

## **Perception of International Student's towards Education Services in Romania: Expectations and Challenges<sup>35</sup>**

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### **Abstract**

*The study examines the perception, expectations and challenges among international students studying in higher learning institutions in Romania. The study has employed an open-ended questionnaire to collect largest student opinions. The study has involved participants from the University of Bucharest, University of Politehnica, University of Ploiesti, Academic studies of Economic Bucharest (ASE), Babes Bolyai, and Carol Davila University of Medicine. The international students involved in this study were almost from Asia, Africa, Southern America, and Europe. The responses of international students were divided into two parts. The first part discusses the perception and expectations and the second part presents the challenges faces such as education style, financial difficulties, language barriers, Homesickness, supervision problems, and cultural/social adjustment.*

**Key words:** student's perception, student's expectation, higher education, academic challenges

### **Introduction**

In the last decade education has become the world leading sign of reputation and higher learning institutions are among the largest service industry of the 21th century. These higher learning institutions are facing multiple tasks not only to maintain and uphold their identities but also to provide quality and standard services which offer good opportunities in attracting international and local students (Hamidal & Rajab, 2012). Romania is not a well known country, especially in Developing countries, but since the fall of communist regime in 1989 and followed by higher education reforms in 1995-2000 and Bologna process which directed all EU member states to enter into a new era of knowledge based and market driven economies by competing each other (Roman, 2008), Romania has made a major progressive step towards the European education by restructuring the entire spectrum of the whole University programs (Bachelor, Master and Doctoral) studies.

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These progressive change has not only attracted Romanians students who are increasingly enrolled in public and private universities, but also a number of international students from different countries which now are making Romania a popular destination among Balkan Zone.

Currently, Romania higher learning institutions are hosting the largest number of foreign students from Europe, Africa, Middle East, Asia and Southern America. A total number of 15, 629 international students were enrolled in various higher learning institutions from the year 2010-2015 (MECTS, 2014) and the big number is predicted to be enrolled in Medicine and Engineering degree programs. The categories of these foreign students are in three parts, those under Romania Government scholarship Scheme of each year 85 students from developing countries were offered a place to study in Romania, ERASMUS students who are in exchange programmes and self-financed students.

However, the continuous influx of foreign students from Asia, Africa and Middle East countries raise some question of whether their influx is for educational purpose or using Romania as a transit to other developed European countries for the purpose of looking a better live and permanent stay. Therefore, it is against this background the study should examine perception of international students towards education service in Romania and explore expectations and challenges in their education undertakings.

#### **Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this paper is to comprehend the perceptions of the international student's towards education services provided by higher learning institutions in Romania and find out the expectations and challenges in their academic undertakings.

#### **Research Questions**

In view of the background and purpose of the study, this study was guided by three important questions.

- 1.What are the perceptions of international students towards education services in higher learning institutions in Romania?
- 2.What do expectations international students have on the acquired knowledge of higher learning institutions in Romania?

3.What challenges do international students' faces in their educational undertaking in Romania?

### **Methodology**

In order to study the perception of student on education services provided by Romanian higher learning institutions an open- ended questionnaires was developed to measure perceptions, expectations and challenges towards education services provided. This method allowed the researcher to capture the largest students' opinions.

The study has involved international students from the University of Bucharest, Politehnica University of Bucharest, Ploiesti University, Academic Studies of Economic Bucharest, Babes Bolyai, and Coral Davila University of Medicine. Participants were obtained through two ways; first looking international students at the university campus, hostels and libraries and second was using friendships Networking.

A total number of 85 participants were involved in this study. Participant were from German, Tanzania, Kenya, Egypt, Jordan, Syria, Nigeria, Russia, Venezuela, Thailand, Iran, Burundi, Somalia, India, Cameroon, Algeria, Guinea, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Liberia and Turkey Participants were from different disciplines of studies, such as Medicine, Engineering, Business administration, Economics, Geology, Art and design, Computer Sciences, Literature and Education science.

