

The Personality of a University Teacher as a Factor Influencing the Attitude of Students toward University Education

Mariana Sirotova, and Eva Frydkova

Abstract—A university teacher is the principal agent influencing the quality of educational process at a university. It is therefore necessary to take interest in the personality of a university teacher as this personality significantly influences the overall quality of university education. This submission introduces a pedeutological view of the personality of a university teacher as one of the key determinants influencing the relationship and the attitude of students to university study. The article also contains the results of a survey focusing on the opinion of students of Philosophical Faculty of St. Cyril and Methodius University in Trnava, Slovakia toward educational work of a university teacher and his/her personality traits.

Keywords—University study, personality traits of a teacher, university teacher, university student, survey of student's opinions and attitudes.

I. INTRODUCTION

UNIVERSITY education develops according to the changes in society as a whole. As a result, we can also see a change in the role and the status of a university teacher from the perspective of his/her educational activity, research work and the overall function of the teacher in the development of a student's personality. The emphasis on materialism, lack of respect for the principals of humanism and democracy bring changes into human behavior and are reflected in the academic culture of a university. A university teacher should therefore be the bearer of positive academic behavior, which should manifest itself in all types of his/her activities, but in regards to the development of a student's personality mainly in his/her educational work. How did the educational work of a university teacher change compared to the past? The question isn't a difficult one. However, when analyzing various literature we realize that the basis of educational work hasn't change. What has changed is the environment in which it takes place.

J. Vašutová states, that the term "university teacher includes all persons operating in institutions and programs of higher education, which are engaged in learning, expert activities,

science and research"[1]. A Slovak professor interested in the area of university pedagogy, R. Štepanovič writes that a university teacher is a basic educational and edifying factor, whose erudition, activity, educational readiness, social and scientific involvement allow him/her to fulfill his/her responsible role in realizing the educational process at a university[2]. The Lexicon of Pedagogy introduces a university teacher as an expert in his/her field, who is appointed to lead the education of university student's in his/her scientific field and at the same time performs tasks in the area of science, submits and defends the results of his/her scientific work which are then used in his/her expert, scientific and educational texts [3]. The definition of the term university teacher by D. Linhartova includes the pedagogical activity of a teacher [4]. The author places a university teacher into position of an expert who participates in a student's socialization process, in building of his/her responsibility for the educational process and in the role of a manager she sees him/her as a facilitator of a student's education. She also emphasizes the importance of analyzing the teacher's own activity and it's educational impact. A characteristic of a university teacher's personality can also be found in legal documents. The Higher Education Act No. 131/2002 Section 75 defines university teachers as follows: "higher education teachers of universities (except lecturers) actively participate in research, development, treatment-preventive or artistic activities focused on obtaining new information, developing new products, works of art or artistic performances" [5]. This section of the Act also mentions the possibility for teachers of universities of applied sciences to substitute active scientific work by monitoring current state of science, research, technology or art. In this generalized statement it has been somehow forgotten that the main and the most important role of a university teacher is to educate students. The above mentioned Higher Education Act mentions activities connected to educational process and the pedagogical activities of university teachers only when classifying individual functions of various university educators (Professor, Associate Professor, Assistant Professor, Assistant). A simple comparison of all above mentioned definitions concludes that in their characteristics all authors highlight the educational activity of a university teacher. It is quite apparent that through this activity a teacher develops the personality of a university

Mariana Sirotova, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Nám. J. Herdu 2, 917 01 Trnava, Slovak Republic; Phone: +421 33 5565 279; E-mail: mariana.sirotova@ucm.sk

Eva Frydkova, University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius, Nám. J. Herdu 2, 917 01 Trnava, Slovak Republic; Phone: +421 33 5565 279; E-mail: eva.frydkova@ucm.sk.

student and therefore it deserves appropriate attention.

M. M. Ficula specifies 15 requirements of a university teacher's personality in regards to his/her pedagogical activity [6]. He emphasizes the pedagogical mastership of a university teacher and his/her personality traits. According to him the following are the most dominant characteristics:

A sensible love toward students – this means unconditional acceptance of a student's personality which manifests itself in the teacher's approach to the student's personality. It is necessary to perceive a young person and accept him/her along with his/her drawbacks and then to try to eliminate or minimize these faults through educational activity.

A creative approach. The axiom that only a creative teacher can produce creative students is valid also in university education. A teacher who is creative tests and analyzes his/her own experience, studies, searches and finds new, better, more rational pedagogical technologies and through them develops the creativity of his/her students. A creative teacher becomes a researcher also in the area of education. He/she relies on the basic theory of education, studies the educational process, draws conclusions, experiments. The realization of pedagogical activity on scientific level requires a creative approach of the teacher and his/her continual self-education and self-improvement.

