

THE IMPORTANCE OF REGULAR ASSESSMENT IN THE HIGHER EDUCATION OF HUNGARY

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Abstract

In the last 25 years, the Hungarian higher education went through an enormous change. In the process the trend of education has changed from an elite training to the so called “mass production” of people with bachelor degree.

Every corporation demands some kind of degree from their applicants, because of this most of the young adults study in higher education. While in the nineties students tended to have intrinsic motivation, nowadays they only have external motivation. Previous researches among the students of Keleti Faculty of Business and Management at Óbuda University showed that more than half of the them don't know what they want to achieve in their life or after their graduation.

Unfortunately, most of them don't know how to deal with their “freedom” and have to learn the hole curriculum at the end of the semester. The purpose of this research is to prove how the frequency of assessment – changing from two a semester to a weekly regularity - influences those “wandering” students' performance based on data gathered over the years among hundreds of students.

***Keywords:** Higher education, Continuous assessment*

1. INTRODUCTION

In line with the CEDEFOP [1] report knowledge is to determine the future wealth and wellbeing of societies. Public education, including higher education has a strategic role in the development and economic growth of the countries [2]. The educational system is responsible for transferring and developing competencies, which are very important on the labour market [3], [4]. Post-secondary education is promoted all over the world. Consequently, the number of students in higher education and those on the labour market with higher educational degree is ever growing, although in the recent two years this growth has slowed down in Hungary. Unfortunately, the increase of the educational niveau of the population has not been accompanied by a drastic increase in employment rate [5]. Furthermore, the relative unemployment of those with higher education has even worsened in the 21st Century [6]. The possible explanation of this contradiction is that the skills and competences offered by those with higher than secondary education do not match with the demand of the prospective employers [7]. Another probable justification might lie in the ever decreasing level of knowledge of those with tertiary education. On the basis of the Hungarian Statistical Office's data the number of those completing their tertiary education

on schedule decreases year by year, even though, as presented above, the number of new students enrolled is still increasing [8]. Accordingly, the increase in quantity is accompanied by a decrease in quality of students in higher education. The number of students enrolled in some kind of higher educational institution between 1990 and 2010 has been around 915 thousand, but only 65% of them (approximately 595 thousand) managed to graduate between 1993 and 2013.

The main question is, are the students in higher education lacking such competencies that those enrolled had in tertiary education in the previous decades. Previous research showed [9] that in tertiary education only a small percentage of students really sees the point of studying. Around 60% of them only knows that they want to be in a higher educational institution, but when asked about what the reason behind their decision is, they do not know the answer. Another 20% enrolled, because some kind of external force, such as their parents or employers, forced them to enroll. A few students, only 5% of all of them wish to build and utilise social connections and networks, and only 15% of them is really willing to study and develop their skills. Another research [10] showed that only 30% of female and 34% of male students are dedicated, or eager to be involved in something other than studying, within the bounds of their HEI. Therefore, the majority of the students in higher education in is not motivated enough to gather new skills and competencies, but they wish to prolong their carefree life style, like before.

According to this, higher educational institutions should reconsider their approach on education and performance measurement and create a system that matches the characteristics of the new generation of students [11].

