



STUDENTS' PERCEPTION OF THE PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF IDEAL TEACHER (I). PILOT STUDY

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Abstract: The current study presents part of the results of a pilot study that aimed the development of a profile for a teacher that is appreciated by school and university students. For the investigation, a 40 items questionnaire based on literature was used. The questionnaire was applied to 76 subjects (school and undergraduate students). The results highlight few differences between the school and the university students' opinions regarding the personal and professional characteristics of the teacher. The experience, the good intention, the big amount of knowledge and the capacity of admitting a mistake are some of the qualities valued by the vast majority of the subjects while the superiority attitude of a teacher generates differences between school and university students, the school students admitting this attitude in a higher percentage than university students. The results of this study suggest a necessity for educating teachers so that they fit the expectations of their students.

Key words: ideal teacher, students' opinion, high school, university

1. Introduction

The primary school, high school and university represent important phases in the individual development of students. Teachers take part to the development process by modelling the abilities, knowledge and personality of their students. The teacher – student relationship changes over time as well as the opinions of the students evolve with the augmentation of their life experiences. Moreover, the desires and the needs of the students suffer modifications, reasons why their ideals as well as the good and wrong practices they could recognise to their teachers become redefined.

Many studies were made to achieve a character, behaviour and style profile for a teacher (Acocella, 2002, p. 24; Dewar, 2002, p.62-63; Fisher, Fraser & Cresswell, 1995, p.17; Devine, Fahie & McGillicuddy, 2013, pp. 90-93; Okoro, Chukwudi, 2011, 107-110). The papers mentioned aspects of teacher profile that are valued by students. Dewar, citing Avent, Adams and Roy (Avent 1931), Adams (1987) and Roy (1987), shows that the teachers consider important to be righteous and correct but also comprehensive. Furthermore, it is of great significance to offer clear instructions and be well trained. The same studies highlight the respect as a key element for the professor – student relationship.

The school and university students see the teacher as a person with a complex role, not only as a simple information providing tool. The following roles of a teacher were identified in the literature: learning mediator, administrator, pastor, responsible with the learning programmes, citizen and community promoter (Harley, Barasa et al., 1999; Pozo-Muoz, Reboloso-Pacheco & Fernandez-Ramrez, 2000). To comply with the curriculum each teacher is involved in out-of-school activities for which special skills of communication with students and parents as well as organizational, planning and coordination aptitudes are required (Dewar, 2002, p. 62).

Regarding a university professor, the most important abilities mentioned in the literature are clarity, competence, a high level of information, fluency in speaking and summarizing capacities. Likewise he has to be an organized, efficient, intelligent and correct "expert" (Ahmad & Sahak, 2009, pp. 66-67, Pozo-Muoz, Reboloso-Pacheco & Fernandez-Ramrez, 2000). Furthermore, it is important for a professor not to be arrogant or authoritative (Ahmad & Sahak, 2009, pp. 66-67, Telli, der Brok &

Cakiroglu, 2008, pp.123). Less relevant characteristics like physical aspect or elegance were also evidenced.

Besides the necessary skills mentioned above, a professor also has to be well acquainted with the school subject he teaches, to stimulate interest in his students, to show enthusiasm towards his subject and towards the teaching process and has to be open to questions (Espina, 2013; Feldman, 1976; Coward, Davis & Wichern, 1978; Kennedy, 1997; Wood, 1998, p. 28).

The requirements of the school/university students regarding a teacher vary in time with the augmentation of the number of professors they work with.

2. Methodology

2.1. Procedure

The phases of the research were the following:

- the ascertainment of the problem, of the main purpose and of the objectives of the research;
- the literature survey for proper documentation;
- the development of a questionnaire that would measure the attitude of the students towards their teachers, using the results of the documentation;
- the application of the questionnaire to 76 subjects, high school and university students, in a written, face to face investigation. The participation was voluntary;
- the centralization, processing and analysis of the collected data. Microsoft Excel software was employed.

2.2. Research question

The research aimed to highlight the characteristics (attitude, personal features and practices) of the teachers that are important for the high school and university students. A further differentiation of the way these characteristics are seen by the school students and the university students was intended.

The current paper will discuss only a part of the answers – the ones that concern the personal features and the attitude of a teacher. The school practices of the teachers will constitute the subject of a second paper.

