LECTURER AND STUDENT PERSPECTIVE REGARDING TEACHING PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION IN ROMANIA

Alina Georgiana PROFIROIU

Alina Georgiana PROFIROIU
Associate Professor, Faculty of Administration and
Public Management, Academy of Economic Studies,
Bucharest, Romania
Tel.: 0040-21-319.1900
E-mail: alina_profiroiu@yahoo.com

Abstract

Over the past five years, Romania has made considerable progress in developing public administration teaching. However the need to increase student interest and involvement in the learning process is a largely widespread issue in all Romanian universities, which impacts on both teaching/learning methodology and student assessment methods.

The present study aims to analyze (1) teaching practices, (2) students' preferences and perceptions regarding these practices, and (3) the relationship between these preferences and real practices. I focused on teaching of public administration (or administrative sciences) as a discipline and the possible variations in students' preferences as opposed to teachers' beliefs and real practices. Moreover, I was concerned with educational effectiveness in terms of acquired competencies and aspects that could increase the effectiveness of students' learning.

In respect of these objectives I designed two questionnaires: one for students in public administration enrolled in undergraduate programs and another for the teaching staff. The two questionnaires addressed comparable research questions. Some questions were similar in order to allow the comparison of responses for both categories of respondents.

Seven public universities were selected through a convenience sampling method from more than 32 Romanian universities which have developed accredited public administration programs. I have chosen the seven most important programs according to student numbers, from all geographic areas of the country. The last part shows that the three hypotheses were not fully validated and for a further research, I should investigate the problem of poor results of my students by a qualitative research among the students with poor attendance and lower than average academic performance.

Keywords: public administration, education, teaching practices, student preferences.

1. Introduction

Within the last two decades, after the fall of the communist regime, there has been an increasing interest in public administration teaching in Central and Eastern European countries, and Romania is no exception for this. It should be noted that over the last 5 years, Romania has made considerable progress in developing public administration teaching. However the need to increase the students' interest and involvement in the learning process is a widespread issue in all Romanian universities. Closely related to teaching methods are the students' assessment methods. How do we know if students have learned what we are trying to teach them?

The current picture in CEE countries, drawn by Nemec, Dimeski and Matei (2011), highlights a big concern: 'lecturing is still the dominant teaching method and written multiple-choice tests and oral examinations dominate as test methods. For an increasing number of courses the final examination now includes an essay'. In contrast, as Stensaker (2008) argued, in order to achieve quality teaching and learning, greater attention should be paid to teaching and learning processes. It is important that teachers are explicit within all teaching practices in order to further develop student learning in all areas of the curriculum.

The way one learns at the university may be different from school or college. A stronger emphasis is placed on teaching how to apply information. This means, for example, being asked to answer questions that provide scope for opinion and debate, where there's no right or wrong answer. 'Research indicates that students are the most qualified sources to report on the extent to which the learning experience was productive, informative, satisfying, or worthwhile. While opinions on these matters are not direct measures of instructor or course effectiveness, they are legitimate indicators of student satisfaction, and there is substantial research linking student satisfaction to effective teaching' (Theall and Franklin, 2001).

In this respect, it is important that teachers within the most diverse environments are kept aware of the positive and negative effects of teaching methodologies currently used within their classrooms. This awareness will then enable teachers to structure learning experience to meet the needs of all individuals while fulfilling the requirements of the curriculum and maintaining student satisfaction.

In the field of Romanian public administration education there is an increasing interest of administrative sciences teachers for identifying new and modern teaching and assessment methods.

The general objective of this study is to investigate the teaching methods in public administration programs, linking those to students' motivation and involvement in the learning process. Despite of the abundant literature related to teaching and assessment methods in higher education in general and in particular in public administration programs, I am unaware of any other study in which this topic was examined with reference to administrative sciences as a specific discipline in Romania.

The present study aims to analyze (1) teaching and assessment practices, (2) students' preferences and perceptions regarding these practices, and (3) the relationship between these preferences and real practices.

