the next table.

| Gender/Age | 19 - 25 years old | 26 - 47 years old | Together |
|------------|-------------------|-------------------|---------------|
| Female | 44 (21,15 %) | 34 (16,35 %) | 78 (37,50 %) |
| Male | 65 (31,25 %) | 65 (31,25 %) | 130 (62,50 %) |
| F + M | 109 (52,40 %) | 99 (47,60 %) | 208 (100 %) |

Results

Will our new university students like schooling?

An answer to this question was an initial goal of our inquiry. 208 new university students of our faculty were asked to finish this unfinished sentence: “*I will enjoy (be interested in) my schooling if...*”

Respondents finished the sentence with 272 conclusions. Most of them (134) expressed requirements connected to **what is taught**. Over 36 % of new university students would like to find the content of instruction interesting and attractive; more than 16% of them would like to encounter good examples from practice; and more than 12 % of them would like to find the content useful and meaningful.

There were also many conclusions to the sentence (68) describing the **teacher’s instructional skills**. Over 16 % of new university students would like to have the content well explained. This requirement was significantly more preferred by women. More than 9 % of all respondents will enjoy their schooling if the teacher is able to instruct them in an attractive way.

The third biggest group of conclusions to the sentence dealt with the **student's individuality**. Over 17 % of respondents conditioned their enjoyment of their schooling on having their own success. This requirement was significantly more preferred by men. Other conclusions from this group (time management, coping with stress, the ability to concentrate on the instruction, personal vitality) appeared occasionally.

The other 2 groups of conclusions were connected to **teaching aids** (8 conclusions) and the **instructional climate** (5).

We can also arrange the results into a list of the positive expectations of our new university students before starting their university studies (Top 5).

| Top 5 positive expectations of new university students: | Incidence |
|--|------------------|
| 1. I will learn interesting and attractive things | 36,05 % |
| 2. I will understand them and I will succeed | 17,31 % |
| 3. Everything will be clearly explained to me in detail | 16,35 % |
| 4. I will meet good examples from practice | 16,35 % |
| 5. I will learn useful and meaningful things | 12,02 % |

What are our new university students' ideas about effective methods of instruction?

Answering this question was the next item of our inquiry. Our new students were asked to finish this unfinished sentence: *"From the methods of instruction point of view it is important to ..."*

Respondents finished the sentence with 232 conclusions. Most of them expressed requirements connected to **attractiveness and dynamics** (66) and to **simplicity and intelligibility** (61) of instruction.

The results also showed that use of **visual and schematic tools**, implementation of **up to date content**, maintenance of a suitable **tempo of the instruction**, and use of **dialogue methods** were also important for our new university students.

Here is the list of important requirements of new university students on methods of instruction before their university studies start.

| Important requirements of new students on methods of instruction: | Incidence |
|--|------------------|
| 1. Attractiveness and dynamics of instruction | 31,73 % |
| 2. Simplicity and intelligibility of instruction | 29,33 % |
| 3. Use of visual and schematic tools | 14,42 % |
| 4. Implementation of up to date content | 13,94 % |
| 5. Maintenance of suitable tempo of the instruction | 8,65 % |
| 6. Use of dialogue methods | 7,69 % |

What should a good university teacher know, be able and willing to do?

Our new university students were also asked to finish 3 unfinished sentences: *"A good university teacher is one who knows ..."*, *"A good university teacher is one who is able to ..."* and *"A good university teacher is one who is willing to ..."*

208 respondents finished the sentences with 690 conclusions (225 about knowledge, 233 about abilities, and 232 about willingness).

Their portrait of a good university teacher, based on their conclusions, is described below:

| A good university teacher is one who... | Incidence |
|--|------------------|
| knows the subject taught well | 65,86 % |
| is able to explain things simply and clearly | 42,79 % |
| is willing to help students (also outside the official time of instruction) | 37,50 % |
| is able to attract and draw attention | 35,58 % |
| is willing to explain things once more | 27,88 % |
| is willing to give individual advice (individual consultation) | 24,04 % |
| knows the students (their needs, abilities, feelings, ...) | 18,75 % |
| knows effective ways how to teach (to motivate, to explain, to communicate, ...) | 17,31 % |

What should a good university teacher avoid?

Respondents were asked to finish this unfinished sentence: “A good university teacher is one who is able to avoid ...”.

The conclusions varied quite a lot, but the most common ones were **snobbery and arrogance** (25,00 %), **biased assessment** (19,71 %) and **monotony and stuffiness** (9,13 %).

What are the most important characteristics of a university teacher?

The final item of our inquiry was eliciting the most important characteristics of university teacher from our new university students. They were asked to finish this unfinished sentence: “I think the most important characteristics of a university teacher are...”

| The most important characteristics of a university teacher are... | Incidence |
|--|------------------|
| Willingness to help students | 32,21 % |
| Respect for students | 23,56 % |
| Patience | 21,15 % |
| Fair / unbiased assessment | 20,19 % |
| Empathy | 16,35 % |
| Tolerance | 12,98 % |
| Effort, diligence | 12,50 % |
| Professional knowledge | 12,02 % |
| Sense of humour | 11,06 % |
| Wisdom and intelligence | 9,62 % |

Discussion (Author’s contribution)

The goal of this article was to share research findings with colleagues interested in promoting the quality of education at our universities. The inquiry described was focused on a survey of university students’ ideas and expectations about their schooling during their first days at university. They have almost no experience with university instruction or university teachers, so their ideas and expectations are not “loaded” by their own “bad” experience, and we suppose they are quite sensitive to the new situation they are in.

The acquired results are quite practical (they have assessed and represent the real situation of the circumstances at our faculty) and they can serve as self-reflection material for university teachers.

We can see 2 ways of further inquiry that can grow from this study:

1. long-term research on the changing ideas of students and their expectations about schooling during university study,
2. comparison of differences in the results gained by the methods of this inquiry ("unfinished sentences" technique) and the questionnaire method.

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