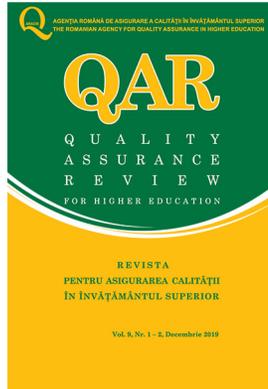




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Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education

**Predare bună și predare mai bună: o evaluare internă prin “Photovoice”
a metodelor de predare din universitate**

Gianina Estera Petre

Quality Assurance Review for Higher Education, Vol. 9, No. 1 – 2, 2019, pp. 27 – 43

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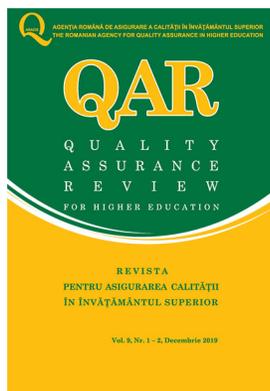
Telefon: +40 21 206 76 00; Fax: +40 21 312 71 35

E-mail: qar@aracis.ro

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Address: Bd. Mărăști, no. 59, sector 1, Bucharest, Romania, postal code 011464

Phone: +40 21 206 76 00; Fax: +40 21 312 71 35

E-mail: qar@aracis.ro

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Good and Better in Teaching: An Internal Evaluation of University's Teaching Methods Through Photovoice

Gianina-Estera Petre

Doctoral Student

*Adventist International Institute of
Advanced Studies Philippines*

petreg@aiaas.edu

Rezumat: În România studenții încă nu au o voce puternică în ceea ce privește îmbunătățirea instituțiilor educaționale. Folosind **action research** și **photovoice**, acest studiu urmărește să ofere o voce studenților cu privire la evaluarea internă a metodelor de predare înainte și după implementarea învățării prin cooperare. Studiul are la bază modelul filosofic al împuternicirii educaționale, dezvoltat de Freire (1970). La studiu au participat șase studenți de la un program de studii de licență. Datele au fost colectate prin fotografii, chestionare și observații. Temele au fost dezvoltate de către participanți printr-un eseu fotografic și au fost analizate împreună cu celelalte date. Rezultatele au arătat eficiența învățării prin cooperare în comparație cu învățarea tradițională în ceea ce privește pregătirea profesională a studenților. Factorii decizionali instituționali au hotărât să păstreze această expoziție fotografică în mod permanent. Recomandarea este aceea ca studenții să continue evaluarea internă anuală în universitate folosind ca design de cercetare **action research** și **photovoice**.

Cuvinte cheie: evaluare internă, bune practici, action research, photovoice, studii superioare, România

Abstract: In Romania, students do not yet have a strong voice in the improvement of educational institutions. By using participatory action research and photovoice, this study aimed to give a voice to university students regarding the internal evaluation of teaching methods before and after the implementation of cooperative learning. The study is anchored to the empowerment education philosophical framework of Freire (1970). Six participants, students from one Bachelor ("licență") study program, went through the photovoice process. Data were collected through photos, questionnaires, and observations. The themes have been developed by the participants through a photo essay and have been analyzed together with the other data. The results showed the effectiveness of cooperative learning in comparison with the traditional teaching regarding students professional training. The policy makers decided to keep this photo exhibit as permanent. The recommendation is to have students evaluate yearly the university through action research and photovoice.

Keywords: internal evaluation, good practices, participatory action research, photovoice, higher education, Romania

Introduction

Educational institutions aim to prepare students for real life and a satisfying profession, in order to successfully face the challenges of a constantly changing society. Educators understand the importance of training students to think critically, to communicate properly, to solve problems easily, to collaborate openly, to work ethically, or to use technology effectively (Trilling and Fadel 2009, 3). Thus, they teach the necessary competencies of the 21st century in an adequate learning environment (Voinea 2019, 25).

