

Survey Regarding the Interest of Companies from Bihor County in Taking the Social Responsibility in the High Educational System

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ABSTRACT

The present context in Romania makes the promotion of the Student Centered Education (SCE) paradigm opportune and compulsory in the universities in our country, considering: the realities of the high educational service market more and more challenging and continuously change.; ARACIS regulations as an institution responsible for the evaluation and accreditation of the universities in Romania; The Bologna process to whose objectives our universities also subscribed. Thus, SCE conditions in a decisive way the competitiveness of the universities, forcing the responsible decisional factors to pay the right attention to it. A condition of SCE's success is the support, the involvement of the third important stakeholder namely the employer. Consequently, we have conducted the research in order to measure the availability of the Bihor county employers to take the social responsibility in the high educational system.

Introduction

The role of this introductory chapter is to present today's conditions that make the Student Centered Education paradigm opportune and compulsory as a strategical and practical approach in the academic environment in general and especially in the Romanian one. For this purpose we will use as a starting point a conclusion formulated in The quality Barometer in 2010, conducted by ARACIS, on the quality status of the high educational system in Romania: *„The overview of the quality status of our high educational system, as it results from the perceptions of the academics, students and employers, is that of a high quality level one. However, when the finalities of the system are considered, the resulting image is, mostly, of a self-centered system. It is rather the perception of a system whose connections with the environment are insufficiently explored and analysed, a system that follows its own logic, coherent, but less involved in the society and rather disconnected from it.”*As a former customer of this system and a present employee of it, having a twelve-year experience, I completely embrace this evaluation, an evaluation that betrays the marketing myopia, fortress attitude, limited understanding of the socio-economical role of the universities in Romania. Although, in the recent years there is an obvious change, its pace is far too slow compared to the necessary and imposed dynamic of the market realities. In this context we believe that the centered student education (SCE) can bring that optical and practical university change to turn the Romanian university system into an active actor, connected to

the realities of our society and economy, that produce value for all the involved stakeholders, for Romania in general.

Analyzing the realities of the market that demands the necessity of promoting the SCE, we have identified the following factors and tendencies:

- ✓ The intensification of the competitive environment as a result of the development of the private universities in Romania, of the promotion actions undertaken by the foreign universities on the Romanian market but also of the reduction of high school graduates.
- ✓ The democratization of the information. The present informational society has undermined the monopoly of the teachers over knowledge in the relationship with the students.
- ✓ The accelerated pace of the changes in the present society, including the one of the economy, that makes the concern to learn how to study in order to continuously adapt to the changes more important than the competence acquired at some point into a certain field.
- ✓ The need for meaning of the modern man. The spiritual leader of the Tibetan Dalai Lama says that present people don't especially suffer because of material lack but because of the lack of love and sense. The XXI century student can find these only if he becomes an active part of the educational process, only if the reflection becomes a current practice, only if the failure in the process of learning by doing is an experience of learning and improving and not the acknowledgement of incompetence, only if asking questions represents an exploratory approach and a proof of curiosity not a sign of disproof for the teacher or of the ignorance of the student, only if the students becomes the partner of the teacher and not just a simple information receptor.
- ✓ Significant changes in the psychology of the new generations with results in their own learning styles. For example, the importance of the audio-video learning has grown to the detriment of studying a book, reality that the teacher must consider in order to increase the effectiveness of the learning process.
- ✓ The increase of the number of students who can be knowledge sources for their colleagues and teachers. We take into account students involved in: practice companies, volunteering, workforce, entrepreneurship. We wonder if a teacher who has never had a company is more entitled to speak to his students about entrepreneurship than an entrepreneur student. We do not know the answer to this question but we are sure that together they can create more value for the students.

In these circumstances SCE must be a priority for the management team of every university in Romania. However the success of this approach will depend on the involvement of the third important stakeholder, the employer. This is the reason for which we have conducted the research in order to measure the availability of the employers to take the social responsibility in the high educational system.

Research Regarding the Availability of Bihor County Employers to Take the Social Responsibility in the High Educational System

The aim of the research is not only to measure today's level of involvement of Bihor county companies in taking the social responsibility in the high educational system but also their interest, priorities and future availability for this. Starting from the results we get we will come up with solutions for employers' superior involvement in the partnerships with the universities, thus helping the SCE and also the improvement of the quality of the graduates.

