



University Education and Students' Integration to Research Activities¹

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1. Introduction

In the present times serious changes are taking place in all the fields of politics, economics, culture, education, international relations, deep and dynamic situations of restructuring and globalisation are developing (Beck, 1992; 1999; Nedyalkova et al 2005). Globalisation is putting forward the question of the place of science and the growing importance of research work and skills (Giddens, 2009), of the way they become a part of man's professionalism and his/her placing in society. In that context university education is attaining a central role as it provides key skills to students and it is focused on obtaining knowledge and qualification which are specialized and science centred.

The present article aims at analyzing several important aspects of rationalizing university education as an environment of intellectual and research transmission putting an accent on the following questions:

- Which are the characteristic features of the initiation of students to research work;
- What qualities research activity develops;
- How the trained young people behave towards different research activities.

The accent of the analysis is put on students and their point of view on their inclusion in different research activities. The article is based on the results obtained in the process of the project carried out by lecturers, post graduate students and students at Sociology Department of South-West University in 2013.

2. Education and Research Activity

Education is connected with teaching knowledge, qualification and competence, creating a base for the successful realisation of individuals. Education corresponds to personal needs for knowledge about humans, nature and society, which form the ability of orientation in the world, of the feeling of a personal place within social structures, of the inclusion in social relations. Education is important in social plan, because it *is connected*:

1. *With* adoption of skills for life in a community, expressed by creation of attitudes and readiness of the individual to communicate and cohabit with his/her coevals, in order to turn into an active participant in the life of the education institutions, to assimilate abilities, shaping his/her practical activities and orientation. Life in Community (Jackson, 1968) is ability, meaning the necessity to confirm to the others, to respect them and even to renounce your own desires, to make compromise with your moods, which is formed within the organisational surroundings of the educational institutions since their earliest forms (Durkheim, 1934; 1956).

2. Education is connected *with* teaching knowledge, qualification and competence, building the cultural and the intellectual mainstay of society. Thus the connection between dominating demands and their mapping through training and education of individuals is supported. Education introduces actors in a world of publicly developed meanings whenever the circumstance of a possibility that in certain cases their relative character can manifest itself.

In accordance with its basic activities: training and education, the educational system is aimed at formation of definite personal qualities and that might be conscious or not, purposefully or not sought by various agents included into running interactions. But the construction of social consciousness through the training process is not always evident, meaning that the educational system acquires also one obscure function, which is revealed through the interdependence between personal formation and the structure of power realities and relations. That is, education, while performing its specific activities concerning the educational process, at the same time realizes its social function of preservation and support of the existing social order.

¹ This article is presented with the financial support of National Science Fund - Bulgaria, under the project "Culture of giving in the sphere of education: social, institutional and personality dimensions", Team leader prof.P.Boyadjieva



Educational institutions socialize through knowledge they teach, by specific rules and values they legitimize, by contacts and sub-cultures they develop and draw individuals into different relations; they socialize also through the basic agents of their influence - lecturers. All those sides of the socialization impacts accumulate definite experience in themselves and they become bearers of particular purpose and engagement devoted to shape in accordance to social pattern which determines them. University education should present a unity of training and research and it is necessary for the research process to be realized through student participation. That is important, because the inclusion of students into research activities:

a) Increases the acquired qualification and their professional skills; b) gets students near to laboratories and the processes of constructing knowledge; c) contributes to acquiring competence through their inclusion into diverse activities ("learning by doing"); d) creates attitude towards learning and adoption of new possibilities.

Through research work:

- students become more active and interested in training; they apply in practice the matter for instruction at lectures and exercises; they learn new things; they turn into a corrective of lecturers' work, because they pose questions; they ask for additional specifications.

Another important consequence of the participation of students in research activities is the promotion of their motivation to continue their studies at higher educational degrees such as master's or doctoral. Research work in itself is significant, because it aims at complex personal development as from the point of view of obtaining specific skills and competence, as well as concerning qualities necessary for the construction of general attitude towards knowledge. Here are some of the qualities, promoted by research activity:

- Criticism and self-reflection.
- Openness to changes.
- Aptitude towards perfection.
- Ambition and creative approach.
- Higher professionalism.
- Drive towards increasing of qualification.