As a post-communist country, Romania has been confronted with a diversity of challenges in reshaping its educational system. Being a part of the European Higher Education Area, Romania must align to specific requirements regarding quality standards in education. Thus, school evaluation, externally or internally, may result in school improvement (OECD 2013, 383). In Romania, the external evaluation and the accreditation of the educational institutions are made through the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) or the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Pre-university (ARACIP). It is not the purpose of this research to focus on external evaluation but on internal evaluation in higher education (HE). The internal or self-evaluation of educational institutions must be correctly understood, together with its benefits for growth and improvement, rather than to be perceived as a compulsory activity (Kitchen et al. 2017, 167). Only when the internal evaluation is seen as learning through evaluation process can the end of evaluation be understood as the beginning of implementing the recommendations (Toderăș and Stăvaru 2015, 102). Thus, the quality of education increases in a cyclical process.

Review of the Literature

Internal evaluation is not an easy process, given that in Romania education is competitive by nature. On one hand, educational institutions are under the pressure of performing. On the other hand, by revealing some weaknesses, schools are placed in a negative light, which is not desirable (Kitchen et al. 2017, 189). Therefore, even if self-evaluation brings growth, it also requires openness from the leadership team to improve certain situations. According to Bloom and colleagues (Bloom et al. 2013, 15), this openness develops positive relationships leading both to students' success and to institutional growth. In this kind of environment, the opinions of the institution members are valued, fostering creativity and productivity (Mather and Hess 2013, 35). Such an open approach may also empower the Romanian educational system, especially in HE.

Internal Evaluation

In HE, an internal evaluation may take the form of institutional reports and study programme reports (Ciolan et al. 2015, 33). According to Geven et al. (2015), ARACIS's "methodology emphasizes the production of documents outlining procedures rather than substantive performance indicators on teaching and learning"

(p. 55). Thus, internal evaluation is perceived more as checking up the external evaluation criteria rather than contributing to institutional growth (Geven et al. 2015, 56). In these cases, professors are not very motivated to be involved in the internal evaluation, as this process is not linked so much to their teaching practices.

Nevertheless, a rewarding leadership approach may focus on exemplary practices. The transformational leadership framework highlights five aspects of good leaders: (a) model the way, (b) inspire a shared vision, (c) challenge the process, (d) enable others to act, (e) encourage the heart (Kouzes and Posner 2017, 12). As leadership skills can be learned (Adair 2010, 4; Adair 2011, 88), the leaders may develop those skills which may lead to both human and institutional transformation.

Usually, HE leaders are interested in the growth of the institution they lead. Therefore, they are looking to apply various methods. These methods must be also suitable for the stakeholders, professors and students, in order to be accepted and their purposes understood (Geven et al. 2015, 46). One method to improve the HE institutional practices is Participatory Action Research (PAR). It may be organized as an internal evaluation method to identify the practices in need of improvement and to refine them with the support of the involved stakeholders. It may be applied in order to increase the quality of life for educational systems, community schools, or people (Creswell 2012, 582).

A second method used to empower people from non-outspoken groups, by giving them a voice, is photovoice. It is also used to create a proper environment for change and improvement, reaching the policy makers by the stories related through photos taken by participants. It mediates understanding on certain issues (Butler-Kisber 2018, 135), bringing up desires and emotions not possible to be expressed in other ways. Photovoice is a PAR, a powerful tool for social and individual change (Wallerstein and Bernstein 1988, 383), with its foundation in the Freire's empowerment education framework (2005) and documentary photography (Worth and Adair 1972).

Photovoice was successfully applied in various areas, starting with the healthcare field where it was developed (Wang et al. 1998). It extended by exploring community change (Wang 2006), social justice (Jackson et al. 2014), life after natural calamities (Rosario, Aguillon, and Lucion 2015), women's issues (Rosario, Domocmat, and Oniashvili 2016), HE internal evaluation (Petre 2019), and it is still extending its area of interest.

Institutional Evaluation Outcomes

When the leadership looks for institutional improvement by involving students in the internal evaluation, positive results and good practices may appear (Wang and Redwood-Jones 2001, 560). The students' reflections on the institution practices can support this betterment (Fifolt and Lander 2013, 26), leading to change at the institutional level (Mather and Hess 2013, 39) and to the growth of the students' contentment regarding the university they attend (Schreiner 2013, 49). Furthermore, when students' opinions are valued, they can contribute to the growth

of the community they live in, perceiving their contribution as important and useful (Bloom et al. 2013, 14).