The hypotheses of the research are:

- Most companies perform activities of social responsibilities but the educational system is not a priority there.
- The companies think that the graduates have the greatest responsibility regarding the quality of the university graduates while the employers (companies, ngos, public institutions) have the smallest one.
- The main activity for the cooperation of the companies with the academic environment is to offer students practice and internship sessions but the interest of the companies in other activities in a partnership with the academic environment is significantly increasing in the future.

- The main advantage for the companies when cooperating with the academic environment is to improve the image as employer, to recruit the best graduates.

As a research method we used the survey based on questionnaire (see annex eleven). We applied the questionnaire to 48 companies in Bihor County between 21.07.2014 – 12.09.2014. The sampling method was that of the snowball. The sample companies cover the entire diversity from the point of view of the fields, Romanian capital- foreign capital, small-average- big, and life on the market.

Next we will show you *the results of the research*. To validate or invalidate **the first hypothesis** of the research we analysed the answers to questions 7 and 8 of the applied questionnaire, as shown in the following graphic.

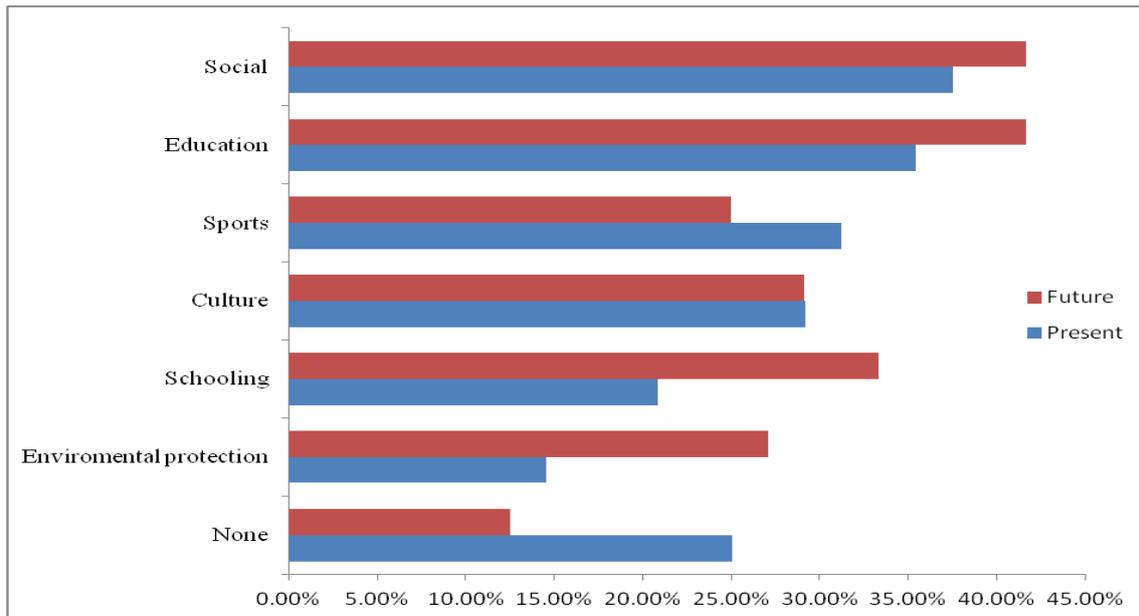


Figure 1: The evolution of the intentions to take CSR actions for the companies in Bihor

Thus, you can notice the fact that:

- ✓ 75% of the companies performed activities of social responsibility, which is significant, especially in the circumstances of the recent pretty difficult economy. This availability of the companies to involve in social responsibility actions represents a positive aspect which must be exploited by the management of the universities also; the future tendency being to increase the involved companies by more than 10%.
- ✓ The social field is the priority, which is absolutely normal considering the realities of the Romanian society characterized by a low living standard.
- ✓ When it comes to CSR actions, the education is not of priority, this being on the second last place. Only 20% of the companies are currently involved in this field. However, as future intentions, the educational system is more and more on the list of the companies' preferences under the aspect of availability to perform CSR actions, a positive aspect for the Romanian education. *In conclusion, the first hypothesis of the research was validated.*
- ✓ The only field in which the companies want to involve less in the future is the sport, probably because of the following reasons: the relatively weak performances of the Romanian sport in general; the scandals that disturbed the Romanian sport in the last years.

Regarding **the second hypothesis** of the research, this is partially validated. As you can see in graphic number two, the companies think that the graduate has the main responsibility for his quality concerning the professional training, but his family and not the employers are on the last place. It is true that the difference between the two categories is from small to insignificant.