### **Data analysis**

Data obtained from the measured Likert Scale of (1. Extremely satisfied, 2. Very satisfied, 3. Moderately satisfied and 4. Not at all satisfied), were coded and analysed through IBM SPSS Statistics, Data Editor version 20 and summarized in frequencies, mean and percentages. Another open ended questionnaires were mostly in the form of texts and were presented as paraphrases in the thematic format. All the data were presented according to the three themes under this study, which are; perception, expectations and challenges.

### **Findings and Discussion**

Based on the purpose of the study, which sought to understand the perception of international students towards educational services provided by higher learning institutions, their expectations and challenges, the finding of this study were divided into two major parts.

The first part presents students' perceptions and their expectations and the second part presents the challenges they are facing in colleges/university academic life.

### **Higher Education in Romania**

In Romania, the state is responsible for Higher Education through the Ministry of Education, Research, Youth and Sport. Both public and private higher learning institutions are guaranteed autonomy by the state, national legislation, educational policies and their own charter, all higher learning institutions must take part in the accreditation procedures as explained by the accreditation of higher learning institutions of 1993 (Eurydice, 2007). Currently, there are 125 public and private universities, polytechnic and institutions with the total enrolment of 540,560 local students and 15,629 foreign students in the year 2014/2015 (MECTS, 2014). However, the task of ensuring the standard and quality of education for both public and private colleges/universities was placed in the hand of Agency for Higher Education Quality Assurance (ARACIS). According to ARACIS (2008) the colleges/universities should maintain a high based on the quality standards and create quality culture. These standards and culture quality should measure high quality education in terms of good pedagogical standards, opportunity for students to intellectual challenges and critical thinking as well as ability to solve individual and societal problems.

Romania education system has made a good progress since 2005 when ARACIS get a full registration of membership in the European Quality Assurance in Higher Education in 2009 of which the results has been seen as today some Romanian Universities are among of the Shanghai academic Ranking of top 500 world ranking universities and in the Times Higher Education top 200 world ranking in the scientific and research production. These universities include, Alexandru Iona-Cauza University, Bucharest University, Iasi University, Babes-Bolyai University, Politehnica University of Bucharest, University of Cluj-Napoca and West University of Timisoara (ERAWATCH, 2013). These observable progress and other factors such as small tuition fee and easy way of visa processing to a greater extent has increased yeast of

international students to take an option of studying in Romania and many foreign students are enrolled in these universities.

### **Why Study at Romanian Colleges/Universities?**

Question number 4 sought to investigate the reasons of choosing Romania as a place to study for foreign students. In fact, this question has got many different answers which are presented in the table 1 below:

Table 1 indicated responses of foreign students, mainly from developing countries, their option to study in Romanian universities.

*Table 2*

Frequency	Responses	Percent
45	Romanian Government scholarship/ ERASMUS scholarship	53
80	Small university tuition fee	94
70	Easy admission process e.g no language requirement and age limit	82
64	Easy to get a Visa	75

The response above has shown clearly that, a small tuition fee was the major motive for the majority of students from developing country (Africa, Arabs countries and Asia) to study in Romanian universities. Romania has a small tuition fee, which range from 2,500€ to 5,000€ for undergraduate and 4,000€ to 7,000€ for postgraduate, whilst in other European Member States which are not tuition free, the tuition fee range from 4,000€ to 20,000€. For-example in France the tuition fee range from 4,000€ to 13,500€, Denmark, 6,000€ to 16,000€, Finland, 3000€ to 2,000€, Sweden, 9,000€ to 15,750€ and Spain, 5,000€ to 12,000€. Likewise, EU students have same rights, the same tuition fee when the move from one country to another country as agreed in Bologna process (cycles), their tuition fee should not exceed 650€ per year (Weingarten, 2013).