Research showed that a constructive dialogue reflects a sense of responsibility in the institutional growth (Dewar and Sharp 2013, 1), especially when the students are receiving a voice (Fifolt and Lander 2013, 26) and are supported in this process (Bergmark and Kostenius 2018, 623). However, there are situations when students may not have the freedom to express their requests to the leadership (Canning 2016, 11). Thus, preparing an environment wherein students can convey their perceptions, desires, or recommendations in a positive manner may lead to growth and improvement.

The students' voices should be heard also regarding their initial training program. In most of the cases, the initial teachers' training (ITT) deals with the proper content of the academic programme. However, when the delivery of the content is not properly done, the ITT is "unlikely to produce outstanding teachers" (Carter 2015, 37).

In Romania, the ITT does not effectively prepare educators for teaching. The European Commission report for Romania (Commission 2019, 4) mentions that the "initial teacher education offers very little preparation and practical training, particularly in modern teaching techniques or inclusive pedagogy". If this is the official report regarding what should be ameliorated in the Romanian educational system, then it should be useful to explore what is the opinion of students in their ITT education regarding their preparation for the professional life and to propose interventions for institutional improvements and for a better training.

The purpose of the present study is to present the perceptions of the students from the Pedagogy of Preschool and Primary School (PPPS) study programme, with respect to the teaching methods used in the selected university, before and after the implementation of cooperative learning. The emphasis is on how the teaching methods are preparing them for professional life, thus whether the ITT is successfully conducted with regard to interactive and modern teaching methods or not. Moreover, the study aims to reveal the impact of the university students in the improvement of the teaching practices, thus positively contributing to the internal institutional evaluation of the selected HE.

Three research questions led this study, as follows: (1) What are the teaching practices in the selected university before the implementation of cooperative learning? (2) What recommendations can be made to improve the prevalent teaching methods in the selected university? (3) What are the outcomes of the cooperative learning implementation in the selected university?

Methodology

This study is a qualitative research. It tries to show and to evaluate a reality in order to improve it through the stakeholders or the evaluands' contribution (Dahler-Larsen 2018, 867-869). It used Participatory Action Research and photovoice. The photovoice steps are presented in this section.

Research Design

Participatory Action Research is used when the research's purpose is to improve the quality of an institution as well as the quality of groups' or family's lives (Stringer 2014, 14). Creswell (2012, 583) states that it can be used to empower individuals in the educational system or the educational institution itself. Therefore, it is "participatory and action-oriented" (Leavy 2017, 234). Sagor (2011, 6-7) proposes four stages for action research: (1) *Clarifying vision and target* – or responding to "What do I want to accomplish?"; (2) *Articulating a theory* – or "What do I believe is the approach with the greatest potential for achieving my goals?"; (3) *Implementing action and collecting data* – or "What data will I need to collect to understand the efficacy and workings of my theory of action?"; (4) *Reflecting on the data and planning informed action* – or "Based on this data, how should I adjust my future actions?"

According to Wang and Burris (1997, 369), photovoice has three goals: (a) to record and reflect on the positive or the negative aspects of a community, (b) to promote dialogue on important issues in a community, and (c) to create a favourable situation to reach the policy makers. It may lead the participants to improve their community in a creative way (Margolis and Zunjarwad 2018, 616) and bring collaboration between the participants (Banks 2018, 92).

Research Setting and Participants

This study was conducted in a Romanian university, situated in the southern part of the country. The higher education institution has several academic programs. However, the participants have been selected only from the PPPS program. Purposive sampling was used, the participants representing two classes, PPPS second year, and PPPS third year. In qualitative research, the sample is chosen not to meet the criteria of numbers but of the representative qualities (Saldaña and Omasta 2018, 179). In this study, the criteria for choosing the participants were (a) to be regular students with more than 75% class attendance, (b) to be open in expressing their opinions regarding the given topic, and (c) to be willing to participate. The study took place between March-June 2019. From 11 eligible students, only six accepted to participate.

Data Collection

In collecting data, the photo voice steps of Wang and colleagues were used (1998, 76). The steps are briefly described below. The photo essay from Rosario et al. (2016, 52) model was added to strengthen the study. The photo essay was used to create a favourable atmosphere for the participants to tell the stories behind their photos, to group the photos into themes, and to organize the photo exhibit. For the photo essay, the recommendations of Petre (2019, 166) have been followed, allowing the participants to write the photo essay themselves as they knew better what story they wanted to convey through the taken photos.