3. Empirical Dimensions

How do young people describe their inclusion into research activities or what are the specific meaningful associations through their view, when they speak about students' participation in research work. Shared opinions at the focus groups within the university project of 2013 were used.

Respondents pointed at:

- Inclusion in research projects;
- Participation in conferences and round tables;
- Writing articles on different topics;
- Elaboration of creative presentations;

It can be noticed that for students actual participation in research activity was associated mainly with activities bearing in themselves the store of a specialized scientific activity, understood as part of professional occupation with science. At the same time, however, I can add that along with that conception, shared among students, one has to bear in mind that their incorporation to research work takes place through routine and everyday training practices at classrooms and auditoriums as well, which is connected with:

- assigning specific tasks at lectures, seminars and exercises, literary studies on definite topic, elaboration of term papers, making presentations, writing of reports and of essays.

At every one of the indicated activities, implemented within the framework of training and assigned to students by their lecturers a specific research effort, connected with theoretical and exploratory work, with coordination of the team and distribution of the engagements of every one of the members, making of generalisations and presenting the results from theoretical and/or practical work are presumed. Those are all the important everyday efforts, which are necessary, but in fact students perceive them as training and not as research activity. In connection with that it is important to emphasize that attitude towards research work of students is something that is constructed and family plays its role in that process, important are individual inclinations and natural abilities as well. The most important role however is that of the educational institutions and especially that of lecturers as the main agents of training and of research activity. That is why it is important to accentuate on the fact that the participation of students in research work is connected with the quality of education, the

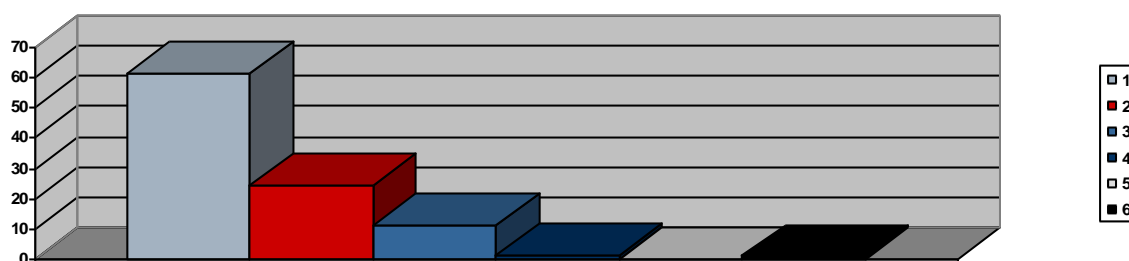
preparation of lecturers themselves, their research engagements, their participation in different scientific nets, with lecturers and students readiness to work together.

What does attract students in research activity taking place in university environment? First of all that is *team-work* i. e. "the possibility to discuss different things with the other young people during the classes", "the appearance in front of the other students", "field work". It was observed that the majority of students finds attractive the social aspects of research work, namely possibilities for discussions, for establishing of contacts, so that sociability might be considered one of the motivations for including students in different research activities.

In connection with the formation of research attitudes with students the relation: *education - creative attitude* has to be taken into consideration too.

Students participating in research inquiry declared that: "*Education has to develop creative attitudes*": 86.0% of the respondents expressed *agreement* with that statement: 1 - fully agree 61.5%; 2 - agree: 24.5%; 3 - neither agree, nor disagree: 11.5%; 4 - disagree: 1.5%; 5 - fully disagree: 0%; 6 - don't know 1% (Graph 1).

