

STUDENTS'S PERCEPTION ABOUT THE EVALUATION SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITY. A CASE STUDY

ALEXANDRU-SABIN NICULA

„Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Geography,
e-mail: sabinnicula@yahoo.com.

DĂNUȚ PETREA

„Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Geography,
e-mail: dpetrea@geografie.ubbcluj.ro.

IULIU VESCAN

„Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Geography,
e-mail: vescan@geografie.ubbcluj.ro.

IOAN FODOREAN

„Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Geography,
e-mail: ioan@geografie.ubbcluj.ro.

CĂTĂLINA-ELENA ROȘU

„Babeş-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, Faculty of Geography
e-mail: rosu_catalina88@yahoo.com.

(Received: June 2012; in revised form: July 2012)

ABSTRACT

This paper has been elaborated to realize a radiography of the existing situation related to evaluation, but also to identify the main deficiencies of the evaluation process. From a methodological point of view we questioned students from different specializations belonging to the Faculty of Geography, "Babeş-Bolyai" University in Cluj-Napoca, Romania. The chosen sample was not established from the very beginning but the questionnaire was applied during courses and seminars, so the percentage of the respondents is directly proportional to students' presence at the respective classes. Regarding the evaluating practice, the study reveals a series of specific traits such as: high percentage of the written exams in students evaluation, high dose of subjectivity presented by the responding students or the existence of a rather big discrepancy in the respondents percentage of each specialization. We noticed students' preferences for the evaluator's feedback at the end of the evaluation process but, also, the chance of sitting again for the exam.

Keywords: perception, evaluation, students, Faculty of Geography

INTRODUCTION

This study is trying to identify in general terms students' perception of the evaluation practice in the Faculty of Geography, "Babeș-Bolyai" University, in Cluj-Napoca.

We analyzed students' perception about the evaluation practice for three major reasons:

- identifying their known horizon regarding methods of students' evaluation after an exam;
- analyzing the existing situation at the moment concerning evaluation;
- identifying the most efficient ways of evaluation and the ones that are recommended to be implemented in the future.

THEORETICAL SUBSTANTIATION

According to DEX (1998), perception (*lat. perception, percipio*) represents a psychological process which reflects the object and the phenomena in the objective world and acts straight to the sensitive organs in all their traits, like a whole.

In specialized literature, evaluation is defined as "[...] all the activities that include the organization, the collecting and the treatment of data by applying measure instruments to give valuable thoughts which are the base of a certain educational decision" (Dulamă, Roșcovanu, 2007, p. 8). Some researchers consider that the evaluation system "does not have to be perceived in a hard an inflexible way because it represents more than just a simple quantification of some results, including some quality concepts such as value, efficiency, and quality" (Opre, 2010, p.41).

Why are we evaluating?

The evaluation experts claim that "evaluation is not a purpose itself, but it should be seen like a valid instrument to certify the quality of learning and recommend that evaluation is performed to analyze the quality of the scientific content and the competences achieved by the student within the learning process" (Opre, 2010, p. 43). "The periodical procedures of evaluating the teaching activity, research and professional services performed by the academic group represents the main instrument of proof which can be provided by an university for its quality and prestige" (Opre, 2010, p. 43).

STUDENTS'S PERCEPTION ABOUT THE EVALUATION SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITY...

What are we supposed to evaluate?

Evaluation experts suggests that the evaluation activity should be exerted objectively, no other nature implications shoul exist and to follow the quality of the information provided by the student (Opre, 2010). If we evaluate the quality of the learning act, then, we should directly verify the quality of the information taught to students. There are not just a few cases when the scientific information provided by the teacher is not proper and it does not correspond with present reality. Persisting in this embarrassing field with many deficiencies such as not updating the information, practicing incorrect and subjective evaluation methods are doomed to failure.

In addition to the information received from the student, the evaluator has to follow some other qualities such as: the clarity and the consistency of the points revealed by the evaluated person, the language used and the innovatory nature of the exam. Evaluation activity has to be centered on the quality of the information presented by the student and not on subjective aspects (not to evaluate students for their clothes, tastes or physical aspect).

How do we evaluate?

In the evaluation system, a very important role have the ways, the methods and the instruments through which it is realized. Between information sources and the means of evaluation exists a similarity relationship, both are multiple. Among the most frequently used evaluation ways and information collecting about students' results there are: written edited exams, written grid tests and edited, grid tests, oral exams, internships, and the paper/semester project. (Opre, 2010).

