Assessment of Teaching Quality: Survey of University Graduates

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Abstract: In this article authors present the assessment of teaching quality from the aspect of graduates of Social Sciences Faculty. One of the essential spheres in the work of Faculty is a qualified work of the teachers, that is why that work should be evaluated not only by the authority, deans of the faculties, but also by those to who are using it- students and graduates. The research done had allowed stating the attitude of the graduates to the studies and the quality of teaching. Taking to consideration the opinion of the graduates, different corrective procedures were held to improve the quality of the studies.
Key words: graduates, teaching guality, opinion, research.

INTRODUCTION

The aim to create a common European higher education area up to 2010 calls for expanding the system of higher education quality assessment and development at universities. Gratz Declaration (2003) emphasises the necessity for universities to perform internal assessment of its activities. Bergen Communique (2005) highlights that quality development should be performed in a systematic way, according to the defined processes, cohered with external quality assurance procedures.
Such aspirations are relevant in Lithuania as well. Problems related with higher education quality assessment and their solution possibilities are reflected in the Education Guidelines for 2003-2012. (*Švietimo gairės 2003-2012 metams* [Education Guidelines for 2003/2012], 2002:168). It is stressed that quality assessment should be comprehensive, impartial and thorough.
The key function of the system of higher education quality assessment is a purposeful collection of information, its analysis, interpretation and generalision. While performing this, other functions, distinguished by Harvey (1999), are carried out: *accountability for the performed activity, informing the society, and study quality improvement.* It is important that representatives of various university communities participated in the assessment (Upcraft, Schuf, 1996; Preskill, 1997). Seeking to make use of the assessment findings and contribute to the institutional development, it is necessary to analyse relevant issues which are of interest to the university community.
Aiming at the investigation of higher education quality, it is necessary to obtain the information from the faculty community and members of the society – to obtain their approach to higher education quality, to systemise it, then present the generalised information about the state of higher education quality at the faculty and opportunities for its development (Savickiene, 2005).
In a broad sense, external setting is difficult to investigate; however, it is necessary to discuss its links with the main groups of the society – faculty graduates and employers.

BACKGROUND

In this article, one of the main educational dimensions is analysed. It is – teaching quality of the Social Sciences Faculty at Siauliai University. The research that was held and in which took part 305 graduates has allowed stating the opinion of the graduates to studies and teaching quality.

Why was the research held? Every March the meeting of the Faculty graduates is organised. It was decided to create an instrumental questionnaire for the graduates. This social opinion and judgement questionnaire combines many spheres of the Faculty work and one of them is the dimension of the teaching quality. With its help there were pointed out 18 statements that included the questions about the quality of teaching. The data was analysed using SPSS (Statistical Package of Social Sciences) software and Microsoft Excel Programme.

The research that was held allowed stating the aspects of the teaching quality of the Faculty that can be improved. The following spheres were stated: the possibilities of the qualification improvement of

the teachers that are working for the bachelor programme, finding the ways for such improvement, the possibility of theory and practice unity, making the individual work with students more active, listening to the needs of the students, the development of their communicative skills.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In the 'movement' of quality, since the 1980s, a handful conceptions of guality are current, some compatible with the ISO definition, others less so. Applied especially to higher education, Harvey & Green listed five main categories of conceptions (Harvey, Green, 1993). Four of these are generally known categories: *quality as excellence (the traditional academic view), quality as conformity to standards ('zero 'errors'), quality as fitness for purpose, and quality as value for money.* Applied to higher education: "there are (at least) as many definitions of quality in higher education as there are categories of stakeholders (such as students, teaching staff, scientific communities, government and employers), are multiflyed by the number of purposes, or dimensions, these stakeholders distinguish "(Brennan, et al, 1992:13). The fifth category is Harvey's own contribution: quality as transformation. With this view, he stresses that higher is not just a service for customers, but does something to the students. They are changed, empowered by education, so that standard quality definitions cannot be applied in a straights-forward way: students goals and needs at the outset may be different from their views as graduates. The other foundation level term is evaluation, which he takes to mean the (systematic) process of formulating a standard and reaching a value judgement on something (Westerheijden, 2005:59).