I focused on public administration teaching (or administrative science) as a discipline and on the possible variations in students' preferences as opposed to their teachers' beliefs. Moreover, I was concerned with educational effectiveness in terms of competencies acquired and aspects that could increase the effectiveness of students' learning.

This research is also relevant for my teaching activity. It is motivated by the poor exam results of my students. I have taught administrative science and related disciplines for 13 years within the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest. *Administrative science* and *Fundamentals of public administration* are two introductory courses that I have taught for the first year of Public Administration bachelor program within the School of Administration and Public Management. I believe it is my duty as well to investigate the causes of his situation.

In addition, a review of the literature has shown that no studies are available that investigate teaching methods used by teachers of public administration in Romanian universities. Therefore, it is essential to conduct the research to find out whether the methods used by teachers in public administration disciplines are perceived as useful and relevant by the students.

This paper is divided into four parts. The first part presents an introduction into the context where the problem was stated, a brief literature review and explains the purpose, the focus of the work and the motivation underpinning the choice of topic. This introduction was followed by a review of the existing literature relevant to teaching in higher education and, particularly, in public administration. The third part describes the research design and methodology. It starts by reiterating the statement of the problem, aims, objectives of research and research questions, and continues with addressing a description of the research methods, the research design and justification for its use in this study. Several hypotheses have been tested in this study. The paper contains an explanation of the sampling procedures and data collection process, a plan for data analysis and a discussion of ethical considerations. The last part presents the data analysis, the findings and discussions, followed by conclusions and recommendations.

2. Teaching methods in higher education with special reference to Public Administration

At the beginning of the 2000s, Public Administration was considered to be a young discipline (Stillman and Kickert, 1999, p. 5), although elements of modern PA programs have been taught within other disciplines for a considerable amount of time (Connaughton and Randma, 2001, p. 3). The situation has changed and public administration 'nowadays […] is widely acknowledged as an independent and interdisciplinary discipline within the broader family of social sciences' (Fenger and Homburg, 2010, p. 385).

Moreover, as Connaughton and Randma (2001) noted there are differences within Europe in public administration practice and education that dependent on various factors (such as the concept of the state/state tradition, the identity of PA as a dis-

ciplinary, multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary domain), and which have either directly or indirectly influenced the curricula of PA in individual European countries. In the literature, Banyan (2005) has also analyzed the impact of globalization on public administration and has suggested some complementary alternative to usual classroom pedagogies, such as applied experiences (study abroad, internships and capstone projects).

In Romania, higher education programs in administrative sciences have been offered 'by over 30 public and private universities, programs that have undergone evaluation and authorization processes, […] by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and even European ones, for example EAPAA, for programs at UBB and SNSPA' (Nemec, Dimeski and Matei, 2011).

The traditional educational process is expressed by the 'teaching is telling' metaphor, focused on the mechanical assimilation and further reproduction of information, while the new approach promotes the idea that 'students must be active discoverers and constructors of their own knowledge' (Barr and Tagg, 1995). An effective learning process should generate substantial changes in the students' behavior. The quality of instruction in the new model of effective teaching results from two factors: the teacher's ability to generate 'intellectual excitement' and a good 'interpersonal rapport with the students'. Van de Meer and Ringeling (2007) stressed the importance of effectiveness, by making teaching more relevant and less theoretical.

Raising the students' involvement in the instruction process means activating them all along the teaching session, rather than considering them passive receivers of 'chunks' and 'bits' of knowledge, taught in a cumulative and linear manner. Active learning is much more based on stimulating the learners' genuine curiosity concerning the topic under discussion, relying on the educator's regard of their intellectual perceptiveness. Students should be encouraged to suggest approaches to a problem or to guess the results of an experiment.

Sander *et al.* (2000) found that first-year students expected to be taught mainly through formal lectures but preferred more interactive and group-based activities. Similarly, Hativa and Birenbaum (2000) found that students favored a student-centered approach to teaching rather than a teacher-centered approach. However, the approach that is most preferred by students is the presentation of the material in a clear, well-structured and interesting way (Norton *et al.*, 2005, p. 538).