METHOD

The main purpose of the research has been to study students' perception about the evaluating system in the first cycle. The secondary purposes have been: analyzing students' perception about the ways, the methods and the instruments of evaluation used by their professors, construing students' perception about the ways, the methods and the instruments of evaluation used by their professors.

Place and time of research

The research was organized in April 2012, at the Faculty of Geography, "Babeş-Bolyai" University, Cluj-Napoca, Romania.

Participants

In the research were involved students from the 2008-2011 age group. To identify as truthful as possible students' perception about the evaluation modalities, we questioned students from the 1^s, 2nd and 3rd year from the specializations: Geography of Tourism, Territorial Planning, Geography, Meteorology-Hydrology, and Cartography (Figure 1). The highest percentage of respondents was from Geography of Tourism students, 68.73%, and the lowest was registered for the Meteorology-Hydrology students (4.68%). This difference between the highest percentage and the others was due to the high number of students in Geography of Tourism (over 350).

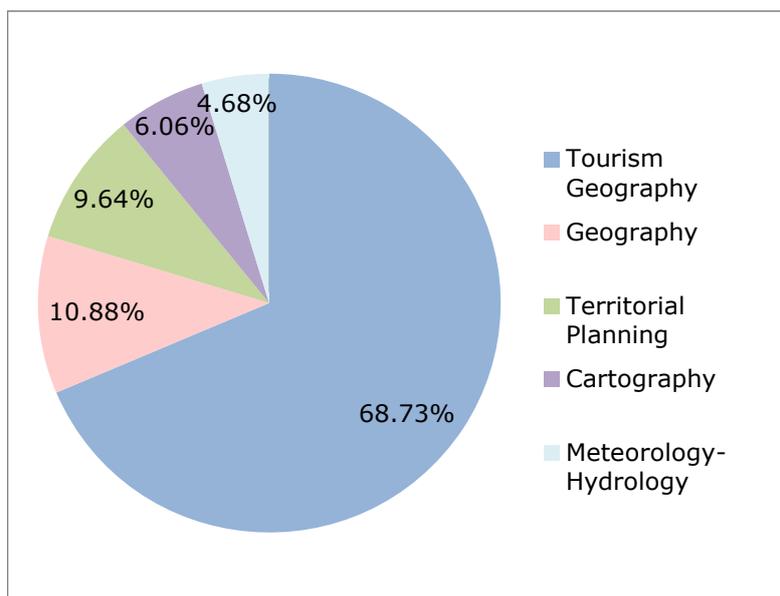


Fig. 1. Respondents' percentage according to their specialization

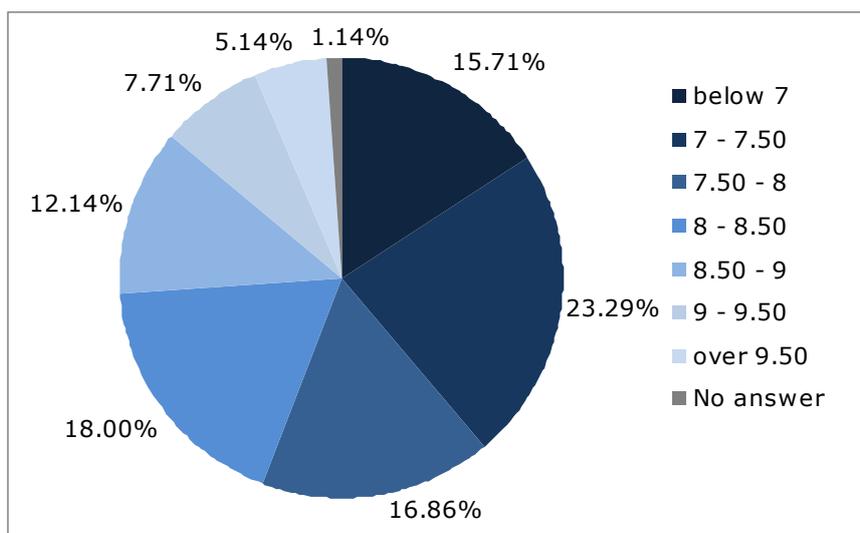


Fig. 2. General average percentage by category (2011)

STUDENTS'S PERCEPTION ABOUT THE EVALUATION SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITY...

We differentiated among research participants according to the general average they got in the previous year for each year of study. The general average of all the specializations revealed the fact that the highest percentage (23.29%) was for 7-7.50 gauge, followed by 8-8.50 with 18%. The percentage of the students having the average over 9.50 was 5.14% (Figure 2). We also differentiated among participants according to the activities performed in parallel with the classes and practical works program.