Realizing his/her own civil responsibility – to educate responsible citizens of the state, highly qualified experts for the society with a humanist and democratic thinking.

High moral qualities. From a moral point of view a teacher needs to behave in a way in which he wants his/her students to behave. He/she needs to be a living example of virtues.

The ability to control his/her own emotional sphere and will-power. It is demonstrated mainly in the well-thoughtout behavior and proper positive or negative emotions. It is necessary that the teacher's emotional reaction to stimuli stemming from the environment of pedagogical activity and from students themselves is appropriate. The teacher displays emotions and the will in unexpected situations of educational process which require a developed pedagogical self-control, stamina, an ability to quickly choose adequate reactions to situations and correct solutions. To successfully work with students, a teacher must be determined, initiative, disciplined, demanding of oneself and others. Characteristics like stamina, an ability to hold back in combination with a quick reaction time, resourcefulness, emotional stability and emotional self-control are particularly important.

Enthusiasm and intuition. The enthusiasm comes to a person as a reaction to a certain psychological effort, from a focus on a subject of research, from continuous thinking and experiencing. It is a psychological status involving all psychological processes at once – thinking, feeling, perception, intuition etc. Intuition demonstrates itself in a particular feeling that the direction of one's activity is correct, in wishing for its results, in an unconscious conviction that it is necessary to act in a particular way and no other.

A mastery of speech. It involves being concrete, witty,

expressing oneself clearly and logically, an ability to induce appropriate feelings in others. Besides this a teacher's speech should not suffer from defects (like lisp, stuttering, not pronouncing certain sounds, too fast or slow pace). It is also important to use the literary language.

Optimism. It should be an integral part of a teacher's personality today. Its presence influences the effectiveness of students' education, induces positive emotions in students, their good mood and interest in an activity, decisiveness and self-confidence.

Health and appearance. The job a teacher requires considerable psychological a physical effort. Therefore, good health is an important pre-condition of an adequate performance in this particular job. A teacher should take good care of his/her health as well as maintain a good physical and psychological state. A teacher's appearance also plays an important part in the pedagogical process. Scruffy appearance raises negative feelings among students which spreads into the pedagogical activity of the teacher and thus decreases its quality and effect.

Besides the above mentioned personality traits of a teacher the author also points out the importance of developing the teacher's own competences which should be focused on developing the cognitive part of a student's personality (perfect knowledge of a subject, erudition, mastery of the didactics, pedagogical observation and vigilance, pedagogical tact and pedagogical verbalization). Requirements of particular personality traits are focused on those qualities of a teacher which directly or indirectly influence the development of a student's personality. E. Petlák also justifies the importance of a teacher's personal qualities and their influence on his/her educational activity and considers a teacher's personality traits an important medium for influencing the quality of educational process as well as the overall success of a teacher's work itself [7].

A set of specific qualities of a teacher forms his/her authority, which means generally acknowledged value of the teacher's qualities perceived by students and the power of his/her educational influence based on this value. A teacher is perceived as an authority when he/she is an expert in his particular field and is able to adequately transfer his/her knowledge, likes his/her students, his/her work, has passion for finding solutions to the questions of science and research and his/her moral standards are present in his everyday work in the form of a fair and responsible approach to his/her students [9]. When taking into consideration a generally accepted psychological fact that a social behavior is also a function of a behavior of others, it is important to pay attention to the teacher-student relationship, which is often characterized as dominant. A teacher is in a position of a guide and he/she manages the educational activity of a student. Therefore, he/she is often considered, and from the position of students often also perceived, as the superior. However, when having in mind the improvement of the educational process, it is necessary to change this incorrect identification of a teacher

and transfer the teacher-student relationship into a partnership which is mutually enriching. J. Vašutová states that a university teacher should maintain collegial relationship with his/her students with only a small level of superiority [1]. This level of superiority can also be expressed as a natural authority of a teacher. "A teacher shall become the bearer of a culture of relations, which he/she expects from his/her students, he/she shall be a person of principles, but at the same time tolerant, shall be demanding of his/her students as well as of his/her own pedagogical performance and finally a teacher shall be friendly and shall respect the personality of students. The attitude and the relationships of a university teacher are mirrored in the relationship of students toward the teacher" [8].

