

MODERN COMMUNICATION SKILLS AS AN ELEMENT OF QUALITY PERCEPTION OF LECTURERS IN EDUCATION

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SUMMARY

Due to the phenomenon of lecturer's transmission of quality perception to quality perception of the whole education institution, it is interesting to examine which elements determine the quality of a modern lecturer. Moreover, the interest of publics for its service depends upon the quality of that educational institution, what further determines the grade of existence justifiability and economic indicator of that institution's management success. In conditions where there are more and more of higher education institutions in Bosnia and Herzegovina, these parameters are going to have even greater significance. As a result of fast development of means of communication in the last twenty years, changes of quality perceptions and traditional authorities in society in general are evident, and so are in education. These changes have amplified not only the importance of the communication quality as the quality element of a lecturer in general, but the importance of responsibility in communication.

Communication competence, that is going to be written about in this work, is related to the term "FIT persons" in literature and it implies persons that have completely mastered communication with information technology (Fluent with Information Technology). Contemporary communication skills that are above mentioned have imposed as very important in determining lecturer's quality in the education institution nowadays. For the needs of this work the research was conducted among the student population in Tuzla and Zenica (using the questionnaire technique). Presented research results showed that contemporary communication skills are an important element of quality perception of a modern lecturer.

Keywords: communication skills, quality, education, lecturer

1. INTRODUCTION

Without a modern and good education there can be no modern and good society. There is no high standard of living, no professional and profitable workforce to make the economy competitive, effective and adequate to the age we live in. That is why successful social reforms of whole social systems, by rule, begin with reforms of their educational subsystems. Transitional societies like the Bosnian society, which will be in focus of this work, should pay close attention to this.

The transition of the Bosnian society is proceeding by adjusting the present standards with the standards of the EU, and is manifested through a series of reforms in various spheres of life and labour. In Bosnian educational system, which consists of pre-school education,

elementary education, secondary and higher education, the reforms are aimed at switching the focus on the child, ensuring its development and acquisition of high-quality knowledge, skills and competencies appropriate to life in the 21st century. It should be noted that, with the aim of improving the quality of education, some changes and modernizations of the curriculum and ways of grading the students have already been made. However, the quality of education depends primarily on the quality of teachers and education reforms must include changes in the level and modernity of their knowledge, expertise, work ethics and methods of communication in class. There is no good school/faculty without good teachers/professors, and the consensus on that has been reached a long time ago. But despite numerous researches, there is still no consensus on which elements determine a lecturer's quality in modern schooling. Namely, the perception of a lecturer's quality is not the same in all societies and cultures and changes together with a society. Elements that affect the perception of a lecturer's quality are numerous, variable and changeable. The results of a research, which will be partially presented in this work, show that what affects the perception of the quality of teaching staff in BiH the most is them possessing modern communication skills.

2. COMMUNICATION COMPETENCES AND MODERN LECTURER'S QUALITY – PREVIOUS OBSERVATIONS

The quality of a lecturer should be observed from the aspect of their impact on achieving efficient and modern knowledge, their expertise, and the ability of pupils and students with the aim of their inclusion in the labour market. However, it should be noted that a teacher's quality reflects the perception of quality of the educational institutions they work in, by which this category gets more important.