As regards specific teaching methods, Walsh (2006) highlighted the role of the case study in teaching public administration in a cross national context by principally transferring of cases between contexts and among students of varying cultural backgrounds. In the end, she recommended ways in which international academic cooperation could contribute to the effective use of the case study method in order to address globalization in curriculum. Furthermore, Mandel and Keast (2009) underpinned the importance of new kind of learning in collaborative networks.

Trigwell and Prosser (1993) identified five different approaches to teaching depending on the intentions and the teaching strategies: teacher-focused approaches

aimed at the transmission of information and student-focused approaches aiming to bring about conceptual change and intellectual development in the students.

In a questionnaire-based study, Norton *et al.* (2005) found that conceptions of teaching varied across different disciplines, but they revealed that teachers teaching the same disciplines at different institutions had relatively similar conceptions of teaching.

3. Methodology

3.1. Restatement of the problem

Traditional teacher-centered methodologies do not seem to be appropriate anymore for the current generation of students and the levels of teaching and learning performance are unsatisfactory in terms of both depth and breadth. As Nicolaides (2012, p. 621) mentioned 'sadly, many lectures have adopted conventional methods of teaching and learning [...]. In many lecture rooms, teaching and learning techniques are outdated and theoretical knowledge is still disseminated through the technique of talk and chalk'. Nemec, Dimeski and Matei (2011) identify the budgetary constraints as the main cause of scarcity of interactive methodologies in CEE countries. In this context, we could justifiably explore the current Public Administration teaching status in Romania. In addition, I have a personal concern for my students' poor results at the administrative science discipline in the first year within undergraduate Public Administration BA program at the Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest.

3.2. Aim and objectives of research

The aim of this study was to explore the teaching practices in public administration undergraduate programs. This paper discusses the issues of appropriate teaching methods for administrative sciences or public administration as a discipline in Romania, aiming to stimulate in the students the learning motivation and the involvement in the learning process and to reduce the failure rate.

I have also been interested in the various teaching methods used by administrative sciences teachers in most important public administration programs of various Romanian universities and attempted to explore the students' opinion regarding the teaching tools they perceived as most interesting. In addition, I investigated the differences between staff perceptions and student preferences. In meeting the above-mentioned objectives the following questions guided my research and were particularly useful for the design of my research instruments:

RQ1: Which methods of teaching and interest stimulation are considered appropriate by teachers and students?

RQ2: Which are the methods of teaching and interest stimulation actually used in the process of teaching administrative science (or equivalent)?

RQ3: Which is the educational effectiveness of the discipline in terms of competencies acquired and which aspects could contribute to increasing effectiveness?

RQ4: Which is the students' interest for this discipline and which particular factors can stimulate their interest?

3.3. Description of research design and data collection

In respect of these research questions I designed two questionnaires: one for students of public administration undergraduate programs and another for the teaching staff who taught administrative science or related disciplines such as *Science of administration*, *Basics of public administration*, *Introduction to public administration*, *Theory of public administration* or *Fundamentals of public administration* (according to the name of the discipline in different programs).

Both of these questionnaires have been divided into three parts: one requiring the participants' identification, the second one referring to the teaching style and the third one regarding the effectiveness of this discipline. Some questions were similar in order to compare responses of both categories of respondents. Within the two questionnaires, closed-ended questions predominated due to the advantages related to easier statistical analysis of responses, collection of questionnaires with large number of items and enhanced respondent's confidence rates (Chelcea, 2007).

Seven public universities were selected through a convenience sampling method from more than 32 Romanian universities which have developed accredited public administration programs: Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest (ASE Bucharest), University of Craiova, National School for Political and Administrative Studies (SNSPA), Bucharest University, Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (UAIC Iasi), Ovidius University from Constanța, Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca (UBB). I have chosen the seven most important programs according to the number of students, from all geographic areas of the country. Convenience sampling, a type of non-probability sampling, is characterized as involving 'readily accessible' persons for study participation (LoBiondo-Wood and Harber, 2002). 'Convenience sampling – or as it is sometimes called, accidental or opportunity sampling – involves choosing the nearest individuals to serve as respondents and continuing that process until the required sample size has been obtained'(Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2000). In fact my research could be categorized as action research because it promoted reflection on practice.