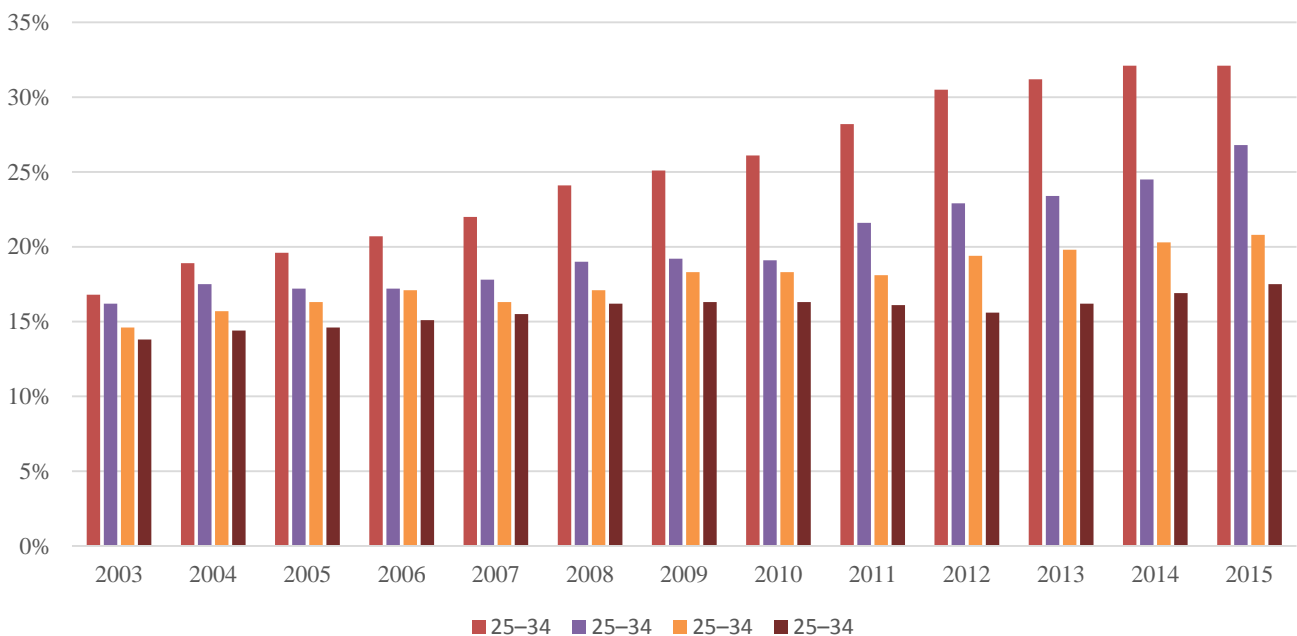


Figure 1. The ratio of those with higher than secondary education within various age groups (Source: KSH, 2016)

2. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

To understand the students' behavior, we have to carefully look into what motivates them every day to attend their courses, and whether they are motivated at all?

Students' motivation is especially important during the university years because this phase also represents the last formal education many students receive before competing for work. During these years spent in higher education their sole purpose would be to develop their abilities and match them with specific needs of the labour market. For this reason, education and along these lines motivation of students during these years is of particular importance [12].

A lot of people get enough satisfaction from their work and take great pride in it. However, it seems students in higher education just do not seem to be motivated at school. Most of them simply see it as a nuisance and only study to survive and not to drop out of university. The reason behind such behaviour is motivation, or in this case the lack of it [13].

It is a well-known fact that almost nothing can be learned unless students are motivated on a consistent basis [14]. In order for teachers to be able to create a drive for learning they must be well trained, to be capable of monitoring the whole educational process and dedicated enough to be responsive to their students [15]. The notion of motivation has been studied by management theorists and social psychologists for ages, in an attempt to identify successful approaches to management. Motivation is a theoretical construction representing the reason for individual needs, desires and actions. In line with this, a motive is what makes an individual to act in a certain way, or at least develop an inclination for that specific behaviour [16]. Motivation theories can be classified in a number of ways, like Natural vs. Rational; Content based vs. Process based; or Intrinsic vs. Extrinsic.

Douglas McGregor's (1960) theory of X and Y type employees is a content based approach that incorporates both natural and rational, intrinsic and extrinsic motives. This theory introduces two different way of workforce motivation used in an organizational setting. According to McGregor, when employees like their work and job, and are willing to take responsibility their leaders do not necessarily supervise their subordinates for effective performance. Therefore, such (Y type) employees' leaders should grant them independence, higher responsibility for work and opportunities for self-actualisation. In this kind of system, created for Y type subordinates, when provided with enough resources, trust and the right organizational circumstances employees will strive to work well, and their interests will be the same as the organization's.