In the past, the two most often used elements in assessing the quality of teaching staff in BiH were the level of education and the lecturer's experience. However, in literature, other elements can be found of which, for the use of this work, we will single out: teacher's qualifications (knowledge and experience), teacher's characteristics (views, expectations, willingness to cooperate, friendliness), teacher's practical work (the way in which he achieves communication and interaction with his students) and teacher's success (the evaluation of "added value" by which the teacher contributes to the learning process) [1]. When analysing the elements of perception of teacher's quality it should be noted that it is a dynamic category which changes according to many parameters, as for example changes in lifestyle, the understanding of education, social expectations, economy, labour market, parents and even children. One must also not forget the impact of globalisation and the extremely quick advancements in information and communication (IC) technologies in all spheres of life. Conducted surveys of generational trademarks point at great generation differences between modern teachers and pupils/students in terms of their thinking, system of values, the understanding of the educational process, motivation, willingness to work, work and study ethics and others. Differences in regard to preferences and expectations related to the manner of progress of the educational system and means of education in schooling have been noticed. Modern students are born and live in a world of modern technologies. Publically available data shows an increased spread in the use of Internet in BiH, especially among students (in year 2011 it was 55%). However, it is just this possibility of easy acquisition of a great amount of information and quick learning, the possibility of quick and easy data exchange, often results in modern students seeing some materials, old tested educational standards and methods of work (which are still used in BiH) as well the common method of communication in schooling as outdated, useless and unattractive. It is here that the cause for their lack of motivation for learning and work lies in, which is a great problem for all teachers since unmotivated students can't reach a targeted level of knowledge. So, how to teach, educate

and raise today's generations of students in a manner that all targeted goals of the education process are accomplished on one hand, and on the other hand, how to make their time and work spent in school comfortable and attractive from their point of view? What to do in order to make today's pupils and students of today see their teacher as good, attractive and encouraging, a teacher whose authority they will follow and respect? The answer lies in a wider use of modern IC technologies in classes and class communication. Namely, it is the use of modern technologies in class and the implementation of new communication skills by the teacher that is a crucial factor on which modern pupils and students perceive their teacher's quality. Communication competence, which will be further analysed in this work, is in literature commonly related to the term "FIT persons" (Fluent with Information Technology) [2].

3. FIT PERSONS

The term "FIT persons" imply people who have mastered communication via information technologies. The rapid development of new IC technologies over the last two decades has changed the perception of quality and the image of traditional authorities in all segments of society, especially in modern schooling. Today's pupils and students expect their teachers to be "FIT persons". What are actually the qualities that such teachers must have? Foremost, it is useful to mention that in a National Research Council's study - NRC 1997 (when the term "computer literacy" was rejected in favour of "skill"), the exact number and types of skills defined by FIT have not been determined. It has been so because almost daily changes in technologies by which some ICT skills are being outgrown must be considered, while at the same time some necessary new ones come forth. Fluency connotes „the ability to reformulate knowledge, to express oneself creatively and appropriately, and to produce and generate information (rather than simply comprehending it)“. Aside from that, fluency also "entails a process of lifelong learning in which individuals continually apply what they know to adapt to change and acquire more knowledge to become more effective at applying information technology to their work and personal lives"[3]. FITness or fluency with information technologies is defined as a balance of three components which represent complementary types of knowledge. Those are:

- Modern skills – needed for working capabilities as well as ensuring practical experience which new skills are acquired with. Those are, among others intellectual capabilities, collaboration and communication with important figures. We relate them to information literacy, that is, the ability of using Wordprocessing and other programmes and the use of the Internet for finding information, sending e-mails, etc.
- Basic concepts – the understanding of principles and the idea of computers, web and information, i.e. elements that support information technologies (IT) and the understanding of how they develop with the insight into the potential and limitations of IT. We relate them to computer literacy, the understanding of the concept of computers and their components (hardware, software...) and network structure.
- Intellectual capabilities – they support abstract understanding of IT in order to encourage people to use them whenever possible and to recover from problems that might happen while using them. We relate them to the skill of critical thinking, the ability of solving problems, evaluating and verifying sources. [2, 3, 4].