In general the term culture is defined as a set of habits, relationships, institutions, pieces of art and other features which characterize a society or a social group. The term itself is derived from a Latin word *cultura* which means "to cultivate" [10]. Culture is a part of social relationships in a society, relationships and behavior of individuals in a certain social group and it needs to be continually cultivated. Each social group is characterized by a certain culture of relationships which arise out of historical substance of its origin and are modified by the society itself. Materialism, consumerism and a lack of respect for a human which are being preferred in society today spread into university environment and are reflected in academic culture. Academic culture is formed by academic atmosphere of a university environment. V. Šucha considers academic atmosphere to be an abstract category that can't be defined nor written, but we either feel it or not [11]. He compares it to human love, which can't be easily defined, but one clearly feels it when it's lost. "In the life of a university the academic atmosphere is as important as love in a human life". Although the author claims that the atmosphere can't be described, he submits a few of its "building stones":

Public discussions which are tools for ideas, for their defense as well as for the public trial of their acceptability and value. Public discussions shouldn't be personal nor offensive to other participants, even though they are open and often critical. A critique shouldn't be considered a personal attack nor should a personal attack be hidden behind a professional critique. Open, meaningful and candid public discussions help create positive academic atmosphere.

Public lectures are activities which create a platform not only for university teachers and students, but also for scientists and professionals as well as for general public. Through an appropriate combination of topics, thorough preparation, promotion and realization public lectures can add to the academic atmosphere of a university in a scientific area.

An open approach to art and culture as a medium for social communication and as a platform for social contact and penetration. Art related events organized by a university can enliven academic stereotypes and open "windows into other worlds" which are only seemingly fundamentally different

from the world of science and education.

Ethical dimension. V. Šucha (2010, s. 72) emphasizes its importance by saying that "without ethics and morality a university would become a mere gilt with a rotten core". He suggests that each university should have its own ethical codex and ethics commissions that would deal with prevention and judge disputable violations of the codex. A university should find a way of incorporating ethics into basic principles of its existence.

What dominates in all the above mentioned "building stones" is the personality of a member of academic environment. The members of academic environment are university teachers, students, scientists and other experts. And as we stated before academic culture is formed mainly by the relationships and behavior of the members of academic environment. University teachers should be the bearers of academic culture, form positive academic atmosphere and thus influence the development of not only students' personalities, but also the development of university environment and its positive public image. It is therefore important to ponder the questions of a university teacher's personality and how it is perceived by students.

Following the theoretical base we would like to introduce a survey measuring the level of satisfaction of students of the Philosophical Faculty of UCM (PF UCM). The survey was carried out in 2004 using a questionnaire which was prepared by a commission for quality control at the PF UCM with an aim of finding out how satisfied students were with the choice of school, with the course and organization of their study, with accommodation and food, free time as well as with study subjects, their organization and with teachers. In regards to the topic of this article we are going to mention only results related to a university teacher.

So far 193 students of all study programs and of all year-classes of PF UCM have taken part in the survey (at the time of preparation of this article the survey hasn't been concluded). Collected student opinions are shown in total numbers for the whole sample of surveyed subjects together with selected quotations of students' oral comments.

Students assess a university teacher in term of basic qualities characterizing his/her personality. It means his/her qualification, skills, personality traits and character.

Other criteria of evaluating teachers (the last line of the graph) are connected mainly to the teacher's personality traits and his/her character. There were however also criteria which were closely related to the previous criteria. A university teacher is positively evaluated when he/she possesses the following attributes (in order from the most often occurring ones to the least common):

Humane approach and kindness – it means love of students expressed in the quality of pedagogical work, in an attempt to get to know them as much as possible and to consider them equal partners. (... "Humanity, respect for students. I'm stating an example of a real professor of our PF. Deep reverence, respect. IDOL! If only there were more of them!"...,

...”Humane approach, kindness, immense willingness, impeccable expertise in his field...”, ...”humanity, there are some who lack this quality”...).

Willingness – a teacher’s attempt to accommodate students or to help them is among the most regarded qualities. However, it depends on how this willingness is being interpreted as it can contain a wide spectrum of possibilities. (...”if we are unable to understand something they should be ready to repeat it, if we are unable to get to the required literature, it would be good to have the possibility to ask the teacher to send us a scanned version of the study material”..., ...”every time there is a problem of technical character or if don’t know something or any other issue, we know that we can write to him and he solves everything.”, ... “she is ALWAYS willing to help even if the problem is not directly related to her competencies or the competencies of the department.”, ...”willingness to organize school events”).

Pleasant demeanor and appearance – are often significant factors influencing students’ activity and their motivation (... “the overall appearance and image are also very important. What’s also important is how the teacher approaches us, what he thinks of us – are we just sheep and he just wants to quickly finish his work and good bye or is he cool, he talks to us and lets us express our own views and he doesn’t look down on us”..., ...”it is apparent that he enjoys the subject he teaches and he transfers this enthusiasm onto his students”, ... “They are intelligent, witty, cordial, always kind, inspirational and they pull me forward,” ...”stylishly dressed” ...)