### **International Students Perceptions toward Education Services and Expectations**

An international student is someone who is not a Romanian citizen or a prominent resident, but he/she is studying in Romania. Similarly, perception is the way in which an individual considers,

understood and interpret something in order to get a clear image (Hamidal & Rajab, 2012) regardless the exposure towards certain services or information as well as how individual choose and manage the information differs and depends on one's, understanding and interpretation. Likewise, in the provision of education, students have different perceptions towards services provided by an institution and these differences depends on one's needs and how the services provided meets his/her expectations. This part presents international students perception and expectations towards education services provided by Romania education institutions of which must determine their future life after graduation and returning back to their home countries or looking for jobs and opportunities.

Table 3

**Perceptions of international students towards teaching delivery and education content**

Education delivery & Content	Frequency	Mean	Percent
Extremely satisfied	22	1.9	25.9
Very satisfied	53		62.4
Moderately satisfied	10		11.8
Total	85		100.0

Table 4

**Perceptions of international students towards professor's support**

Professor's support	Frequency	Mean	Percent
Extremely satisfied	4	2.67	4.7
Very satisfied	20		23.5
Moderately satisfied	61		71.8
Total	85		100.0

Table 5

**Perceptions of international students towards supporting staff support**

Supporting staff support	Frequency	Mean	Percent
Extremely satisfied	9	2.42	10.6
Very satisfied	31		36.5

Moderately satisfied	45	52.9
Total	85	100.0

Table 6

**Perceptions of international students towards examination assessment, grading and feedback**

Examination assessment, grading & feedback	Frequency	Mean	Percent
Extremely satisfied	12	2.28	14.1
Very satisfied	45		52.9
Moderately satisfied	20		23.5
Not all satisfied	8		9.4
Total	85		100.0

Table 7

**Perceptions of international students towards Service delivery, e.g., accommodation and internet**

Service delivery, e.g., accommodation & internet	Frequency	Percent	Percent
Extremely satisfied	7	2.51	8.2
Very satisfied	28		32.9
Moderately satisfied	50		58.8
Total	85		100.0

Table 8

**Perceptions of international students towards university tuition fee**

Tuition Fee	Frequency	Percent	Percent
Extremely satisfied	6	2.11	7.1
Very satisfied	64		75.3
Moderately satisfied	15		17.6
Total	85		100.0

Table 9

**Perceptions of international students towards acquiring skills and knowledge**

Acquired Knowledge and Skills	Frequency	Mean	Percent
Extremely important	77	5.09	90.6
Somewhat important	8		9.4
Total	85		100.0

Table 10

Expectations of international students towards the acquired knowledge and skills

Expectations	Frequency	Mean	Percent
High expectations	85	8.00	100.0

Table 11 presents an overall perception and expectation of international students towards education services provided by educational institutions in Romania.

Table 12

Levels	Dimensions
Extremely satisfied	Teaching delivery and education content
Extremely satisfied	Education provided and expectations
Very satisfied	University tuition fee
Very satisfied	Examination assessment, grading and feedback
Moderately satisfied	Professor/ instructor on academic support
Moderately satisfied	Services e.g., internet, recreational and accommodation

Basing on the overall international student perceptions and expectations towards the education services in Romania institutions, this study has found that, international students were highly satisfied with the teaching-learning process, education content, model of assessment, grading and feedback system as well as tuition fee paid at universities/colleges (see). Again, the result indicates that, international students have high expectations of the education, knowledge and skill acquired to have a meaningful sense in their future life. Furthermore, the results show the perception of international students toward lecturer's support or help as well as other services like internet and accommodation is at a moderate level.

However, this moderate level doesn't mean that professors are not helpful, but professors as the icon and symbols of university reputation, should do best to help students to achieve their goals, by doing so, not only they will be popularising their institutions but also their status, recognition and encouraging alumni student to recommend others to join their institutions. In the same vein, internet services and accommodation were rated at moderate levels, therefore, it is the responsibility of institutions to maintain an efficient service delivery in order to ensure students not only international students, but also local students have to enjoy and feel satisfied with the services provided by their institutions.