Preliminaries. Wang et al. (1998, 78-80) state that during this stage a researcher

should take into consideration different aspects such as (a) contextualizing of the issue—the teaching methods used in the selected university; (b) stating the objectives—to evaluate the teaching methods, by the PPPS students, before and after implementing cooperative learning; (c) selecting the site and obtaining permission from the HE administration; (d) selecting the participants; (e) obtaining verbal and written consent from the participants—the last step of the preliminaries of the photovoice study.

Implementation method and data analysis. In the first phase of the photovoice, implementing methods and data analysis, we followed mainly the steps from Wang and colleagues (1998, 80-81), but also other authors, as follows:

1. Orientation regarding the concept and the methodology of photovoice. Participants learned about photovoice what is and when it can be used.

2. Photography training. Students have been trained on how to take pictures, and also in the ethical aspects of taking photos.

3. Giving the theme. In taking pictures, before and after the implementation of cooperative learning, the participants showed their answers to the question *How does teaching take place in the university?*

4. Time for taking pictures. Participants took pictures regarding the teaching methods used in the university before cooperative learning implementation. They had two weeks for taking pictures for this step, after which they selected three most relevant pictures for the given theme. After the implementation of cooperative learning, participants again took pictures from which they selected three representative pictures for the theme. This time the pictures were taken only in the two classes where the cooperative learning was implemented.

5. Facilitating group discussion. The researcher organized two separated meetings with participants from both classes, for discussing the photos.

6. Critical reflection and dialogue. After the selection of pictures, the participants presented the story of each photography. The dialogue and their reflections were guided by SHOWED framework (Wallerstein and Bernstein 1988, 386), as we recommended in the previous study (Petre 2019, 166). The participants responded to the next questions for each picture: What do you see here? What's really happening here? How does this relate to our lives? Why does this problem or strength exist? How can we become empowered by this? What can we do about this? The same process was followed for the second set of photos. Writing down the stories behind the photos was the task of each participant.

7. Codifying. After discussing, contextualizing, and storytelling, the participants engaged in the photo essay activity. They grouped the photos by themes, giving names for both parts of the study. The first was named *Good in teaching* and the second was named *Better in teaching*. The photo exhibit was organized under the title *Good and better in teaching*.

Dissemination of findings. The findings of this study are disseminated through the next four methods: (1) photo exhibit – organized in June, at the end of the school

year 2018-2019. Several professors participated in the photo exhibit, including academic representatives, as well as students and the participants. The photos were presented anonymously in order to not link them with the participants. The photo exhibit was organized as permanent, in a classroom of the PPPS academic program; (2) presentation in an international research conference – 20th AIIAS International Conference on Business, Education, and Public Health, Philippines, November 19-21, 2019; (3) the present article; and (4) dissertation, as the study is part of the researcher's dissertation.

Advocating policy. The third phase of the photovoice, advocating policy, was addressed to the policy makers, the academic department of the university. For the second aspect – reaching the policy makers – the researcher presented the study and informed them about the steps involved. As this study was the second photovoice conducted in the university, the policy makers were familiarized with the concept of the photovoice. The photo exhibit aimed (a) to bring awareness about what the students of PPPS academic program need regarding the teaching methods and their initial training; and (b) to influence the decision of policy makers' regarding the improvement of the teaching methods.

Sources of Data

The present study used as the main source of data the photos taken by the selected PPPS students, before and after the implementation of cooperative learning. Additionally, for triangulation purpose, an online questionnaire was applied for both students and professors, regarding the actual teaching methods used in the university and the participants' recommendations regarding possible improvements of the teaching methods. Even if a survey was applied, the study is qualitative as its purpose is to improve the teaching methods in a university through the evaluation of the students, thus, honouring “the voices of the participants” (Creswell and Clark 2018, 7). Additionally, the researcher's class observations were used. Moreover, besides rigorously following the methodology, we made room for creativity in combining different methods of data collection (Flick 2018, 77).

Findings and Discussion

The codifying step was done by the participants. They have grouped the photos and have identified the themes. The findings are presented based on the two phases of the research, named by the participants Good in teaching and Better in teaching. In what follows, we present the selected photos from the photovoice and the stories behind them, supported by the collected data.

Recurring Themes I – Good in Teaching

Four themes have been identified regarding how the PPPS students perceive the teaching methods used in the university before the implementation of cooperative learning: (a) interaction with low frequency, (b) pretty well, but not good enough, (c) quantity, and (d) let us progress.