Quality of higher education arose as an issue in policy because of a break-down of traditional relationships of trust between higher education and politicians, representing the society' – said J. Westerheijden. It should be observed that quality it self was not new. In the words of the eminent historian of higher education, Guy Neave: 'quality is not 'here to stay', if only for the self-evident reason that across the centuries of the university's existence in Europe, it never departed' (Neave, 1994:116).

The quality of teaching in higher education

Faculty work is a complex enterprise in a political milieu but most assessment procedures are intensitive to its broad responsibility (Stake, Cisneros-Cohernour, 2004:95).

The evaluation of teaching is an inseparable part of the evaluation of the institution. A broad and effective evaluation of teaching requires critical study of institutional goals, classroom environments, administrative organization and operations, curricular content, student achievement, and the impact of programs on state and society (Shultman, 1986; Cave et al., 1988; Lave & Wenger, 1991; Shinkfield & Stufflebeam, 1995).

Like teaching, evaluation is a process of judgment based on information. As described in The Personnel Evaluation Standards (1988), various kinds of information gathering procedures, observers, and situations should be used.

Criteria for teaching. Evaluation is usually thought of as based on criteria, with certain descriptive scores indicating more or less of qualities, then drawing forth a judgment of goodness or badness. The formal evaluation of teaching often relies on checklists with criteria such as knowledge of subject matter, effectiveness of student control and quality of lesson plans (Braskamp and Ory, 1994).

Students, lecturers and administrators often do not agree with criteria and standards. When asked to evaluate as lecturer, students tend to emphasize personality characteristics; peer faculty members tend to emphasize camaraderie and political allegiance; administrators admire compliance.

Diversity in student views is important. Individual peer views are important. The purpose of evaluation should not be to get a single rating or descriptor, but to learn the multi-faceted quality of teaching, partly as perceived by the people involved.

Perhaps there are no professional and teaching fields so unchanging that one can indicate with confidence what knowledge and skill will be critical in tomorrow's world. Such uncertainties do not allow lecturers to escape responsibility for preparation of the coming generation but the grounds for evaluating teaching effectiveness by standardized assessment are not being found.

The standards of the quality teaching. Narasimhan (1997:122) taking to consideration his own experience states that the main elements of teaching are presented by the content, technique and the art of communication ("classroom chemistry"). We also must not forget about motivation of students, their behaviour and ability to fulfil all the tasks of the teacher during the semester.
The work of the teacher could be seen through what and how he teaches and how the results of studying are evaluated (Narasimhan, 1997:122). The quality of teaching and learning is not only multidimensional (Ramsden, 1993), but also situational (Ramsden, 1979), and relative (Maller and Funnel, 1993, Trignell and Prosser, 1991) dimension (quotes Zakeviciene, 2001). According to Holmes (1993) it a big deal depends on 'individuals' and the 'moment of truth' (Narasimhan, 1997).
According to Neumann(1992), Samuelowitcz & Brain (1992), the difference between the wish of the teacher to teach ideally and his real ability is something that happens very often (quotes Zakeviciene, 2001). The ability to teach well depends on the possessed competences these are pedagogical, psychological, administrative competences. This is an ability of the teacher to organize the process of studying in a way that can ensure the self-realisation of the student in the process of studying. The European Union demands from the teachers to teach their subject with "an European shade", to have a positive view on the European dimensions (pluralism, multicultural society), partner spirit, to speak at least one of the European languages, to know the educational systems of other countries; to know and to use an information and communication technologies, to know the theory and methodology; be interested in the innovations of teaching (especially module teaching) and be able to use them (Juceviciene, 1998 – quotes Lipinskiene, 2002). The structure of the teaching competence consists of subject knowledge competence, scientific, pedagogical and communication competences.
The research done by Gaskell and Simpson (2000) has shown that students first of all are evaluating the teacher's knowledge of the subject he teaches. The second important position is given to the sociability of the teacher, and the third is the ability to be a good tutor and the forth is to present a follow up information after the work done, the ability to develop learning skills (Lipinskiene, 2002). The Lithuanian scientists also do the research of a personality of a teacher. Tijuneliene (1998) says that the style of teacher's communication with the students influences their state of mind, motivation and learning results.
The aim of University teaching, according to the Total Quality Management, is to satisfy the client. That is why several requirements should be remembered. Cannon and Newble (2000: 220-223) suggest the following standards of the quality of teaching: (1) clear tasks/ aims; (2) the competence of the teacher; (3) the usage of suitable teaching methods; (4) meaningful results of teaching; (5) the effective presentation of the scientific knowledge; (6) teacher's self-assessment.
The correct usage of teaching methods is stated by the usage of teaching methods that help to reach the goals; are the methods effectively used and changed according to the circumstances and students' reports.
The constant improvement of the teaching process is achieved by follow up connection. Willing to improve the quality of teaching it is necessary to listen to the opinion of students and their proposals. The ideas of students are based on their experience, their needs and hopes. That means the earlier during the semester the information about the factors that influence the quality of teaching will be collected, the earlier the situation will be improved (Narasimhan, 1996:121).