In the case of Bosnia and Herzegovina, numerous available data, sadly, indicate that IC technology and its use in education are developing very slowly. Most elementary schools, even those that own some computers, don't have the financial means needed for their maintenance and proper use (e.g. no possibility of acquiring paper, additional equipment, printers, scanners, Internet, adequate software etc). High schools are better equipped, but even

there, numerous problems are noticeable. It often occurs that even the biggest grammar schools, even though they have phonetic cabinets with an active Internet connection, a number of computers, often even LANs, smart boards and similar equipment, do not use the same enough during classes, justifying such a behaviour with a lack of financial resources for maintenance and reparation of the equipment. This raises the question whether the reasons for not using the available equipment are exclusively related to the lack of funds or whether schooling staffs in Bosnia and Herzegovina are resisting to use new IC technologies in their work. Unfortunately, GEC files indicate that the Bosnian teachers (especially older generations), after their formal education, do not put a lot of effort in mastering modern communication skills. It seems that the problem lies in the fact that many computers in schools are being unused because the teachers have no interest in using them during a class. It is interesting to note that Bosnian pupils and students themselves think that the problem of not using IC technologies enough lies in the lack of will or IC knowledge and competencies of their teachers. That also influences the students' perception of their teachers' quality. When discussing about Bosnian students, it should be noted that we are talking about generations with high information literacy. They are fully aware that IC technologies increase and ease access and analysis of information, simplify the learning process, make it better, more attractive and faster. That is why the students are dissatisfied when the learning process at the faculty does not keep track of that new, faster, simpler and more attractive pace. They usually see their professors as the guilty parties for the "out-dated" methods of work and do not accept a lack of funds as an "alibi". The perception of teachers' quality in the education sector of Bosnian society depends on whether they have and how well they have mastered modern communication instruments and whether they use them in their everyday work and communication. Now, we shall see how students in two Bosnian universities perceive their teachers' quality based on the mentioned element.

4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A research on modern communication skills as an element of perception of teachers' quality in Bosnian education, conducted during February 2013, is based on empirical methods of data acquisition: observation, surveys and analysis of document content. A random sample enclosed 120 university students from Tuzla and Zenica. During the creation of the sample, attention was paid to polling students of different academic years and different faculties, students from rural and urban backgrounds who have finished different high schools, as well as gender structure. The anonymous survey consisted of closed questions, which offered "Yes", "No" and "Do not know" as the answers, and two with "Positive", "Negative", "Positive as well as negative" as possible answers. All materials and research results of the survey (questionnaires, data bases, and reports) are owned by the authors of this work. Facts and data acquired by the research, with the use of quantitative quality analysis, comparative and statistical methods, have been used for description and explication as well as anticipation of changes. Data control has been done in accordance to ISO 9001:2000.

5. RESEARCH RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research conducted among students studying in two public universities in Bosnia, the universities in Zenica and Tuzla, has shown that their communication with professors via Internet, the standard communication method, has not yet been implemented. When talking about giving basic information to students, 55% of asked students claim that communication via Internet has been implemented, while 42% do not agree with this (3% of asked students claimed they do not know). At first, one might say that this statistic is tolerable, however it must be mentioned that in Bosnian universities professors have for a long time had the obligation to inform their students about exam dates, results, and other things via modern

services, so this segment of their communication should not be put in question. Taking that into account, the high rate of professors who neglect this basic level of Internet communication with students is surprising. The results become more distinctive when analysing the answers on satisfaction of quality based on additional, student needed information. The percentage of students who were dissatisfied by the communication was 63%, 30% were satisfied, while 7% answered with “I do not know”. The following results show that these answers are not a result of students being uninterested in using Internet in communication with professors. To the question “*Would you prefer if your communication with your professors via Internet was part of standard communication at faculty?*” 73% of asked answered positively. Results have also shown that there is a difference in student communication with professors of different generations. The answers for the question “*What are your experiences in communication via Internet with your professors in case they are: a) under 40 years old b) over 40 years old (with the possible answers: “positive”, “negative” and “positive and negative”)*”, it is evident that students have a more satisfactory communication with professors under the age of 40 (45%) in comparison to communication with professors over the age of 40 (24%). It is interesting to note that students have more “positive and negative” experiences with professors under the age of 40 (33%), while this perception of experience with professors over the age of 40 is a bit lower (25%). This indicates to a better quality perception of communication via Internet with professors under the age of 40. Not pretending that this work gives detailed and complete analysis of all factors which might influence the results, we will analyse how the Bosnian student population perceives the quality of their professors from the aspect of their mastering of modern communication skills. Analysing the results of the question “*Do you think that modern communication skills of professors and their willingness to communicate with students via Internet represent an important element of teacher's quality perception?*” 75% of examinees agree with the mentioned claim. Only 17% of examinees do not agree with this claim, while 8% of examinees claim they “Do not know”. Let us take a look a Figure 1.