This kind of approach is what most higher educational institutions are using currently [17]. Typical university teaching structure incorporates lectures and seminars, where students are introduced to both theoretical and practical knowledge. In order to support students' work (in this case their study), universities should provide optimal conditions, such as classrooms, beamers and computers, libraries, labs, study halls. In return, students are responsible for their performance and knowledge acquisition. Although this would be expected, as it seems, this system does not function properly. This might be because of the false assumptions about the students' behaviour and motivation. To keep on using the introduced terminology of McGregor, there is a high possibility that students in higher education are not type Y.

Those who dislike or are not satisfied with their work and hence are inherently lazy, are different from those Y type people. McGregor labelled them as X types, thus to be productive, they require objectives, they have to rely on the threat of punishment to increase their inclination towards collaboration.

In line with this, the Hungarian students should be regarded as X type people, when they are at a higher educational institution officially to increase their knowledge and develop their skills. They perceive their student status as a necessity, something they have to bear with, in order to receive some extrinsic motivation, like pocket-money from parents, or an appointment to a higher position in case of employees. "In this case there should be something (or someone) in the organization, for example in a HEI, that makes them to do

their job, study and prepare for the lectures. However, this external motivation that is necessary for X type people are not prevalent in most HEI.” [11]

The management style, likewise the teaching style of university teachers, are heavily influenced by the beliefs and assumptions about what motivates those they have to lead or teach: teachers think that if students detest studying, they will tend toward an authoritarian style of teaching with normal lectures and tight control. On the other hand, if they assume their students like to study for their own sake and take pride in it, then they will tend to adopt a more participative approach with conversations and joint projects [18]. All in all, a major change is needed in the organization’s processes if they want to increase the niveau and effectiveness of their study programs when the number of X type students enrolled is increasing. Therefore, the aim of this treatise is to identify the group of students who attend higher educational institutions and can be referred to as X types, and provide a solution for their lack of motivation for studying.

3. THE FIRST ROUND OF THE RESEARCH

“Different aspects have to be taken into consideration while creating different analysis, which can be described by grouping of different data and information received from the connection to them.” [19] In order to be able to determine, whether the majority of the students really belongs to the X type of people, a 7 years long experiment has been introduced to test the reaction of participating students on continuous assessment.

A subject, called “Vállalatgazdaságtan” (Business Economics) has been involved in this test, where usually more than 50% of the students failed to get a grade at the end of the semester. This subject was assessed in two rounds. First, students could be rewarded with a signature, based on their performance during the semester. Then those with a signature might sign up for and take the final exam (or retake it not more than twice in a given semester).

In the first two years of the test period, students have been assessed only twice during the semester, which is 14 weeks long. Firstly at midterm and a second test at the end of the term. These assessments were the basis of acquirable signature. Students had to reach more than 60% in the combined score of the two tests, if that was achieved they could get the signature. Under such circumstances only 34% of the students could pass the subject with at least a pass in 2009 and 2010. Out of 207 students, only 97 managed to get the signature, but even from them 28 failed to graduate from the course. (For further details see Table. 1.) In the third year, in order to decrease the number of those failing the subject, weakly written test have been introduced as the first step of continuous assessment. Students had to reach 60% on average (not on each of the tests) to deserve the signature. With this change, the ratio of those who did not manage to get a signature dropped by 5%, and in the following year with another 17%. In addition to this the number of those who did not manage to get a grade, despite (on the basis of the 14 weekly and 2 larger tests) deserving a signature fell to 1 in each year (third to fifth year). At this point, a conscious decision has been made to keep on with the weekly assessment of the students from this subject. However, after the fourth year, in order to reduce the burden of the continuous assessment has put on the teachers the written test have been substituted with online tests [20], where students immediately after their test could get a feed-back on their current level of knowledge. The main point in informing them in an instant, was to make them work harder for the coming test through making them realise, if their previous performance was not enough to reach the 60% of the tests’ average at the end of the semester.