The Student Questionnaire contained 20 questions, 19 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. The student sample was comprised of 99 students: 10-20 students studying Public Administration at undergraduate program from each university were selected through convenient sampling (20 – Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest (ASE Bucharest), 10 – University of Craiova, 10 – National School for Political and Administrative Studies (SNSPA), 15 – Bucharest University, 15 – Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (UAIC Iasi), 14 – Ovidius University Constanța, 15 – Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca (UBB).

Questions were designed to examine the frequency of attendance to seminars and courses, bibliographical resources used for this discipline, student opinion about appropriate methods of teaching (as perceived) for the administrative science discipline. Students were asked to rate different teaching methods on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 – being the least appropriate and 5 – being the most appropriate teaching. In addition, they were asked to what extent certain teaching aspects could facilitate understanding and

increase their interest and to what extent different teaching methods were actually used by the teachers who have taught administrative science or related disciplines. I used a Likert scale to measure the perception of the students: not at all, to a small extent, moderately, largely, to a great extent. Skills acquired were examined by rating on a one to five Likert scale. Students were asked to rate the discipline's difficulty and their interest for discipline on a scale of 1 to 5. Also they were requested to mention the factors that have contributed to better understanding and higher interest.

The Teacher Questionnaire contained 17 questions, 16 closed-ended questions and one open-ended question. Teacher sample included 17 individuals who have taught public administration at the selected universities: 4 – Academy of Economic Studies in Bucharest (ASE Bucharest), 2 – University of Craiova, 3 – National School for Political and Administrative Studies (SNSPA), 1 – Bucharest University, 2 – Alexandru Ioan Cuza University (UAIC Iasi), 2 – Ovidius University Constanța, 3 – Babeș-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca (UBB).

The first part of the staff questionnaire contains identification questions: name of the discipline taught, year of the study when this discipline has been taught, teaching experience in related discipline and in public administration program and their background. Additional demographic data was not requested, taking into account that this is more a qualitative research, not a quantitative one 'which often values random sampling techniques and large participants numbers to make generalizations about population' (Polit, Beck and Hungler, 2001). However, I preferred the questionnaire instead of an interview because I intended to address the same questions to teachers and students in order to compare their responses. Teachers were asked to rate different teaching methods they have preferred and they have considered to be preferred by their students on the scale of 1 to 5, 1 – being the least appropriate and 5 – being the most appropriate teaching methods. Also, they were asked about the competencies considered to be acquired by rating them on a Likert scale: not at all, to a small extent, moderately, largely, to a great extent.

Data Collection

Prior to data collection, I called up a discipline coordinator from the above-mentioned universities asking them to administer both questionnaires, one to their colleagues who have taught the same discipline and the other to their students who have already passed the exams. The participants have voluntarily agreed to participate in the study. No compensation was offered. The questionnaires were sent by mail and were collected during April 12 and May 15, 2013.

In addition I designed three research hypotheses that emerged from my own expectations about the findings. They have guided me in interpreting the findings.

- H1: There are significant differences between staff opinions and student preferences related to teaching methods and stimulation methods of student interest for administrative science (or equivalent) as discipline.
- H2: There are significant differences between student preferences for teaching methods and those used in reality.

– H3: There are considerable variations in appreciation between students and teachers regarding the competencies acquired at this discipline.

For ethical considerations, I fully revealed my identity and assured anonymity and confidentiality of participants. During the initial contact of my colleagues from other universities, I assur you that I would provide them with feedback if they requested it.

3.4. Research limitations, practical implications and originality

The sample of the study was limited to seven Romanian undergraduate public administration programs, those with the highest number of students and it is not statistically representative because students were non-randomly chosen. The absence of identifying information makes it impossible to determine with certainty the existence and number of duplicates. Also, students and teachers' preferences for innovative teaching and assessment methods were not investigated.