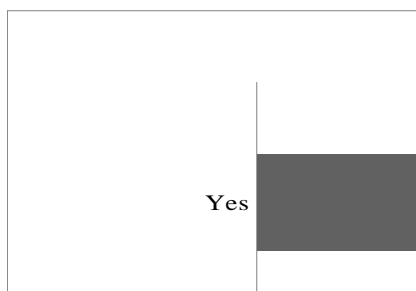


Figure 1. Modern communication skills of professors as an element of their quality perception

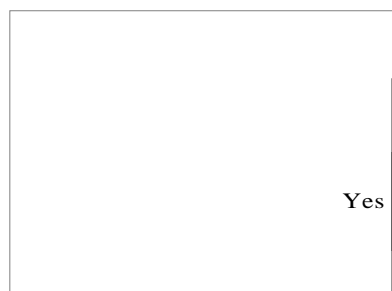


Figure 2. Responsiveness to E-questions as an element of grading the professors responsibility

The research confirmed that communication via e-mail is very important for students, and that, based on it, they perceive not only teacher's quality, but also their responsibility and communication modernity. With the claim that a professor not answering to a students' simple question (in a situation when the professor himself suggested such a method of communication) affects the responsibility and communication modernity grade of professors, a high 82% agreed with it. This leads to the conclusion that students recognise the responsiveness to e-mails as one of the most important indicators if their professor is “FIT” or not. Only 11% of them do not see this as relevant to the responsibility grade of professors, while 7% made no statements (Fig.2).

6. CONCLUSION

Considering that a lecturer's modern communication skills in education present a complex term whose full overview is not the intention of this work, a short review on communication competence, in literature referred to as "FIT persons", is given in it. Unfortunately, conducted researches have shown that this kind of communication competence of Bosnian lecturers in educational institutions has still not reached a satisfactory level. The results of conducted researches conducted on groups of students in two Bosnian universities show that students are usually dissatisfied with the level and quality of Internet communication with their lecturers. The only encouraging thing is the growing number of younger lecturers who communicate with students via IC technologies. Still, it is obvious that efforts must be made to make class communication reach the level adequate to the time and age we live and work in. These steps will also satisfy the expectations of modern generations of pupils and students who expect their lecturers to be "FIT persons". Fact is, students expect and want not only basic information, but better, timely and comprehensive communication with lecturers, which includes a better use of modern ways and methods of communication. Furthermore, it should be noted that only a "FIT professor", capable of using this quality, is perceived as a good lecturer who creates a necessary authority. The conducted surveys have confirmed this. The improvement of IT knowledge and competencies of Bosnian lecturers has to be implemented systematically, institutionally and without delay, and these activities have to become a part of the teaching staff's lifelong education. Why is it important to make these steps? There are many answers, but for the needs of this work, we remind you that modern communication skills are, without a doubt, an important element of a lecturer's quality perception in the modern age. And, as the existence of the phenomenon of relating the lecturer's quality perception with the quality perception of the specific educational institution had already been noted, the importance of methods of communication becomes even greater. Namely, without a good, responsible and modern communication between students and lecturers in any educational institution, the institution itself will not be perceived as good, responsible and modern. And in an educational market, where the competition is greater due to the constant increase in number of educational institution (especially higher education institutions), the institution, as such, will not succeed in providing the interest of the public for its services. A regular functioning of such an institution will become questionable. That also certainly indicates at the necessity of Bosnian lecturers adapting modern communication skills, which will qualify present and future generations of students for a successful and easy adjustment to living and working in the 21st century. Knowing this, a greater use of IC technologies is a obligation in Bosnian education.

7. REFERENCES

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