Peculiarities of the research of the quality teaching process. The traditional positivistic approach for evaluating teaching in higher education has been characterized by a strong emphasis on objectivity in measurement that excludes attention to values behind the practise (Cisneros-Cohernour, 2005:85). The researher or evaluator is an ,,objective" data gatherer who strongly relies on quantitative methods. According to Ericson (1986) the mainstream paradigm for research on teaching has its roots in the traditional model of the natural sciences: 'The history of the positivistic research on teaching for the past 20 years is one of analytical bootstrapping with very partial theoretical models of the teaching process, on the assumptions that what was generic across classrooms would emerge across studies and that the subtle variations across classrooms were trivial and could be washed out of the analysis as error variance'.
Researchers following this paradigm tend to link the idea of teaching to the idea of treatment, and evaluattion to the idea of effectiveness. Teaching effectiveness, then, is 'measured by looking at end-of-the-year scores or standardized achievement tests, and to particular teaching practices' (Ericson, 1986:131).
Other researchers point out that the formal conception of good teaching in higher education has not resulted from process-product research but from lists of characteristics or qualities that are used as descriptors of good teaching. Some of these lists are the result of surveys to faculty members and students

who have been asked to describe what constitute 'good teaching'. Feldman (1988), Frey (1976) and Marsh (1987) support the use of these characteristics or behaviors for designing instruments for assessing teaching quality (quotes Cisnerous-Cohernour, 2005). They say that including multiple demensions can produce useful information as feedback for faculty needs for improvement of instruction.
Another group of researchers supports a different pont of view. These researchers claim that teaching should be evaluated 'globaly' rather than paying attention to particular characteristics or dimensions of instruction. Cashin and Downey (1992), Cohen (1986) and Abrami et al (1990; 1993), are among the researchers who support the use of global items or a 'carefully weighted average of the factor scores' when the ratings are used for making administrative decisions (Abrami et al. 1990:98).