The percentage of the employed students was 19.86% (Figure 3). The conclusion was that many students had a rather low presence rate at the academic program, so their way of perceiving the most optimum evaluation practices were highly subjective.

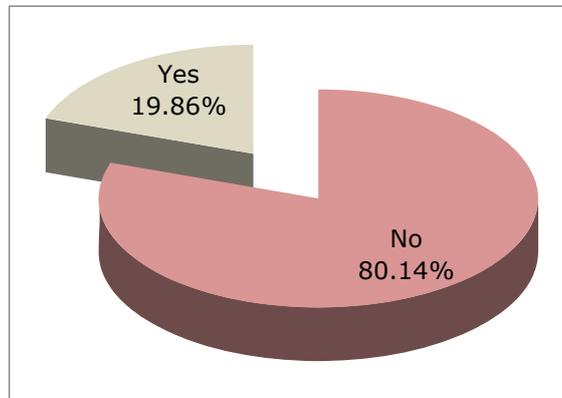


Fig. 3. Gender structure of the sample

Gender structure revealed the fact that females were the majority, having 59.86% of the total (Figure 4).

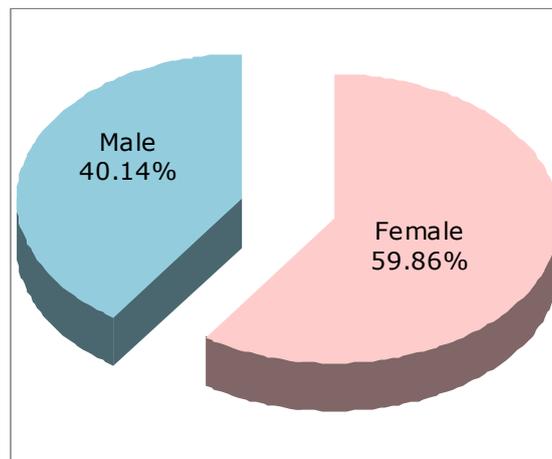


Fig. 4. Employed respondents' percentage

Related to the home area of the respondents, the disparity of the sample was high, here being questioned students from abroad (Figure 5). The students from Cluj County had the highest percentage, 45.29%, at a considerable distance from the students in the next county, Alba, with 6.86%. The percentage of the respondents from the Republic of Moldova was 0.14% of the total. The disparity level of the respondents ensured positive attributes to our research, the main advantage being the large area, national and international, too.