The online testing system’s help has been proved to be successful so far, the ratio of students getting signature could further be increased. More than 70% of the students were

able to meet the 60% requirement and the only 11 of the 226 them failed to get a grade in the last three years. This is a 13% increase even compared to the results of the weekly paper-based tests on the average. Although, the last year's results were worse than the previous few years' in terms of failure on the semester's final test. The summary of the results is presented below, in table 1.

Table 1: Results of testing

	2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015
	2 tests per semester		Paper-based continuous assessment		Online continuous assessment		
Number of students	115	92	83	65	53	63	110
Could get signature	56	41	43	45	39	48	85
Could not get signature	59	51	40	20	14	15	25
Failing grade (1)	23	5	1	0	1	2	8
Sufficient (2)	8	5	14	10	12	25	38
Moderate (3)	10	18	11	14	16	12	21
Good (4)	8	7	12	16	12	5	11
Excellent (5)	10	5	8	5	1	7	7
Not failing students	36	35	45	45	41	49	77
Ratio of students did not fail (%)	31%	38%	54%	69%	77%	78%	70%
Ratio of students getting signature (%)	49%	45%	52%	69%	74%	76%	77%

To sum the results up, as it is clearly visible from above, the continuous assessment managed by the online system's direct feed-back possibly increased the efficiency of the continuous assessment further.

The meaning of this is, when students facing a system operating on McGregor's X type's assumptions, their performance is far better than in a system, where evaluation of performance is not continuous and they should study regularly and develop their skills for their own sake. It is an important question, whether this data collected from only one subject is enough to measure the students' real performance, and is it a solid proof that students are being X type of people rather than Y types. Whether they are aware of the fact of their X type behaviour or not, it is up to further investigation, as well as with this mentality they provoke corresponding behaviour from their teachers. This paper also describes this matter from another perspective, which might be the possible reason behind this passive attitude of the students'.

4. THE SECOND ROUND OF THE RESEARCH

The previous research showed an interesting result. Between 2013 and 2014 the number of students passing the subject did not increase significantly and was stagnant. In the last year, as it was stated above, the ration even decreased. Therefore, it was time for a different type of investigation that inspected the students' motives in studying. This research has been initiated in February 2015 among students of Business Economics, and continued in March 2016 including students from a subject called Organisational Behaviour in Practice. The research is not accurate regarding the ratio of students which

subject they were attending, because it has not been asked in the questionnaire. The response rate was high due to the questionnaire has been filled during the seminars, it was over 90% (N=256). 34% of students were male (N=87) and 66% were female (N=169). Their age distribution of participants of the research is displayed on Figure 2.

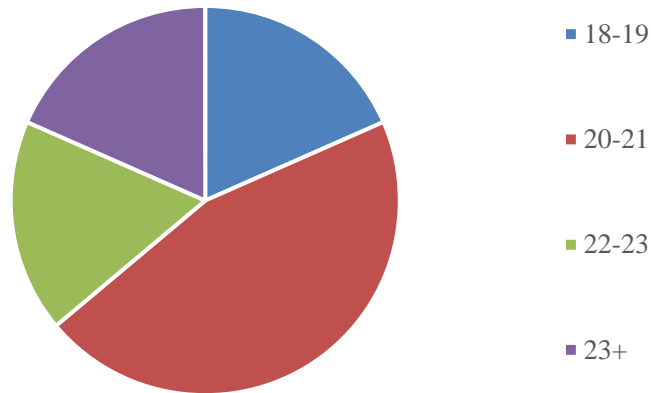


Figure 2. Age distribution of respondents

According to their motivation it was surprising to see that the first reason for them for being at the university – from rating family, workplace expectation; wanting to know more; networking purpose; and still not know what to do – was networking as the most important. Unfortunately, more than 30% (N=83) of the students answered that it is true or partly true that they do not know what they wanted from life and they were attending university without any goal. (For further details see Figure 3.)