RESULTS OF THE RESEARCH OF GRADUATES' OPINION

The Faculty of Social Sciences of Siauliai University is established in 1998. Till the year of 2006, the faculty has trained 2065 qualified specialists. In 2006, around 700 Business and Social Administration, Economics and Education Management bachelors and masters joined them.
For the effective aims and tasks fulfilment, the data and information of primary research are needed. For the research, the special instrument was created – social beliefs and opinion questionnaire that included a unit of questions (18) about the quality of teaching at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Siauliai University.
The instrument of the research consisted of the following structural parts: 1) reference – instruction; 2) demographical fluctuating data and diagnostic data unit.
305 graduates of the faculty took part in the research.
Firstly, the analysis of the questionnaire of the demographic unit is presented. The major part of the respondents have been women (73%), this tendency is reflecting the situation in the faculty where 2/3 of the total number of students are women. The major part of the respondents graduated from business management course.
During the time of questionnaire more than a half of the respondents were employed (64 %) and 36 % were unemployed. This should not be considered as impossibility to find a job, because a big part of the respondents has just graduated or continued their studies for different degrees.
Of all graduates, only 28.6 % had longer than 6 months employment experience according to the chosen specialization. Under 6 months experience of work had 9.2 % of respondents. The regular work, but not according the specialization had ¼ of the respondents.
The statistical data of the questionnaire was processed with SPSS (Statistical Package for Social sciences) software and Microsoft Excel programme.
In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked to answer 18 structural statements about the quality of teaching at the Faculty of Social Sciences of Siauliai University. The answers were presented in ranking scale: 5- "Very good", 4- "Good", 3- "No opinion", 2- "Bad", 1- "Poor".

Traditionally in the practice of psychometrics, the opinion scale data collection is processed with the factorial analysis. Factorial analysis is effective because based on counting the extracted factors reveal the latent structure of the analysed subject. First the data suitability for factorial analysis was checked. The chosen level of value is $\alpha = 0.05$. After the counting it occurred that Barlet's spherity criterion is $p < 0.05$. If KMO coefficient = 0, 887, that means that the variety of the data suites for the factorial analysis.
While carrying out the analysis, 3 factors were stated: "Complexity of the studying process", "The communication of teachers and students", "Academic support" (Table 1).

Table 1

Structural components of the teaching quality

The components of teaching quality assessment(factors) and the steps of the test	**The factorial weight of the test steps**	**Cronbach *α* coefficient**
THE COMPLEXITY OF THE STUDYING PROCESS		
The theoretical part presented during the year is connected with the practical part	,691	,82
Teachers are ready to pass the content of the subject	,608	
The effectiveness of the auditorium time usage	,598	
The involvement of students into the process of acquiring new knowledge	,588	
Connection with the acquired knowledge, the development of the critical thinking	,538	

Students are taught to adjust to the constantly changing work market	,523	
The methods that contribute to students' participation in lectures	,503	
The usage of the information technologies during the process of studying	,432	
COMMUNICATION BETWEEN TEACHERS AND STUDENTS		
The methods of the teachers that are used to evaluate the results of the students' work evaluation	,677	,81
The transparency of a teacher while evaluating students	,667	
The collaboration of teachers and students during the auditorium work	,538	
The possibility to a debate during a lecture	,518	
The possibility to tell teachers their hopes and get them fulfilled	,490	
The efforts of teachers to make sure that the knowledge they pass is understandable	,421	
ACADEMIC SUPPORT		
The possibility to get consultations from teachers	,685	,75
The constant free-will academic support	,631	
Collaboration of teachers and students while doing scientific research	,599	
Teacher consultations	,537	

The first factor "*The complexity of the studying process*" includes such important spheres like theory and practice connection, the effectiveness of auditorium time usage, the development of critical thinking, etc. "*Communication between teachers and students"* is not less important with its content: it includes such questions as evaluation criteria and their transparency, communication and debates during lectures, the possibility to fulfil wishes.

The third factor is the smallest and consists of only 4 statements, but according to the opinion of researches it perfectly reflects the possibility of students to have various help not only during lectures, but also after them. It is called "*Academic support*".

Analysing the histogram of students' needs and looking at the structural content we can state that the respondents have evaluated the usage of information technology in the process of studying with the highest grade $\bar{x}$ = 3.33.

(For the generalisation of the answers of students was used the average arithmetical way of counting. It could have the meaning close to 1, in case when all of the respondents evaluated the situation negatively and 5 in case of positive evaluation).

Not less important was the possibility to take part in the process of acquiring new knowledge. The third comes to pass the content of the subject taught. The graduates state that they did not
acquire skills to adjust to the changing work market situation ($\bar{x}$ = 2.79), and that the theory was not enough connected with the practical activity ($\bar{x}$ = 2.79) (Figure 1).