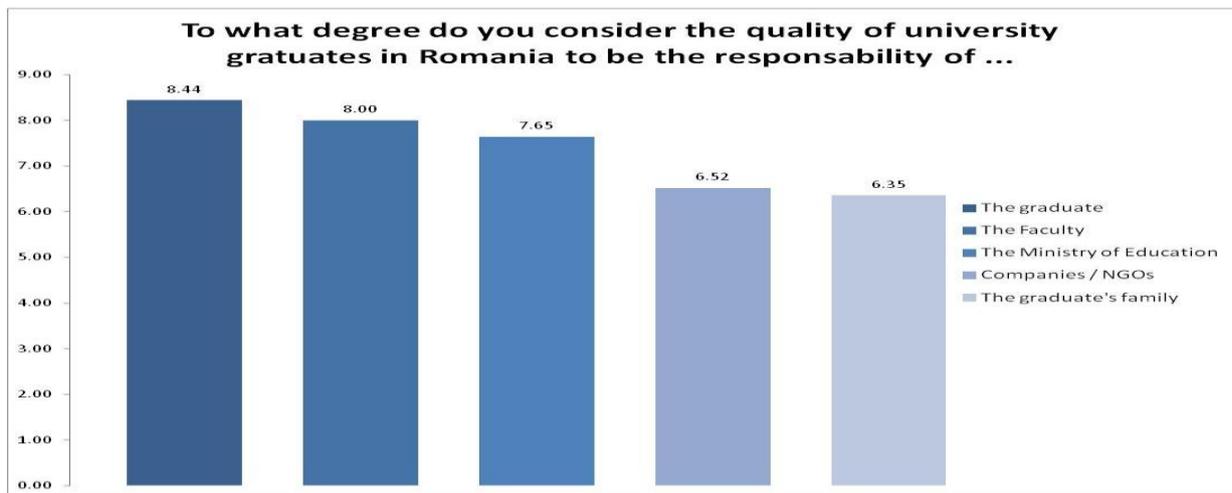


Figure 2: Different stakeholders' level of responsibility for the quality of the graduates

Other interesting aspects related to the answer to question number nine are:

- ✓ The faculty where the student is studying is thought to be almost as responsible as the student for his quality when graduating;
- ✓ The companies also made the Ministry of Education responsible for the quality of the graduates although the university autonomy is extended enough in Romania;
- ✓ Family takes the last place as responsible for the quality of the graduate (another proof of the present tendency in the contemporary society to diminish the forming and educational role of the family), even if values like the labor cult and earnestness are taught in the family;
- ✓ Even on the second last place as responsibility, the employers got a score of 6,52 points out of 10 (pretty much from our point of view), which means they consider themselves responsible enough for training the graduates and implicitly, their quality.

The third hypothesis of the research is entirely confirmed by the answers to questions twelve and thirteen of the questionnaire and which are seen on graphic three. The confirmation of this research hypothesis according to which the availability of the companies to involve in more and more activities with the academic environment is increasing, demonstrates once again the opportunity for the universities to turn the cooperation with the employers into a priority. We underline the fact that the graphic in figure eight was made under the following conditions: the importance of the companies which are now performing different activities was calculated out of the total number of the companies which have a current partnership agreement with a university. (16 companies) and the importance of the companies which intend to perform different activities in the future was calculated out of the 48 companies that formed the sampling. Other interesting aspects related to the answers to these questions are:

- ✓ After practice and internship, the best represented present activities between universities and companies are the works of study completion in the companies, students' work visits in the company and training offered to students by the company's employees.
- ✓ The activities that are now poorly represented in the partnerships are: the scholarships for the students, the trainings for the employees, offered by the teachers, students' services, mentoring programmers and the sponsorships.
- ✓ What is significantly increasing is the future availability of the companies to involve in: students' and/or teachers' services, mentoring programmers between the company's employee and the student, trainings for the company's employees and granting scholarships to students. This tendency is of extreme importance as it creates the conditions for the SCE implementation and opportunities to attract resources for the university, resources that are poor in the present context.

The conclusions presented before show that the universities should considerably vary the types of activities performed with the employers without focusing almost exclusively on practice, internship and study completion works.