Interaction with low frequency.

The findings show that students learn better when the teaching methods are diversified. The participants have mentioned that, occasionally, teachers use interactive methods in the class. One student said: “Taking into consideration that we learn many things in a short time, I think some things must be exemplified to us, to practically apply them for a better understanding. Most

of the professors do not teach in this way [interactively] and it is a pity. We can use traditional methods, but only by using them in combination with modern ones, of cooperation, we can have the desired results. As students, we can motivate our professors to look for the best teaching methods for us, so that we may understand better” (*Interaction with low frequency*, Group 2/Participant 1).

According to the students’ survey responses, lecture occupies the first place in the teaching methods used, with 72%. On the other hand, from the professors who responded, only 29,4% have mentioned lecture as the main teaching method they use. Other teaching methods have been listed as being used in a secondary level in the classroom. Research has shown that students appreciate the use of interactive teaching methods in combination with the lecture (Cavanagh 2011, 23; Johnson and Johnson 2018, 6), identifying both interaction and cooperation as beneficial for learning.



Pretty well, but not good enough.

In the ITT program, the professors must find the best ways to teach. The students’ needs seem to be pretty different than those identified by some professors. One student mentioned that: “As a student, you go to classes to prepare for the real professional life. Life is practical, but classes are theoretical. Most often, the teaching methods of the content are general, explore the topic as

a whole, the students having no ability to adjust the received information, or the cases, to their particular needs.... Any time when the teaching process manages to respond to some real needs of the students, it prepares them practically for the future profession, providing them with specific information and practical solutions” (*The theory is general, but life is particular*, G2/P2).

The students expressed their desires by recommending through questionnaires interactive methods considered effective for learning. They listed graffiti, jigsaw,

debates, cooperative learning, working by small groups, KWL, mind maps, Think-Square-Share, Random Call, demo lessons, Numbered Heads Together, brainstorming, group investigation, Venn diagram, reciprocal teaching/learning, flipped classroom, experiments, stimulation of imagination and creativity, and many others. The professors mentioned in questionnaires, debate and case study—which are number two and three in the list of the methods they use—followed by their recommendation for using interactive lecture, role-playing, simulation, and other methods adjusted to the needs of the students. These findings are supported by other research which states that students' learning is enhanced by using a variety of active teaching methods, most of them based on cooperation (Johnson and Johnson 2018, 4), and adjusted to the students' needs (Noh and Yusuf 2018, 2369).

Quantity. A larger quantity of requirements does not necessarily result in increasing the quality of learning. The participants mentioned the quantity of the requirements as a disadvantage in teaching. One participant expressed this concern through the picture next to it: “Student life is exhausting. During the school year, you cannot do anything else. At the end you see, and you get amazed at how many things you did over a few months. Each professor considers his subject as the most important. Each has numerous requirements for the students and doesn't realize how many requirements are accumulating... Probably this situation helps us to become more organized. But, surely, there are other ways through which we can get organized”. (*Kilograms of information*, G1/P1).



Another student has mentioned that: “Each professor thinks that they are the only ones giving us assignments and the students realize how many they have to do in such a short time. Also, the student has many assignments and does not have a social life” (G1/P3). In traditional teaching, due to the emphasis on teachers' lecture and the competitive grading, assignments are organized only as individual assignments (Abdulahi, Hashim, and Kawo 2017, 257). A balance of individual, group, and class assignments may lead to equal opportunities for students' academic and social life.

Let us progress! Progress is related to the increasing use of technology and the decreasing use of lecture. Openness to the use of new technology in the classroom was mentioned by the students as a need. One participant wrote the following story: “The teaching methods are old, and we like what is old and secure. We are afraid of new, but



this is not helping the students in their future eager-for-new-preparation... We can keep the laptop [from the image], and the interactive work from the class can be transferred [also] in the online environment (Google Classroom, YouTube, Skype). As students, we can give solutions to improve the old teaching methods” (*Silence*, G1/P2).