2.3. Instrument

The questionnaire proposed for this investigation is based on the above mentioned references and on the Teacher Behaviour Inventory (Espina, 2013; Murray, 2014). The items are structured in three categories: personal features (8 items), attitudes (7 items) and behaviour – general behaviour (2 items), teaching behaviour (22 items). One item regards general aspects.

2.4. Subjects

The research aimed to examine the physical, attitudinal and behavioural profile of teachers. A group of 76 persons from which 53 high school students at Colegiul Tehnic Aiud, from 9th to 11th grade, 13 undergraduate students and 10 master students at the Babeş-Bolyai University was involved in the study. The subjects were asked to appreciate on a five steps scale (5 = Total Agreement, 1 = Total Disagreement) 40 affirmations regarding their ideal teacher.

2.5. Results

The answers are varied and some quite unexpected. The important aspects on which the majority of the students agreed are the sex, age and physical characteristics of the teacher.

Table 1. The answers of the students on the items: "The ideal teacher is a man" (Item 1) and "The ideal teacher is a woman" (Item 2).

Appreciation	Item 1		Item 2	
	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)
1	18.87%	34.78%	5.66%	26.09%
2	5.66%	17.39%	0	21.74%
3	58.49%	26.09%	37.74%	21.74%
4	5.66%	13.04%	30.19%	21.74%
5	7.55%	8.70%	26.42%	8.70%

As it can be seen in Table 1, more than half of school students (56.60%) and only 30.43% of university students consider the ideal teacher as a person of feminine gender. In case of Item 1, the percentages of high school and university students that agree with this item are alike: 13.21% high school and 21.74% university students consider that the ideal professor is a man.

Regarding the physical aspect, the answers of the students are summarized in table 2.

Table 2. The answers of the students on the items: "It is important for a teacher to be handsome" (Item 3), "It is important for a teacher have a calm voice" (Item 4) and "It is important for a teacher to be young (under 30 years)" (Item 5).

Appreciation	Item 3		Item 4		Item 5	
	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)
1	15.09%	34.78%	0	4.35%	7.55%	26.09%
2	5.66%	4.35%	1.89%	4.35%	9.43%	21.74%
3	43.40%	34.78%	13.21%	21.74%	49.06%	21.74%
4	15.09%	21.74%	15.09%	34.78%	9.43%	21.74%
5	18.87%	4.35%	69.81%	34.78%	24.53%	8.07%

A third of the high school students valorise (total agreement and partial agreement) the beauty and the youthfulness of the teacher and over 80% appreciate a calm voice. Likewise, a high percentage of university students (69.57%) appreciate the calm voice while only a third of them agree that the ideal professor should be young or handsome.

Table 3. The answers of the students on the items: "It is important for a teacher to be experienced" (Item 6), "It is important for a teacher to be over 45 years old" (Item 7) and "A teacher gets better (professionally) as he/she gets older" (Item 37).

Appreciation	Item 6		Item 7		Item 37	
	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)
1	5.66%	0	16.98%	26.09%	15.09%	13.04%
2	0	0	24.53%	21.74%	3.77%	39.13%
3	1.89%	30.43%	47.17%	39.13%	26.42%	39.13%
4	9.43%	21.74%	3.77%	8.70%	3.77%	21.74%
5	83.02%	47.83%	7.55%	4.35%	7.55%	4.35%

Analysing the data in Table 3, it can be seen that the experience of a teacher is valued by 92.45% of the high school students and by 69.57% of the university students. Regarding the Item 7, high percentages of the subjects disagree with that statement (41.51% of the high school students and 47.83% of the university students). Discrepancies between the two classes of students appear

regarding Item 37; 19% of the high school students compared to 52.17% of the university students do not agree that a teacher becomes better with time.

Table 4. The answers of the students on the items: “It is important for a teacher to be casual” (Item 12) and “The ideal teacher shows his superiority” (Item 13).

Appreciation	Item 12		Item 13	
	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)
1	5.66%	4.35%	11.32%	60.87%
2	11.32%	8.70%	18.87%	8.70%
3	37.74%	17.39%	28.30%	17.39%
4	24.53%	30.43%	16.98%	8.70%
5	18.87%	39.13%	22.64%	0

For the high school students, the informality appears to be more important than the superiority of a teacher, but the difference between the percentages of the two items is minor (43.4% agreement for Item 12 and 39.62% agreement for item 13). In contrast, the university students appreciate in a higher proportion the detached attitude of a professor (69.57%) and only 8.70% appreciate superiority when shown by the teachers.