The paper aims to increase the awareness of the higher education institutions about the importance of the teaching process, through knowing their students' points of view about the teaching methods. This will stimulate the interest of the students and help to get students involved in the learning process.

Originality and value of the research derives from the fact that it was the first to be conducted in the Romanian universities that have developed public administration programs.

4. Data analysis, findings and discussion

4.1. Data analysis

After data collection each quantitative characteristic was codified and introduced in an Excel sheet. Data was analyzed using Descriptive statistics from Excel package. Absolute and relative frequencies were computed for each category of responses. The mean of valid responses was computed for each quantitative characteristic defined based on each question. Statistical methods were used to determine whether there are significant differences between teachers' options and students' preferences for different teaching methods, also for acquired skills. The means of each characteristic of two respondent categories (teachers/students) were compared in order to test the validity of the three hypotheses.

4.2. Participants

Of the 17 teaching staff members, 3 were assistant professors, 9 – lectures, 2 – associate professors and 3 – professors. Their experience in teaching public administration was the following: one with less than 1 year of experience, six with 3-6 years of experience, one with 6-9 years and nine with over 9 years of experience. In addition, their teaching experience within this particular public administration program was as follows: one with less than 1 year of experience, one with 1-3 years, three with 3-6 years, three with 6-9 years and nine with over 9 years of experience. Regarding their

background, 4 were lawyers, 4 – economists and 9 majored in administrative sciences (public administration).

With reference to students, the table below shows the frequency of students' attendance to seminars and courses. An attendance of 50% and more than 50% was reported for more than 95% of students, to both courses and seminars.

Table 1: Student attendance to seminars and courses

Frequency of students attendance	To courses	To seminars
No participation to any course/seminar	0	1
Less than 50% attendance	3	1
50% attendance	54	41
More than 50 % attendance	42	56

One of the questions of students' questionnaires was a multiple responses question and it referred to bibliographical resources used by them in studying the PA discipline. The distribution of responses was the following:

Table 2: Bibliographical resources used by students

Bibliographical resources used by students	%
Course notes or seminar materials	81
Handbooks	46
Scientific books	28
Printed journals	2
Internet resources	42
Electronic databases	16

As we can see, course notes and seminar materials were reported to be the most widely used bibliographical resource (81% of respondents), followed by handbooks and internet resources, with 46% and, respectively, 42% of respondents. In contrast, only 16% of the interviewees indicated electronic databases as bibliographical resource which is not in accordance with the knowledge-based society.

4.3. Findings and discussion

In this section I test the validity of the three hypotheses presented at the beginning of the study by comparing the mean values of teacher and student responses. Instead of presenting the findings for each question I preferred to present the comparative results of the two questionnaires used. The results are presented as correlated with the hypotheses and not with the research questions.

Discussion regarding teacher and student preferences for teaching methods

The first hypothesis referred to differences between staff opinions and student preferences related to teaching methods and ways of stimulating students' interest for administrative science (or equivalent) as a discipline. To test it, I compared the mean values of questions 2.1, 2.2 and 2.3 from both questionnaires and the mean values of question 2.4 of teacher questionnaire with those of question 2.7 of student questionnaire.

Table 3: Teaching methods

Teaching methods preferred by	Teachers	Students	Differences
Q211 Lectures	3.8	3.4	0.4
Q212 Discussions and debates	4.7	4.5	0.2
Q213 Case studies	4.1	4.0	0.1
Q214 Role playing	2.9	3.5	0.6
Q215 Projects	3.8	3.9	0.1

As shown in Table 3, there were no significant differences (0.1-0.2 points) between teacher and student preferences for teaching methods, excepting the case of lectures, the most traditional teaching method (with 0.4 point differences) and role playing (with 0.6 points differences), which is, in my opinion, one of the most innovative teaching methods in the Romanian academic environment.

Discussion on teaching methods used by teachers in the teaching process

Trying to respond to the second research question, I defined the second hypothesis related to the differences between students' preferences for teaching methods and those used in real life at this discipline. This hypothesis was tested by comparing question 2.1 with question 2.5 from the student questionnaire.