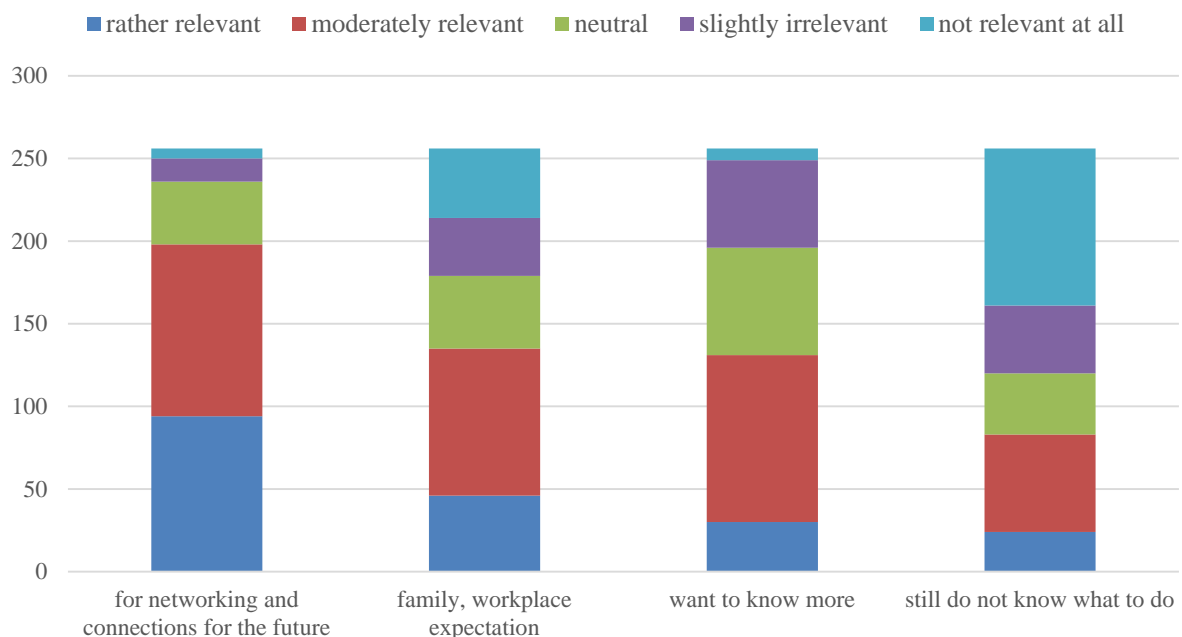


Figure 3. Motives of students for attending HEI

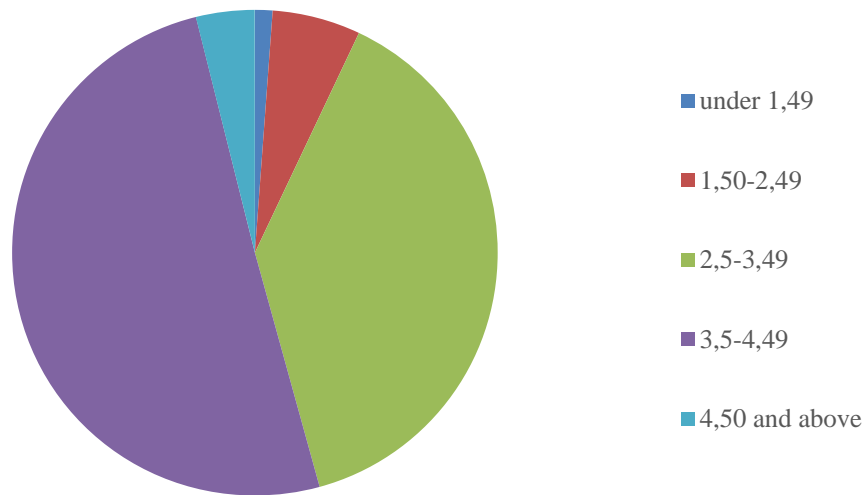


Figure 4. Cumulative average of respondents

Their average (cumulative average calculated from every grade of every semester prior to the one the research has been made) was in accordance with their (lack of) interest, it was 3,5. Slightly more than 45% of the students' had an average worse than 3,5. Fortunately, there were around 4% (N=10) who were above 4,5, meaning that they took their studies seriously. For additional details, see Figure 4.