#### **Challenges International Students' Faces in College/University/ Academic life**

International students join universities with the goal of winning the study line, as they tend to choose the top universities in order to get a strong education basis as well as to create a global link and long life relationship and success. though, in the course of study, students face many obstacles or challenges in their academic life before they reach their expectations and success. These challenges include; education style, supervision problem, Language barrier, financial difficulties, cultural/social adjustment and homesickness.

##### **Education style**

International students especial at an undergraduate degree program from Africa, Asia and Middle East confirmed that, education system in Romania is a bite quite different from education experience they have from their countries, although they are well prepared and performed well in high schools. They maintained that, at the first week of attending class, they feel themselves as they were not prepared for academic life in Romania because almost courses taught at Romanian universities are a series or a continuation of what have been taught in high schools (*Liceul*) which cause a lot of stress and difficulties for them as they tried to win the study line they found themselves behind everyone and feel like they are losing from academic line.

##### **Language barrier**

Language mastery is the problem facing many international students both studying in Romanian and English language. For example, those students attended one year preparation language and their program of study are in Romanian language are ineffective in class participation because of poor intonation, pronunciation and word and phrase stress, they cannot respond quickly and have no courage to ask questions in the class. In the same vein, those studying their program in English face the problems from their teachers/professors as most of professors are not fluent enough in English, at some point they explain the difficult part of the subject in Romanian language which affect students who are not familiar with the language not to understand what exactly the professor was taking about.

#### **Financial difficulties**

Romania like many other middle income countries in Europe has not created enough opportunities for jobs not only for students but also for her citizens. However, the available opportunity for students has restrictions on student work visa and student are ineligible to work in Romania and if granted to work privilege are limited or fixed of only four hours. Many students, mainly from Africa, the Middle East and Asia are ineligible to get financial awards or loans from the Government of Romania, they depend on family financial support, as any delay of sending subsistence from their families put them in a very difficult time of which they cannot even manage to attend classes.

#### **Supervision problem**

It is expected that a Master and PhD students must produce a scholarly work that can have an impact in the society. Despite the fact that, a Master and PhD student must work independently in his/her thesis, but they need an appropriate support/ guideline from their supervisors to shape their projects for better results. However, 7% of respondents who pointed supervision as a challenge to their academic life, indicate that, there are no much help from professors for shaping student project work as the results their final project are not in high quality.

#### **Homesickness**

The separation of students from their families, love ones and friends has been a major problem facing many international students and one of the causes that can bring them down in their academic performance if immediate support are not taken from the counselling department. Many respondents indicate that, they are stressed being away from their love ones (wife, husband and children), mother, father and friends as they have been calling their loved ones and families once or twice a day. However, homesickness is temporarily normal and the best ways to adjust it, students need to meet with people, mingle with local people or friends and create learning and funny groups for socialization.

#### **Cultural/social adjustment**

International students who were studying abroad not only in Romania at the time they arrived in a new cultural/social environment faces the problems which last after a semester or one year depends on the personal exposure and awareness. Most international students in Romania face the same problem of cultural/social adjustment, including; classroom situation, immigration paperwork issues, different food taste, language and people looking different which increases their loneliness, frustration and anxiety which some of them think of going back home. However, for students to cope with cultural/social life adjustment they need to be patient and tolerant to new environments, to remember their goal, why they have decided to come in Romania, build social support in order to reduce isolation and deal with stress and don't let stress to be accumulated by seeking support from the international or counselling offices.

#### **Suggestion**

This study has been concerned with understanding the perception, expectations and challenges facing international students studying in Romanian colleges and university. However, due to the perceptions and challenges pointed out by students themselves that are in the ability of the institutions I suggest the followings.

- University teachers should maintain the structure and rules of English program by avoiding switch coding (mixing of English and

Romanian language) principally in those classes programmed for English.

- University professors should change their attitude and take a full responsibility to contribute to the academic and intellectual development of the students by ensuring that, the master and PhD student assigned to him/her are competent and able to produce high quality theses.
- University management should improve and provide better services related to accommodation and internet in order to fulfil the needs and expectations of international and local students.

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