In addition, I compared the mean values of these questions with those obtained for question 2.5 of teacher questionnaires (in the case of teaching methods) because I was concerned if there were any differences between student preferences and teacher perception of student preference. As can be seen in Table 4 the students reported significantly less preference for lectures and, in contrast, more preference for role playing than teachers actually used in their classrooms. I can thus conclude that students favor innovative teaching methods more than the traditional ones. However, both groups marked discussions and debates with the highest score.

Table 4: Comparison of perception regarding the teaching methods

Teaching methods	Considered by teachers as being preferred by students (1)	Preferred by students (2)	Actually used by teachers (3)	Differences between (2) and (3)
Lectures	3.9	3.4	4.3	0.9
Discussion and debates	4.7	4.5	4.2	0.3
Case studies	4.3	4.0	3.9	0.1
Role playing	3.8	3.5	2.9	0.6
Projects	3.4	3.9	3.9	0.0

If we compare column (1) with column (2) from Table 4, we can see that there are insignificant variations between student preferences for certain teaching methods as viewed by their teachers (column 1) and the real preferences of students (column 2): 0.5 points for lecture and projects. These figures show us that teachers considered lectures as being more preferred by students than real student preferences and, by contrast, teachers' perceptions about students' preferences for projects were less important than students' real preferences. Furthermore, by comparing column (1) with

column (3), we can observe that regardless of teachers' perceptions about students' preferences, teachers have not taken into consideration students' perceived perceptions when they used certain teaching methods.

All these results are consistent with the responses to question 2.4 of the student questionnaire, which indicated modern teaching methods, practical examples, requirements and assessment methods presented in the beginning of courses as contributing to a greater extent of better understanding of the public administration discipline (see Table 5).

Table 5: Aspects which contribute to a better understanding of the PA discipline

Aspects which contribute to better understanding (2.4)	Not at all	To a small extent	Mode-rately	Consi-derably	To the high-est extent	NR	Mean Values
Lecture accompanied by a power-point presentation	5	12	27	24	3	3	3.7
Practical examples	1	0	3	40	53	2	4.6
Examples from others countries' public administration	1	7	17	35	34	5	4.3
Encouraging additional bibliography study	1	17	31	31	13	6	3.7
Encouraging critical analysis	2	9	31	35	17	5	3.9
Use of modern teaching methods	0	1	11	31	50	6	4.7
Use of appropriate assessment methods	0	2	11	44	38	4	4.4
Informing students at the beginning of the course about discipline requirements and assessment methods	2	0	8	29	56	4	4.6

Furthermore, the previous question was reiterated in another form, by asking students to rate from 1 to 5 certain aspects helping them to better understand the transmitted knowledge and to stimulate their interest. In this case students rated the most the debates and discussions within courses and seminars (4.1), practical examples (4.0), and preparation and oral presentation of individual papers (3.9).

Table 6: Aspects helping understanding among students and stimulating student interest

Aspects helping better understanding of knowledge and stimulating students' interest (3.5)	Mean Values	Standard Deviation	Aspects helping better understanding of knowledge and stimulating students' interest (3.5)	Mean Values	Standard Deviation
Q351. Debates and discussions within courses and seminars	4.1	0.93	Q356. Comparative examples with others countries	3.6	1.14
Q352.Teachear's lecture	3.8	0.82	Q357. Projects	3.7	1.07
Q353.Visits of public institutions	3.3	1.47	Q358. Oral presentations of materials prepared by colleagues	3.7	1.04
Q354. Participation at workshops and conferences	3.0	1.24	Q359. Preparation and oral presentation of individual papers	3.9	1.12
Q355. Practical examples	4.0	1.11	Q3510. Practitioner' Lectures	3.5	1.29

My findings were not fully consistent with Nemec, Dimeski and Matei's (2011) remark that highlighted a big concern: 'lecturing is still the dominant teaching method and written multiple choice tests and oral examination dominate as test methods', because my results show that multiple-choice tests are no longer the dominant as-

sessment method. In addition, discussions and debates were actually used and oral presentation of individual paper is considered by students a factor that could contribute to better understanding of transmitted knowledge and to stimulate their interest.