Another participant mentioned that “The professor reads the presentation prepared for that class and, as the student is getting bored because the professor does not present, but reads, s/he is tempted to use the laptop for other purposes” (G1/P3). Students recommended also to the teachers, as a step towards progress, to take into consideration their learning style: “[We] have different learning styles. No matter how great the professors are, how relevant the content is, or how good the expository teaching methods are, if these are repeated often and are not diversified, their effectiveness decreases, and learning does not occur” (G2/P2). According to Bati and colleagues (2012, 599), when mainly lecture is used, the students get bored and the learning process is not achieving the desired level. Thus, the professors must decrease the drawbacks of lecture by using technology to enhance teacher-student communication and to deliver the content (Neumann, Neumann, and Hood 2011, 274) and by taking into consideration the learning styles of the students (Popa, Laurian, and Fitzgerald 2011, 79).

Recurring Themes II – Better in Teaching

In presenting the perception regarding the teaching methods after the implementation of cooperative learning in their classes, the participants have identified four themes: (a) better two than one, (b) no room for competition, (c) individual responsibility, and (d) do not stress us.



Better two than one. When students work in groups there is reciprocal teaching and learning. One participant said, “This situation exists because our professor realized how important and effective cooperative learning methods are. This class and all we have learned is an example of how we should work with our students. It is an example for us as students because we have noticed how easily the information was

retained, without an additional effort. As students, we should first appreciate this teaching method and encourage other professors to use it and then to apply it in our own teaching when we will be teachers” (*Better two than one*, G2/P1).

Another participant, from the parallel class, has stated that: “These methods help to structure students’ relationships and responsibilities as well as possible and to evaluate actively and dynamically the knowledge gained by the students in class. In addition to the fact that they work together to achieve a common goal,

the dynamic situations keep students attentive” (G1/P2). Research showed that learning in groups brings the advantage of shared knowledge and reciprocal support (Ottu 2017, 28) for achieving a common goal (Johnson and Johnson 2018, 4). A learning environment is also created among students, who are motivated to transfer the gained teaching knowledge and skills from the ITT to professional life (Joyce and Showers 2002, 73-74).

No room for competition. The classes have been organized in groups and cooperative learning encouraged them to decrease the competition often found in our classrooms. One participant explains her photo: “The student gives an answer to the class for the reviewing question after they discussed on this topic with the group peers. She has the possibility to clarify in the group the answer to the question, to present her point of view, and also to



enrich it by listening to other groups’ and class colleagues’ opinions. Through these methods, which are based on cooperation, the students learn to work with others towards a common goal, having the role to learn and also to help others understand, they perceive information as easy and store it in their minds for a longer time. As students, we can suggest other professors to apply these methods or we can use them in the future, in our professional activity” (*Public presentation, G2/P3*).

To eliminate competition and to assure the transfer of knowledge and skills from the ITT to their professions, a micro-teaching session was organized. One participant mentioned that “The micro-teaching lesson was an opportunity to learn more about me, about teaching, about integrating several methods (Think-Square-Share, Random Call, Jigsaw). Together with colleagues, we cooperated to have a beautiful micro-teaching. We supported each other, and we gave reciprocal feedback ... This way, we have been placed in situations we don’t often meet in practice” (G1/P1).

Other studies show that sharing knowledge, teaching each other, encouraging cooperation instead of competition are perceived as positive aspects in the classroom (Johnson and Johnson 2018, 9) as well as promoting collaboration to lead students in active learning (Noh and Yusuf 2018, 2367). If during the ITT programme students are trained in a cooperative environment, they will be able to apply it in their profession, changing the actual direction of individual and competitive learning to one focused on group and cooperative learning.

Individual responsibility. A responsible student today will be a responsible teacher tomorrow. Individual responsibility can be learned when is intentionally taught. “Cooperative learning teaching methods promote teamwork, and the team students feel dependent upon one other and are aware that personal success



depends on the success of the other group members. This board is used for roles distribution in the small groups. The roles are changing from class to class. This reflects in a small measure the interdependence developed between group members. The result is the sum of all efforts, amplified by the synergic effect. At the same time, competition is discouraged. By changing the roles within groups, students develop in

various and harmonious ways. We can fulfil our roles dutifully, to do our part as best as we can, and to relate with the other members of the group so that success is maximum” (*No one is smarter than all of us*, G2/P2).

Another participant mentioned that “The method helps in making students responsible in their base group, and also develops the relationships between students. It is used for better structuring the relationships and the responsibilities of the students in the class groups” (G1/P2). Students learned to be responsible first for their learning and growth and second for their group results. Research showed that when cooperation is present, students are motivated to support each other and to make their own contribution valuable for the group, celebrating both individual learning and group success (Johnson and Johnson 2018, 9), opposite to those with a competitive and individualistic background (Macpherson 2015, 5).