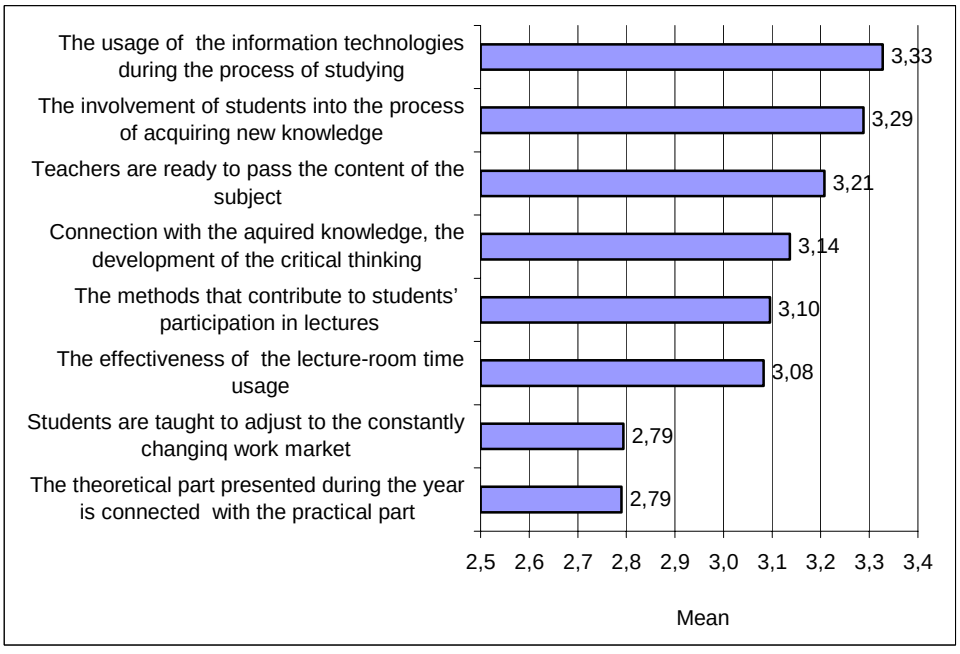

Figure 1 The evaluation of the studying process complexity

Evaluating communication between teachers' and students' communication (Figure 2), the respondents state that they have perfect possibilities to have debates during lecture time ($\bar{x}$ = 3.61), but the possibility to express their wishes and hope for their fulfilment was evaluated with the lowest grade in the whole process of communication ($\bar{x}$ = 3.6).