Discussion of teaching effectiveness, measured by acquired skills and student interest for the discipline

The last hypothesis relates to variations in student and teacher appreciation regarding the competencies acquired at public administration disciplines. It was tested by comparing question 3.4 of both questionnaires. With reference to effectiveness of the public administration discipline, Table 7 shows a small variation between teachers and students considerations related to skills acquired during this discipline (0.1-0.5 points). The highest variations were reported for the ability to analyze, synthesize and forecast (0.5 points) and for the ability to make decisions and ability to use specific terms of administrative science (0.4 points).

Table 7: Perception of acquired skills

Acquired skills	Considered by teachers	Considered by students	Differences
Q341. Ability to consult, interpret and apply legal texts of public administration	3.6	3.7	0.1
Q342. Ability to analyze, synthesize and forecast	4.1	3.6	0.5
Q343. Ability to work in teams	3.6	3.8	0.2
Q344. Decision making abilities	3.5	3.9	0.4
Q345. Ability to use specific terms of administrative science	4.7	4.3	0.4

In response to the last question regarding students' interest for this discipline and factors stimulating their interest, students were asked to rate the discipline's difficulty and their interest for administrative science on a scale of 1 to 5. The mean value for responses with reference to the discipline's difficulty was 3.16 and the standard deviation was 0.69, which shows a little variation from the average.

Students' interest for the public administration discipline was high with a mean value of 4.04 and a standard deviation of 0.65, which indicates that data points tended to be very close to the mean value.

In addition, students were asked to indicate the factors that could contribute to increasing their interest for the related disciplines. 91% of the respondents indicated the discipline's usefulness for civil servants training, almost half of them indicated that administrative science is the basic foundation for other disciplines and it contributes for better understanding of social reality. A third reported that this discipline facilitates the insertion in the labor market and a small number of those questioned (11%) indicated other reasons.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

In conclusion, I could state that the three hypotheses assuming important differences between students and teaching staff were not fully confirmed. A possible explanation could be the fact that the student sample includes mainly students with high

attendance and better than average results. The students' opinion follows the teaching staff preferences. These results are consistent with the fact that 81% of students used course notes and seminar materials given by their teachers as bibliographical resources.

Therefore, for further research I should investigate the problem of poor results of my students by conducting a qualitative study among the students with poor attendance and lower than average academic performance.

The main contribution of this study lies in the fact that there are no studies that have explored teaching in public administration courses and seminars in Romanian PA programs. It also has practical relevance as the results of this study may help academic staff to design public administration courses that will further enhance students' satisfaction and success.

While the body of public administration research is growing in Romania, public administration courses have not received adequate attention. Researches such as this one are significant to all teachers in Romanian public administration programs, particularly to those who teach administrative science or equivalent disciplines. The results of this study will possibly contribute to the body of knowledge useful to higher education in offering courses that stimulate students' interest.

This study was limited to public administration courses at seven Romanian universities that have developed public administration programs. The results should not be generalized to other universities or populations because I used convenience sampling instead of random sampling.

This research provides information about what types of instructional practices were actually used by teachers in public administration higher education. The results of the study indicated that there are no significant differences between students and teachers' preferences regarding the teaching methods or the factors that could stimulate students' interest. However, it is possible that responses for students' survey were provided only by students with acceptable results who attended these courses.

Consequently, a conclusive explanation for students' poor results still needs to be developed. It seems that teachers from the field of public administration undergraduate programs actually used a more limited and traditional repertoire of teaching strategies than their students preferred. Students preferred debates and discussions within courses and seminars, practical examples and oral presentation of individual papers. These findings show that students prefer to be actively engaged in the educational process.

Hence, a higher education initiative needs to be designed in order to enhance the use of a wide range of strategies and promote a student-centered learning environment and improve the quality of instruction in higher education programs.

It is important for the academic staff to be able to use a variety of methodologies within their teaching in order to cater for individual learning preferences and to use the correct methodology at the appropriate time in order to improve student development and interest while meeting the needs and requirements of the curriculum.

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