Unfortunately, if we look at their scientific and social activities, the picture is more disappointing. Only 8 of them has been involved in one or more scientific research in the university, and 20 of them in any kind of social task, such as advocacy or representation. However, in line with their motivation displayed on Figure 3, a relative big portion (42%) of them planned to be in a research, and a smaller one (9%) in student advocacy or representation in the future.

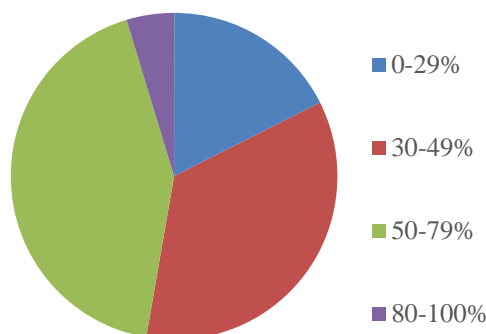


Figure 5. The respondents' performance on the first 4 tests

The students were also very diverse when it came to their performance on the weekly tests based on the first 4 weeks' data in both semester (Figure 5). More than half of them could not perform above 50%, which is the minimum level for the signature on the first 4 tests. What is more, a significant number of students in the research (17,5%) did not manage to

perform on their test above 29%, to be precise it was 45 students. The reason for this unfortunate fact might be found in the confession of the students attending these subjects, on whether they were continuously studying for the weekly tests. 41% (N=106) of them did answer honestly – owing to the anonym nature of the research – that he/she did not prepare for the tests on a weekly basis.

In order to test, whether the students are able and willing to reflect on their studying habits, there was a question that asked, what would be their performance without the weekly assessment. Interestingly, 40% of the students realised that the continuous assessment helped them in improving their level of knowledge and their performance (Figure 6). In addition to this, if only the first years is taken into consideration, this ratio was at 50%.

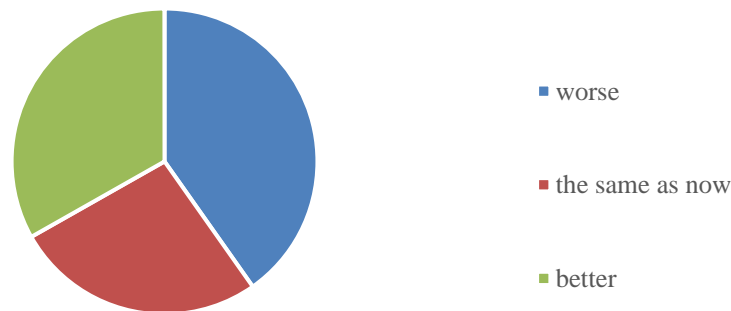


Figure 6. Respondents' opinion of their potential performance without continuous assessment

The same conclusion can be drawn, if we regard their opinion on how many tests and assessments there should be in a semester in the two subjects for the best result. The majority of them preferred the weekly tests (47%), and surprisingly the second most favoured answer, which was that they should write 4 tests in a semester, was also picked by quite many people.

5. CONCLUSION

As it is well illustrated by the previous two researches introduced shortly in this article, students are rather X type people. Most of them do not possess intrinsic motivation for studying, and requires the external motivation. The majority does not even know why they attend higher education, or they only do it because of some kind of expectation of their family or employer. Their performance is better, when assessed continuously.

Interestingly, they are able to view themselves as students without interests and motivations, moreover, they are aware of the fact that without continuous assessment they would perform more poorly, or even fail, because of failed preparation for classes. This means, even those who possess characteristics of the Y type are happy, when being forced to study more frequently and do not ask for more responsibility in relation to their studies. Naturally, there are exceptions.

Present paper highlights the fact that although higher education is aimed at self-motivated, young adults and not underage youngsters, the prevalence of an outer force is unfortunately necessary in higher educational institutions. That is why, the system and the methodology of teaching and appraisal has to be modified, in order to meet the demands of the new generation of students.

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