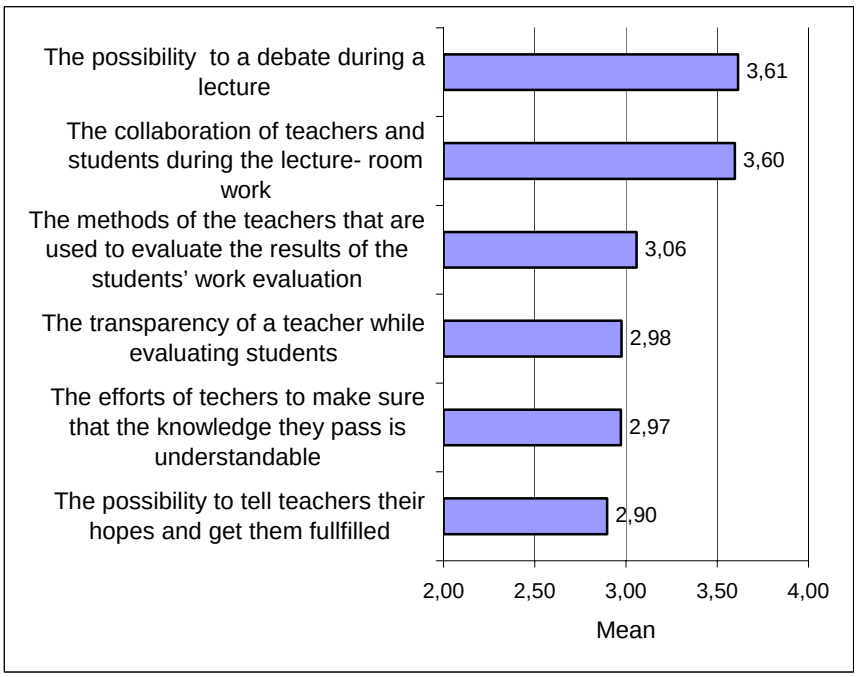

Figure 2 Communication between teachers and students

Evaluating the support (Figure 3), the graduates have given the highest grade to the collaboration while doing scientific research ($\bar{x}$ = 3.6), but graduates state that they can not hope for the support asking for the consultation. Trying to explain this negative evaluation we could probably find the answer in the big teaching load of teachers and they simply lack the time for the individual communication.

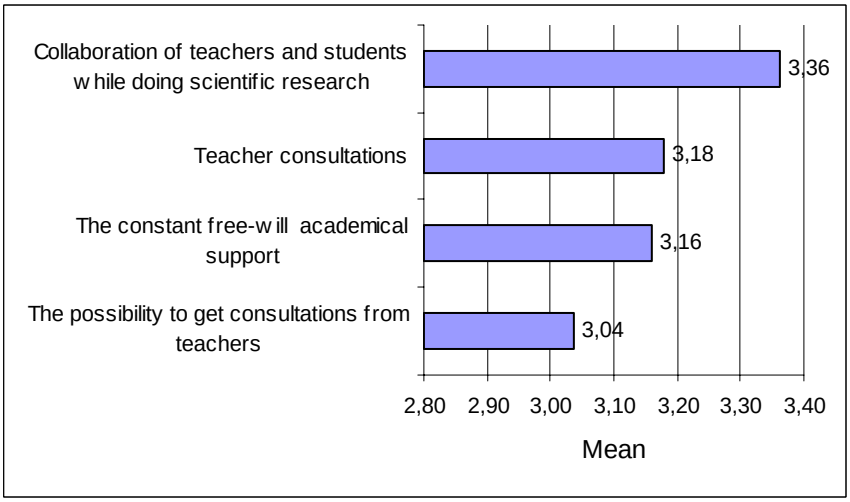

Figure 3 Academic Support

Reaching to evaluate the difference between several data the Kruskal-Vallis test was used. Statistic value is left the same p= 0.05.

The formal evaluation of teaching is very often based on the long list of criteria, for example the knowledge of the subject, the effectiveness of the students' control and the effectiveness of teaching plans (Braskamp and Ory, 1994).

Evaluating the complexity of the factors, bachelors' and masters' views were important for the statistics evaluating the effectiveness of the auditorium time usage.
The graduates having Master's Degree were more positive than Bachelor's Degree students – 56 % of the respondents evaluated the usage of auditorium time as very good, and Bachelor's Degree graduates – 46.2 % only.
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Here we could make a conclusion that for Master's Degree graduates communicate with the more qualified teachers – the main professors and assistant professors; that is why the evaluation is different.

For the next analysis of the research the researchers used Ingwer and Gabler method when, instead of using the average of the scale, the average of the subscribing statements percentage was used (Ingwer and Gabler, 2002). According to these authors the summoned average results give us more obvious and full research results.
While evaluating the opinion of the working graduates, the most statistically important seemed to be the answers of the respondents about the aspects of the connection of the theory with practice, the development of critical thinking and the auditorium time usage effectiveness. Despite of the argument that university education is not for gaining practical knowledge, more and more discussions about the opinion of graduates and employers about missing practical knowledge appear.
Less than half (39.9 %) of working respondents stated that theoretical knowledge was connected with practical knowledge and not working respondents agreed with this statement only with 29.9%. The major part of both not working and working respondents were not satisfied with the small connectivity of practical activity. This problem is important for the society of the Faculty and administration. For solving the problem some things were done – a new Vice Dean was found, with the intention to supervise the activity of students, the preparation for the project of adjusting of European structural funds that is devoted to the improvement of practical activity of students.