Graph 1 Education must develop creative attitudes

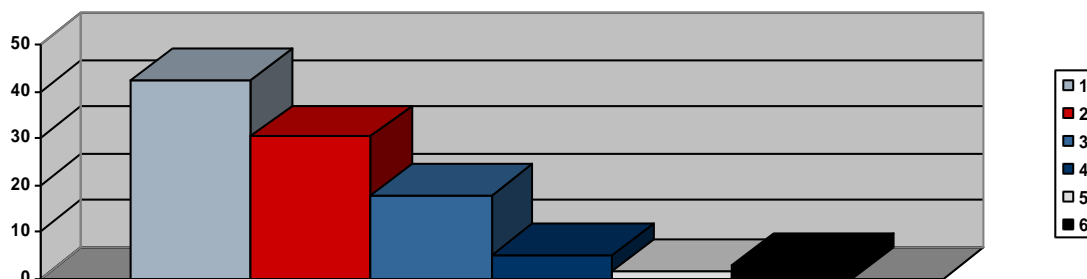


Besides, according to students, education is important for a success in life nowadays in our country (Table 1 and Graph 2):

Table 1. How important is education for success in life nowadays

Extremely important (1)	Very important (2)	Important (3)	Not quite important (4)	Absolutely non-important (5)	Don't know (6)
39.5	31.5	17.5	7.5	1.5	2.5

Graph 2. How important is education for success in life nowadays



It can be noticed that 88.5% of respondents have indicated education as an important condition ("extremely important", "very important", "and important") for individual mobility. All that comes in support of the thesis that education is not only a value in itself; it is actually mapped on educational aspirations and strategies of the Bulgarians. Bringing out of education as a mobility factor shows the



realization of its prestige and significance as a stimulus for prosperity as education is not a value in itself, but it is important in view of realization in society, taking high statuses and reaching welfare.

4. Estimation of Training

Students did not estimate highly the state of the educational system nowadays. During the inquiry to the question: "What is the state of our educational system?" respondents answered by estimation through a ten-degree scale from 00 - "very bad" to 10 - "very good"; responses were as follows (Table 2)

Table 2. Estimation of the state of education

	00	01	02	03	04	05	06	07	08	09	10	Don't know
General estimation	7.8	8.7	9.3	12.9	10.5	19.5	7.4	5.7	2.6	1.6	1.5	12.5

One could observe from the data that for the general estimation of education in this country basic answers were accumulated in the first half of the scale, showing rather a negative estimation. The reasons for that might be sought out in the absence of overall vision on the reforms going on in education, the lack of continuity between the different teams at the education ministry, leading to disorganisation and to piece-work. From their part that presumes imposition of double standards and net of relations. All that reflects on the institutional surroundings, on the specific situations, connected with the realization of the young people. Quality of education and training, discrepancy of marks and the actual knowledge, discrepancy between knowledge, skills and realization are serious problems of the educational system. On the other hand, the important question is: what exactly personal qualities Bulgarian education is forming and it has to form?

5. Conclusions

One of the substantial conclusions of that article is that participation of students in research activity is a prerequisite of achievement of different goals of cognitive and social character, connected with the inclusion of young people in specific nets and structures within the framework of the educational institutions, allowing for displaying of their qualities, attaining qualification and competence, important in personal and in professional plan as well and contributing to their performance. In that context one can conclude that in order to get skills for research, one person has to be connected with another, because those others are exactly the main source of creation of preconditions for the realization of activities. That is why the teams of students enter on the base of interests they share and activities they execute are greatly important. In the long run, research skills and habits acquired through university training, become a substantial characteristic feature of the personal potential and its perfection and those are different sides of the acquisition of social experience and individual significance.

Challenges to education in view of providing research skills to students are connected with:

- Curricula and study programmes, which have to stimulate more creativity and individual approach, and to correspond to person-centred pedagogy.
- Curricula have to show higher mobility and to include more free-chosen disciplines.
- The opening of universities towards older generations, which might turn the universities into real "life-long learning institutions". It is necessary in connection with that distance training forms to be developed further on.
- The activation of project work at universities level as well as an accent on assigning of different creative tasks to students in the process of training.

Students do not always express readiness for inclusion in a creative work. Quite often they are inert and non-interested, passive. At the same time they need expression and research work attracts them by: team-work, creativity, performance in front of others - that exactly has to stand in the vase of the approach to young people. However as a whole the inclusion of students in research work depends on the quality of education, on preparedness and the activity of lecturers. In that sense the inclusion of students in research activities is an important element of personal development and realization under the conditions of globalisation. It depends on the specific structure, organisation and purposefulness, based on running models of training and education, the participation of students in research activities



is a prerequisite for their individual prosperity and at the same time it is an indicator of the development of university education and its perspectives.

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