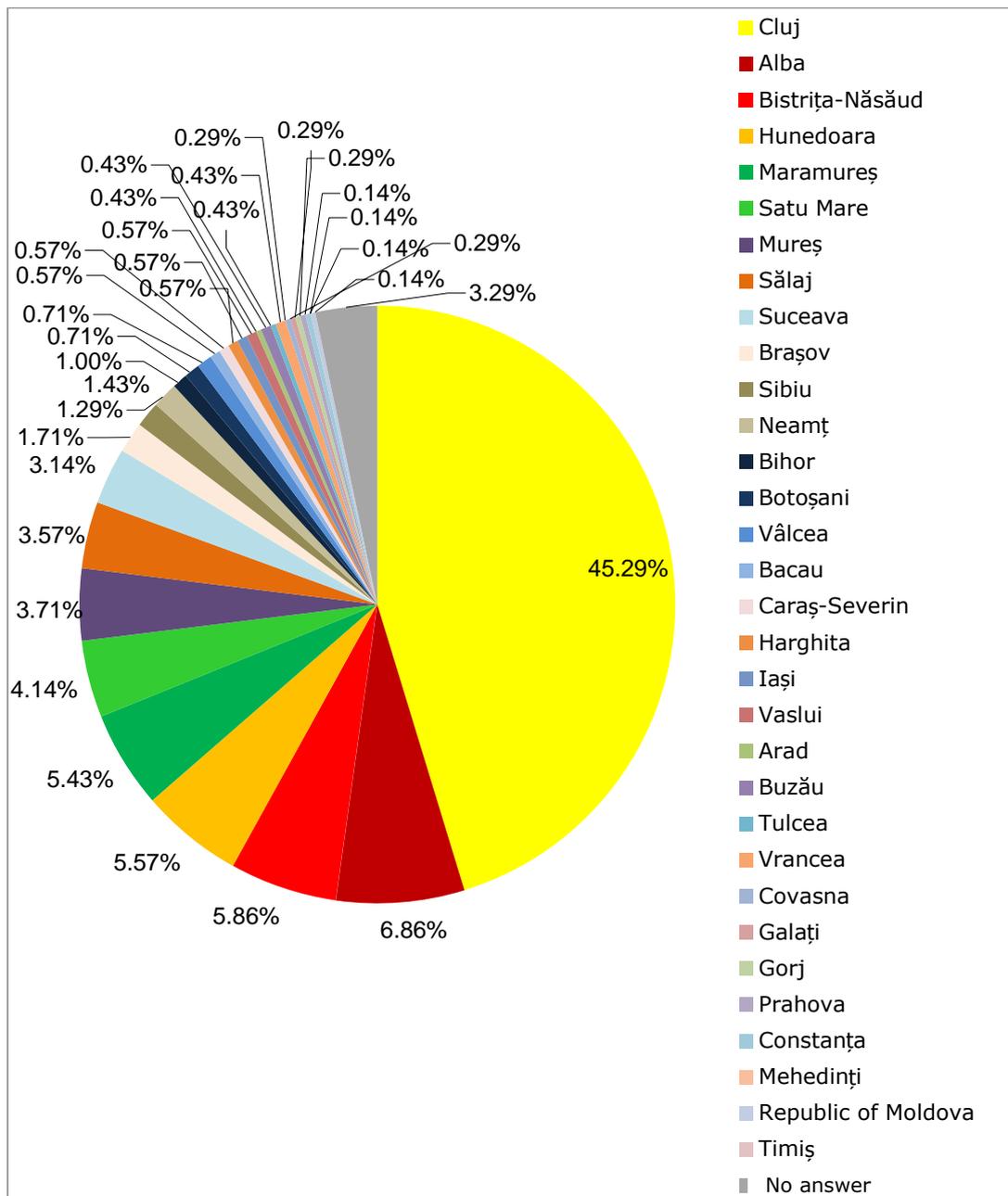


Fig. 5. Respondents' home area

Procedure

To achieve the purpose of the research we used questionnaire investigation. The questionnaire had multiple choice items. Students could choose one or more variants and as well as items which used the Lickert scale. The administered questionnaire had 11 items (see Annex 1), each having more options, according to the given answer. After collecting the data, we processed and represented them graphically. After analyzing and construing the dates obtained in the research, we elaborated the research report where we synthesized the conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

For the first item on students' options about getting the final grade, most respondents (64.86%) chose the grade obtained by averaging the seminar grade with the final exam grade, while among the decision of taking in account only the final exam, the percentage was much lower, 19.14% (Figure 6).

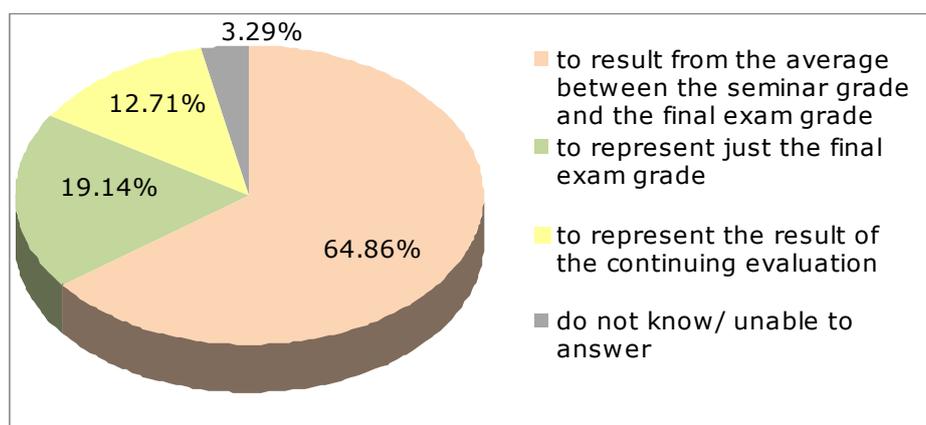


Fig. 6. Respondents' options about the final grade

The high percentage related to the final grade got from the seminar and the final exam average was due to the habit of this practice within assessment in each semester.

However, a percent of 3.29 gave no answer regarding the optimum means of generating the final grade because of the distrust in all the variants presented in the graphic or because of their inability to express their opinion about this issue.