Do not stress us. Learning happens in a non-stressful environment which may be created by the professors. One participant said, “This picture highlights that the students are not stressed when they are asked a certain thing. Why? Because the professor is picking up a card with the name of a student to get the answer, only after all students discussed in groups, deciding the answer for that question. Thus, even

if that student did not know the answer for that question, now, when she is asked to stand up, she knows it because they discussed it together in the group. It is not necessary to go through embarrassing moments when we are asked and we don't know when instead we could transform these occasions in learning situations. Our professor always repeated the motto of cooperative learning: ‘No one is smarter than all of us.’ When we work in teams, the outcomes are superior to those resulting from the work of one person. As students, we should, first of all, be aware that this is how we learn the best and how we have the best results, and then we must learn

how to deal with the children who will be our students” (*Forbidden: “Stand up!... Sit down! You have an F!”*, G2/P1).

The participants understood that cooperation helps them choose to do things in a better way and to eliminate academic stress. One student mentioned, “The students learn in a group for the exam. We work together, we help each other, we reciprocally teach. The group came as a challenge from a professor from our classes. Learning for exams is a very stressful time. But with a little help from your colleagues, you can easily overcome it. Let us organize ourselves more often in study groups” (G1/P1). Cooperative learning helps students to involve not only cognitively but also emotionally with their colleagues (Johnson and Johnson 2018, 10). They feel enjoyment in learning (Miller 2017, 31). As such, the learning environment should be positive and constructive for students’ growth in knowledge and skills.

A very positive aspect of this research is that the participants have identified the advantages of cooperative learning not only for their academic journey but also for their professional life. They have looked at this academic exercise as a way of growing. Thus, they responded positively to the cooperative learning approach perceiving it as favourable in their ITT program. At the same time, participants contributed to the internal evaluation of the teaching methods in the selected HE. As qualitative research findings cannot be generalized, we agree that it is the reader who must decide to what extent the findings of the study and the research design can be replicated in his/her environment.

Policy Decision-Making

During the photo exhibit a positive environment was created wherein the policy makers were exposed to the participants’ opinion regarding the university teaching methods, evaluated through photovoice. The students, as stakeholders, expressed their perceptions constructively. Thus, the policy makers have decided that the university will continue the annual university evaluation through photovoice and will keep as a permanent exhibit the photovoice results of Good and better in teaching, the second stage of the study *The school of my dreams*. The permanent photo exhibit may inspire other professors in looking for the most effective teaching practices. A summary of this internal evaluation as well as the pictures from the photovoice, have been posted on the site of the selected HE.

Conclusion

Internal evaluation in HE may lead to positive improvements when the leaders are receptive to let the students’ voices be heard. It enables students to innovatively and has created the environment in which an institutional transformation can be made. Even if traditional teaching is mainly used in the selected university, the students had the openness to state that modern methods have a positive impact in the ITT program. They approached their training with a positive attitude, highlighting the need for progress in using interactive teaching, cooperation, and technology

in the classroom. They made recommendations which have been implemented in the classes where the study was conducted. Positive results were mentioned by the students after the implementation of cooperative learning in the ITT: developing a positive learning environment, preparing students for their professional life, showing them a teaching model by using a variety of methods, training them for classroom management, decreasing competition and encouraging reciprocal support, developing positive interdependence within the groups, using micro-teaching for helping them apply what they have learned, encouraging reciprocal feedback, increasing individual responsibility, experiencing stress-free evaluation methods, and preparing students to transfer the knowledge and skills from the ITT program to the workplace by organizing study groups.

The recommendations developed through this study are several. First, internal evaluation in HE, using students' perspective, can contribute to the institutional growth. Students must be encouraged to express their recommendations in a positive and constructive way. Thus, the HE leadership team must continue to enable others to act. Second, the method used in the internal evaluation may or may not be effective. In our case, photovoice not only created a positive environment for sharing students' evaluations regarding teaching methods, but also demonstrated that it is a good practice in the internal evaluation, leading to institutional improvements. For further studies, internal institutional evaluation may be realized through photovoice with university employees, students, and parents at all educational levels.

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