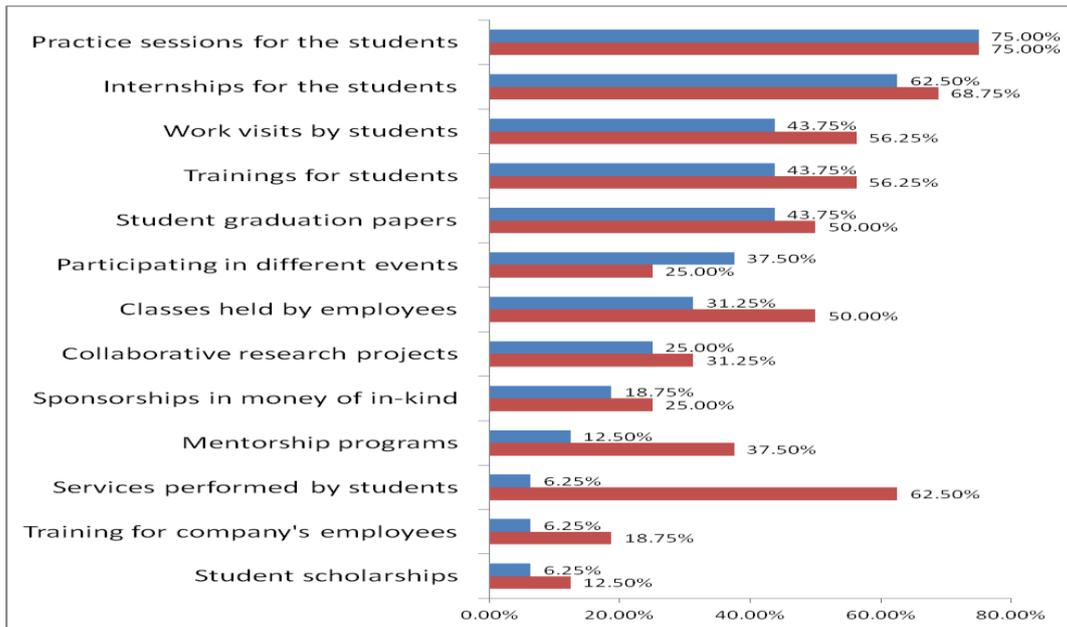


Figure 3: The main activities performed by the companies within the partnerships with the universities and the future intentions

The fourth hypothesis of the research according to which the main advantage expected by the companies after the cooperation with the academic environment is the improvement of the image as employer in order to recruit the best students was validated. As you can see in graphic number four, the companies:

- ✓ Are after a direct advantage after the partnerships with the academic environment, the improvement of their image as employer to recruit the best students, in the first place and their image in the society, in general. Starting from this observation, the managers of the high educational system institutions should use this argument in their dialogues with the employers, in order to persuade them to get involved in partnerships with the academic environment. The present context supports this approach as the companies experience more and more difficult access to quality human resource.

The least important advantages expected by the companies after performing a partnership with the academic environment are: unpaid activities of the students during their practice period or internship; the access to the know-how, the survey of the teachers and/or the students. We see this final aspect as being unfavourable to the universities because it shows the lack of confidence of the business environment towards the professional survey of the students and teachers in different fields.

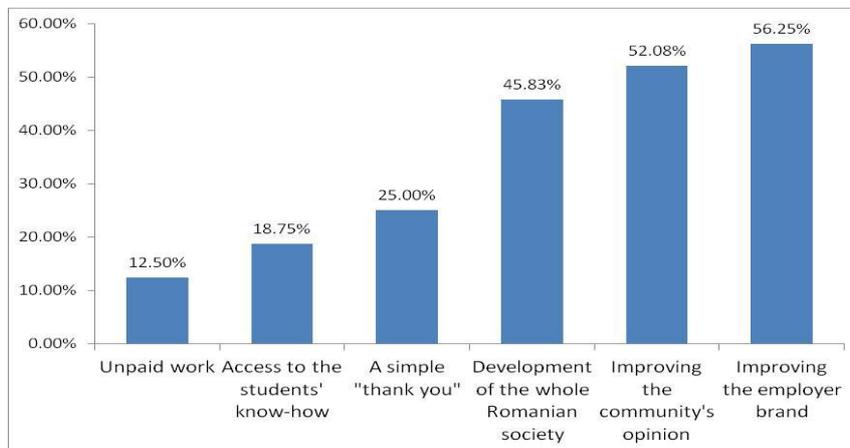


Figure 4: The advantages expected by the employers after performing some CSR activities together with high educational system institutions

Analyzing the answers to question number sixteen (see figure five) regarding the students' main advantages of performing some partnership agreement between the business environment/ NGOs and the educational institution we noticed that:

- ✓ the most important advantage of the students after the partnerships between the university and the employers, from the latter's point of view, is the development of professional competences, followed by practice and better understanding of the economic environment;
- ✓ the development of the human competences is the most unimportant advantage followed by the meeting of some inspiring human and/or professional models.;
- ✓ finding more easily a job and developing the entrepreneurship skills of the students are of average importance.