Related to the respondents' opinion about the ways considered to be efficient in the evaluation process, 56.43% considered that the most efficient way of evaluation was the written exam (Figure 7). 33% considered that the final grade should be the average between the

ALEXANDRU-SABIN NICULA, DĂNUȚ PETREA, IULIU VESCAN, IOAN FODOREAN,
CĂTĂLINA-ELENA ROȘU

assessment during the entire semester and the final exam. Last position was represented by the colloquium evaluation and systematic verification.

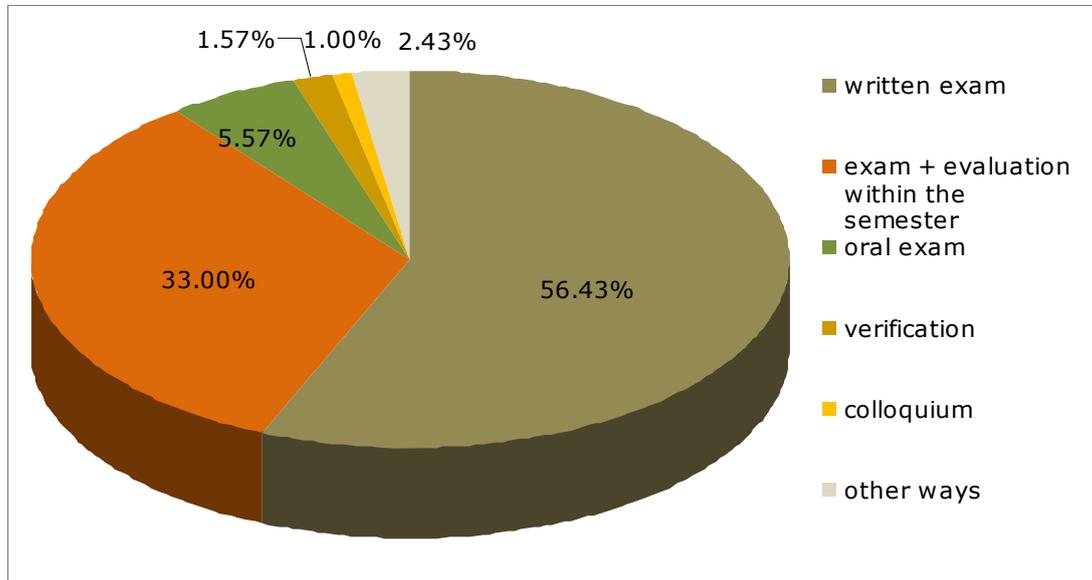


Fig. 7. Respondents' options about the most efficient way of assessing them

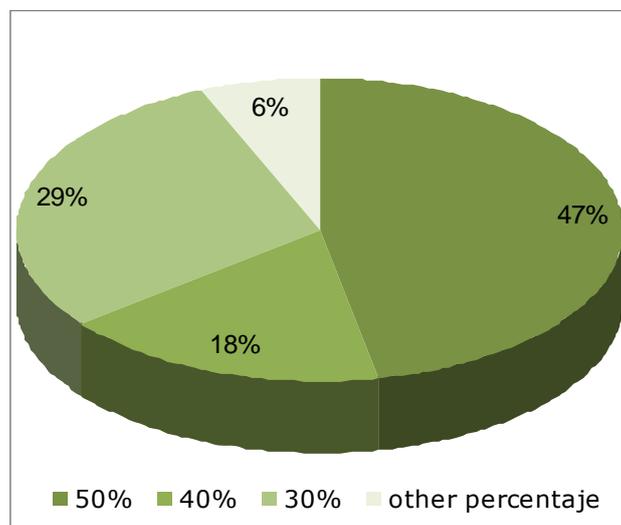


Fig. 8. Percentage of the seminars and practical works in final evaluation

The answers given regarding the seminars or practical works were perceived by students as being important (47%). Most of the students were aware that the seminars and the practical works cannot be omitted because thus they achieved the characteristic competences for a Geography graduate.

Related to the structure of the written exam, most of the respondents chose mainly two types: sets of questions with short answers (33.43%) and

STUDENTS'S PERCEPTION ABOUT THE EVALUATION SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITY...

grid tests (32%). One should not neglect the quite high percentage of the respondents which considered that it was better to combine the subjects between the variants presented in the questionnaire (Figure 9).