Table 5. The answers of the students on the items: “The teacher is always right” (Item 34), “A teacher deserves respect” (Item 35) and “A teacher always wants the best for his students” (Item 39).

Appreciation	Item 34		Item 35		Item 39	
	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)
1	35.85%	47.83%	5.66%	8.70%	1.89%	4.35%
2	24.53%	21.74%	7.55%	8.70%	1.89%	0
3	16.98%	17.39%	5.66%	4.35%	13.21%	30.43%
4	16.98%	4.35%	20.75%	17.39%	18.87%	17.39%
5	5.66%	4.35%	60.38%	60.87%	64.15%	47.83%

Over half of the high school students do not agree with the content of the item 34 (60.38%) whereas the vast majority consider that respect has to be shown to the teachers (81.13%) and that the professors have only good wishes for them (83.02%). Regarding the university students, only fewer than 10% consider that a teacher is always right, 78.26% consider that a professor deserves respect and 65.22% agree that the teacher is good willing.

Another aspect on which the young agree is the high level of knowledge the teachers should possess.

Table 6. The answers of the students on the item 36: “A teacher knows more than a student”.

Appreciation	Item 36	
	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)
1	7.55%	8.70%
2	3.77%	0
3	7.55%	17.39%
4	15.09%	34.78%
5	66.04%	34.78%

Almost 80% of the high school students and 69.57% of the university students agree that the teachers have vaster knowledge than they have. The shades of the university students in their agreement are strongly pronounced. About 34% show total agreement and 34% partial agreement

Table 7. The answers of the students on the items: “It is important for a teacher to allow cheating” (Item 14), “It is important for a teacher never to be wrong” (Item 15) and “It is important for a teacher that makes a mistake to recognize it and remedy it” (Item 16).

Appreciation	Item 14		Item 15		Item 16	
	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)	High school students (N ₁ =53)	University students (N ₂ =23)
1	41.17%	82.61%	20.75%	39.13%	7.55%	13.04%
2	20.75%	8.70%	13.21%	13.04%	1.89%	4.35%
3	16.98%	4.35%	30.19%	30.43%	7.55%	4.35%
4	5.66%	4.35%	13.21%	0	5.66%	8.70%
5	5.66%	0	20.75%	17.39%	77.36%	69.57%

With respect to the attitude a teacher has about fraud and errors, the analysis of the results shows that high school and university students reprobate the toleration of cheating by their teachers (68% high school students and 91.30% university students). Moreover, the subjects appreciate when teachers recognize their mistakes (83.02% of the high school students and 78.26% of the university students). Regarding item 15, the high school students agree and disagree in equal percentages (34%), while more than half of the students (52.17%) disagree that a teacher should never be wrong.

2.6. Discussion

The results point out few opinion differences between high school and university students. The most important discrepancies appear regarding the superiority shown by a teacher and the position of the professors towards cheating. While more than 69% of the university students consider that a teacher should not show his superiority, only 40% of the high school students prove the same tendency. Even a higher dissimilarity appears regarding the position a teacher has in respect with the cheating process. The university students disagree in a proportion of 91.30% with the affirmation “It is important for a teacher to allow cheating” whereas only 49% of the high school students consider the same. Furthermore, over 10% of the high school students wish to be allowed to cheat.

The high school students consider in a percentage of 20% that a teacher is always right and 34% that the professors should never make mistakes. In the same time, 52.17% of the university students disagree with the last item. They admit that a teacher can also be wrong (over 78%), but as well as the high school students consider that each mistake made should be recognized and rectified.

Our assumption is that the differences between the two classes of subjects appear due to their different stages of development and due to a difference in their experience. The university students take contact during time with a higher number of teachers enriching their database.

The main limitations of this study consist in the small number of subjects involved and in the fact that all subjects come from the same institutions (Colegiul Tehnic Aiud and Babeş-Bolyai University).

3. Conclusion

In two of the most important stages in the life of an individual, high school and university, young people have expectancies differing from those of the persons that offer them guidance. The common ground of the high school and university students concerns the physical features and the age of their teachers. The disagreements between the two age groups suggest that a change in the mentality of the young people occurs simultaneously with their growing up and the enrichment on their experiences.

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