Starting from these results we could conclude the fact that the companies look for very well professionally trained students who also have practical experience, their human dimension being less important.

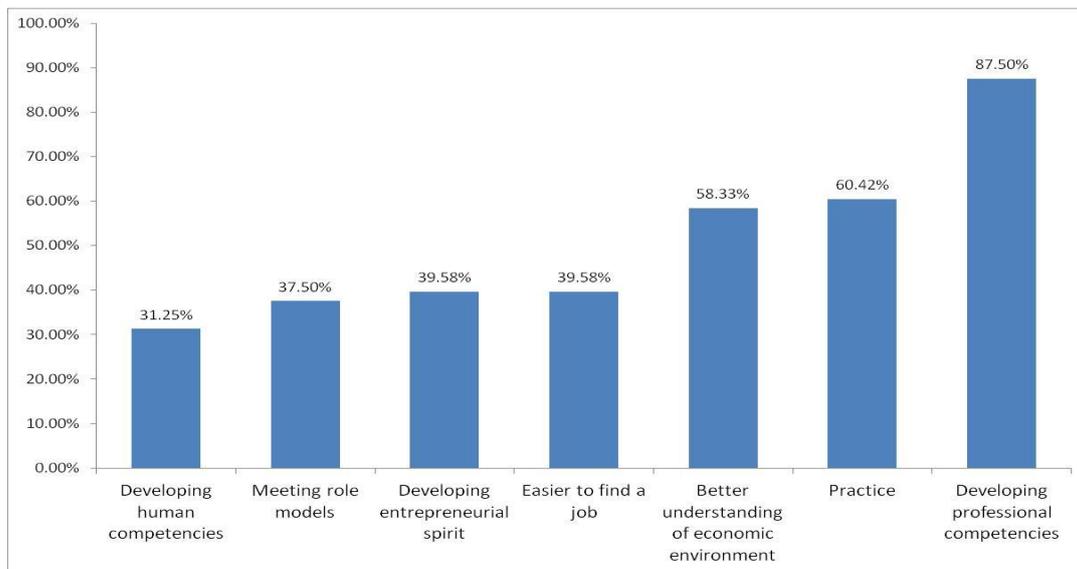


Figure 5: The advantages of the students after a partnership between the employers and the high educational system institution as perceived by the companies

Analyzing the answers to question number seventeen regarding the extent that the partnerships between academic institutions and the business environment may contribute to improving the quality of the graduates, we notice the fact that the companies rated the importance of these partnerships with an average grade of 6,13 on a scale from 1 to 7. We believe this is high rating, which should encourage the university environment to initiate and manage partnerships with the employers.

Conclusions

Starting from the conclusions of the survey which showed the availability of the employers to involve in partnerships with the universities, we suggested a series of actions for the management of the universities, the main ones being:

- The proactive attitude towards the employers. For this it is absolutely mandatory to reflect it in the documents for the strategically and operational planning of the university/faculty.
- The introduction in the operational plan of each department of some activities linked to the partnerships with the employers.
- The elaboration of a best practice guide at the level of universities about the partnerships with the employers.
- Each teacher has to introduce in the disciplinary sheet at least one activity linked to the interaction of the students with the employers (work visits in the companies, guests from the employers, etc.).

- The introduction in the self-evaluation sheet of the teachers of some criteria linked to the activities developed in the partnerships with the employers.
- At the level of faculties and universities they should manage a database with the companies with which they manage partnerships.
- Working with students and graduates who are entrepreneurs or come from families of entrepreneurs. These are just a part of the measures that can be initiated for bringing the academic environment closer to the employers in order to improve the graduates' quality, but the range of possibilities is broader. Their adoption would be an important step for the sustained promotion of SCE in the high educational system in Romania, having positive effects on the quality of the graduates, the development of the economy and the improvement of life's quality in the Romanian society.

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