The ability to motivate and captivate – according to students a teacher is good when he is able to captivate students by his knowledge, work organization, but also by being able to motivate. (...”some often repeat themselves, are boring and unable to captivate students”..., ...”his preparation for lessons – the teacher should know what he wants to teach and his study material shouldn’t be in chaotic order”..., ...”What motivates me is when the teacher praises me”..., ...”personality traits are fine, engaging, lively teaching and lecturing, humanity”..., ...”the teacher should also motivate students, well I think all of them lead by example and are big idols, for me surely”).

The survey also contains some comments which show certain negative occurrences regarding to teachers’ personality and which should be eliminated.

In section “other” students most often stated issues that are already included in the graph. The following were however the most common:

Irresponsibility – students negatively view teachers who are sloppy when it comes to arriving to lectures on time, preparation for their pedagogical activity or its execution. (...”not being prepared for lectures, boredom, extending lectures at the expense of free time – sometimes even the whole break”, ... “not being punctual, always repeating the same – then we are late in the study curriculum”, ... “non-professionalism, exaggerated requirements for finishing the subject, inability to explain to students what is required, being phlegmatic, looking down on students and approaching them

like pupils of elementary school, for God’s sake, I’m 25!!!!!!”).

Teacher’s arrogance, inappropriate approach – students often stated their experience with teachers’ arrogance and ridiculing of students. (... “the way he presents himself during lessons resembles elements of haughtiness, sometimes making fun of students”..., ... “arrogant, haughty approach to students, lets us feel it at almost each lecture/lesson, discussion is almost impossible, what doesn’t suit him is automatically bad, tolerance and compromise are out of question, he seems unprofessional in this field, is unable to formulate his expectations until it’s too late, ... “self-important, looks down on some students, humiliates them in front of the class, you can’t oppose him, even in a good sense, he is correct in everything and nobody else”,...)

Bias, preferring some students to others – university teachers often underestimate the consequences of a visible bias in their behavior or of an obvious preference of some students to others (... “constantly changes criteria and the worst thing is his bias toward some of the students. I feel sorry about that”, ... “Lack of transparency and I don’t know how to say it differently, but the bias toward some students and also vengeance”, ... “Superficiality, subjective approach to students according to sympathies, unfairness”).

Insufficient presentation skills – a university teacher should possess adequate verbal skill and according to students he/she should be able to present his/her knowledge not only verbally, but also via technical means which becomes a necessity in today’s world. (... “some teachers should sign up for The Expert Language (Presentation Techniques), because their presentations are terrible and they should also realize that if we have to copy the notes from slides, nobody listens to the presentation and thus it becomes disturbing”, ... “Terribly long slides which we have to copy and at the same time write notes from what is being said – it’s impossible to do two things at once”, ... “please, give her some training in using Gmail or at least something general about the use of computers, of course to simplify the communication with her.”, ... “One third of teachers are unable to use the Internet (or don’t use it for some other reason) – it is therefore impossible to connect with them.”, ... “non-pedagogical approach – two hour dictations of theory without any liveliness or practical examples. Data-video projector (which is in almost every lecture room) is used by less than half of the teachers.”).

Students don’t consider a teacher an expert, if he/she behaves in an arrogant manner and is unable to attract students attention either by his/her expert knowledge or through verbal or technological means. It is therefore natural that the above mentioned negative characteristics of a university teacher and his/her work can’t lead to positive influencing of students nor to a high quality of educational process.

Based on the students’ comments from the questionnaire we can conclude that a university teacher is under a lot of pressure in regards to the requirements not just on his/her preparation time, but also his/her character traits, vast knowledge and the

ability to captivate. These requirements undoubtedly influence a student's perception of the teacher as well as the student's attitude not only toward the study subject, but also toward the teacher and the university study itself. The positive and negative occurrences stated by students were based on their own experience. According to them a university teacher should first of all be able to captivate students, be an expert in his/her field with adequate pedagogical skills, but at the same time be a personality with a humane approach, sense of humor and willingness to help students. These qualities seem to have a significant role in influencing the attitude of students toward university study.

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Mgr. Mariana Sirotova, PhD., is an alumna of the Faculty of Education of Comenius University in Bratislava, Slovakia. Currently, she is the head of Pedagogy Department at Faculty of Arts (Philosophy) of University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia and her scientific and research activities primarily concern the issues of university pedagogy and pre-gradual teacher education.

PaedDr. Eva Frydkova, PhD., is an alumna of the Faculty of Education of Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, Slovakia. Currently, she works at the Pedagogy Department at Faculty of Arts (Philosophy) of University of St. Cyril and Methodius in Trnava, Slovakia and her scientific and research activities primarily concern the issues of family - school cooperation and pre-gradual teacher education.