The aim of Siauliai University Faculty of Social Sciences is, according to the statute of the Faculty, to prepare specialists "that are able to analyse and predict", that is why during the research the graduates were asked to evaluate the development of the critical thinking at this Faculty. According to the opinion of the researchers, the graduates who are working can evaluate this statement objectively, that's why there was suggested a hypothesis that not working graduates will evaluate this question more negatively than those who are employed.
The suggested hypothesis was proved because almost 50% of all employed respondents stated that the knowledge was presented rationally and the critical thinking was well developed, and only 40 % of unemployed respondents answered positively to this question. In this case we can allow the possibility that temporary unemployed respondents seemed more critical.

Lecture-time usage was evaluated better by the employed graduates.
After the evaluation of the communication during the auditorium work, high grades were received. At the same time Master's Degree graduates seemed to be more satisfied – a bit more than 87% evaluated this point as Very good, and bachelors evaluated it with only 68.1% Good and Very good.
Evaluation of the possibility to express the wishes to the teachers was disclosed by Master's Degree graduates (41.2%) that evaluated it with higher grades than Bachelor's (30.8%).
Evaluating the communication of teachers and students, Master's Degree graduates stated that were more satisfied with the communication.
And again, the answer could be found in the fact that studies for the Master's Degree are on the higher level and teachers are obviously choosing another style of communication. One more point could be

mentioned – many young teachers are working at the Bachelor's study programme, that's why the amplitude of their communication is narrower.
One more statistically important dimension is the evaluation of the work evaluation transparency. And again, less satisfied are Bachelor's Degree graduates – 34.6% of teachers' work evaluation transparency evaluated as Poor and 9.2 % as Very poor, and Master degree graduates - 23.5 % and 7.8%.
During the time of the research, it was also attempted to state the belief of graduates in their communicative abilities and their communication during the auditorium working time.
The suggested hypothesis that the graduates who are self-assured give higher grades to the communication process in the auditorium was proved. The correlation according to Person's method is reaching 0.96.
Another suggested hypothesis that graduates who positively evaluate the collaboration with teachers carrying out scientific researches highly evaluate and their own skills to carry out scientific researches. In this case the correlative connections did not prove. The correlation achieved reached only 0.207.

CONCLUSIONS

According to the processual parameters the higher education quality assessment process consists of the following stages: identification of assessment goals, description of quality dimensions, formulation of assessment criteria and quality indicators, identification of information sources, selection of assessment methods, development of assessment techniques, collection of data, its analysis and summing-up.
The evaluation of teaching in higher education has evolved from informal to systematic approaches as pressures for accountability increased in this level of education. In addition, as administrators began to worry about measuring outcomes, concerns have increased among the faculty about the fairness and use of evaluation results for making administrative decisions, such as tenure, promotion and salary increases.
The conclusions that can be drawn after the fulfilment of the research are the following:
► The graduates have their own view on the administration and development of the educational institution they graduate from, their opinion can help in creating a policy of education and practice;
► The graduates have an opinion about teaching, the reasons that allow learning the subject better with one teacher than with another, and it is necessary to take in consideration their opinion on teaching of high quality;
► Teachers' and graduates' collaboration can create the standards of high quality activities;
The follow-up reaction, stating the weak points of the process of passing knowledge according to the learning results and positive reaction while filling in knowledge gaps can improve the quality of teaching and learning;
► The research allowed stating the spheres that need to be improved for raising the teaching quality at the faculty;
► Such spheres would be the following: the rise of the competence of teachers who work at Bachelor's study programme, the work for the common way of theory and practice skills forming through the prism of problem solving, the activation of individual work with students, listening to the needs of the students and their communicative skills development.

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