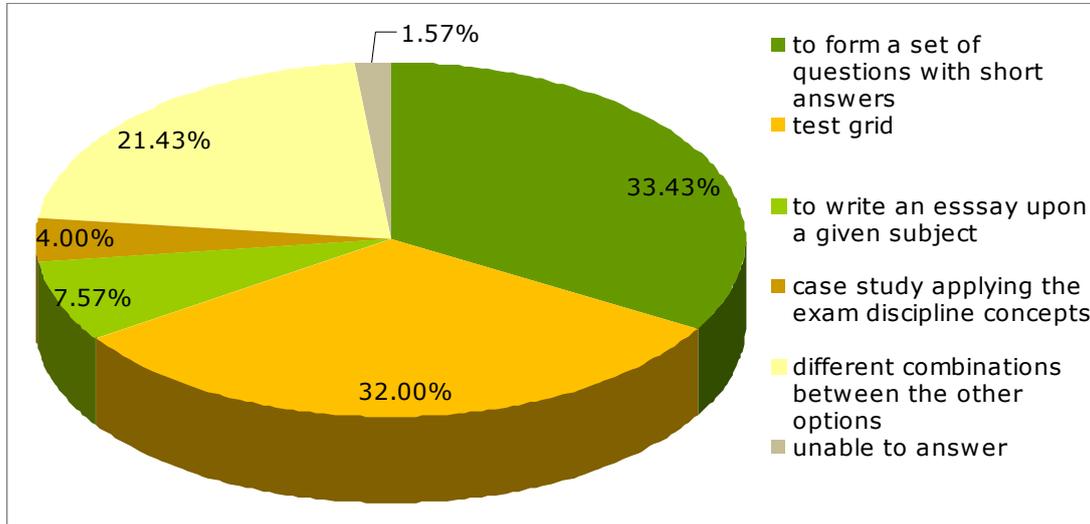


Fig. 9. Forms of written exams

The highest percentage values were due to the fact that most of the respondents were from the Geography of Tourism. As a result of the high number of students within the years of study, most of the assessment means were grid tests or grid tests combined with short answer questions. It was obvious students preferred exams which could offer them the possibility to choose between answers based on subjective reasons.

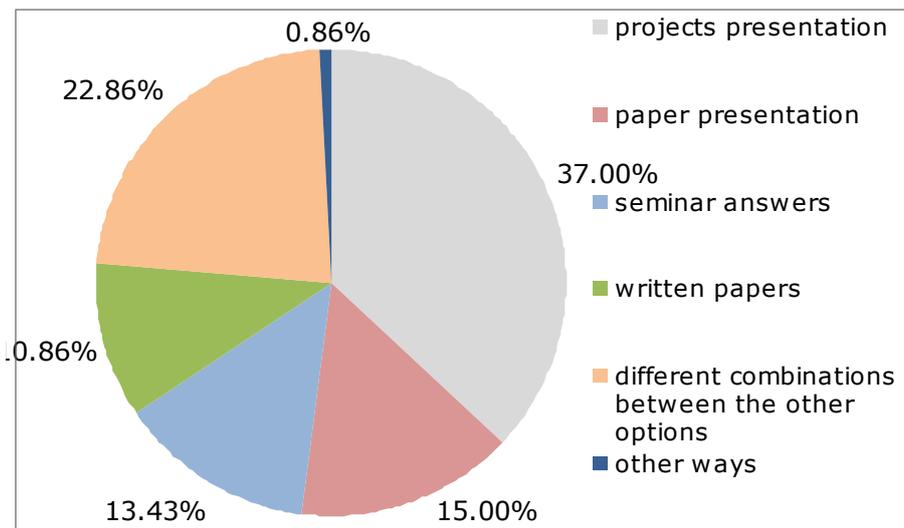


Fig. 10. Structure of respondents' perception about the best assessment type during the entire semester

To the question "What forms of evaluation do you consider efficient during a semester?", the majority (37%) chose project presentation, while only

ALEXANDRU-SABIN NICULA, DĂNUȚ PETREA, IULIU VESCAN, IOAN FODOREAN,
CĂTĂLINA-ELENA ROȘU

13.43% of the respondents chose as the most efficient assessment of seminar responses. As a proof of the fact that there was a rather significant dose of dissatisfaction about the best means of evaluation during a semester there were 22.86% who considered as more efficient a combination of the presented options (Figure 10).

To the question "What do you consider that a student should prove for getting the maximum grade in a discipline?", most of the respondents (81.43%) selected understanding and proper use of the specialised concepts (Figure 11). Supplementary documentation had low percentage (3.26). Exactly reproducing basic concepts of the discipline had priority for 8.43% and this was the second option chosen by the respondents.

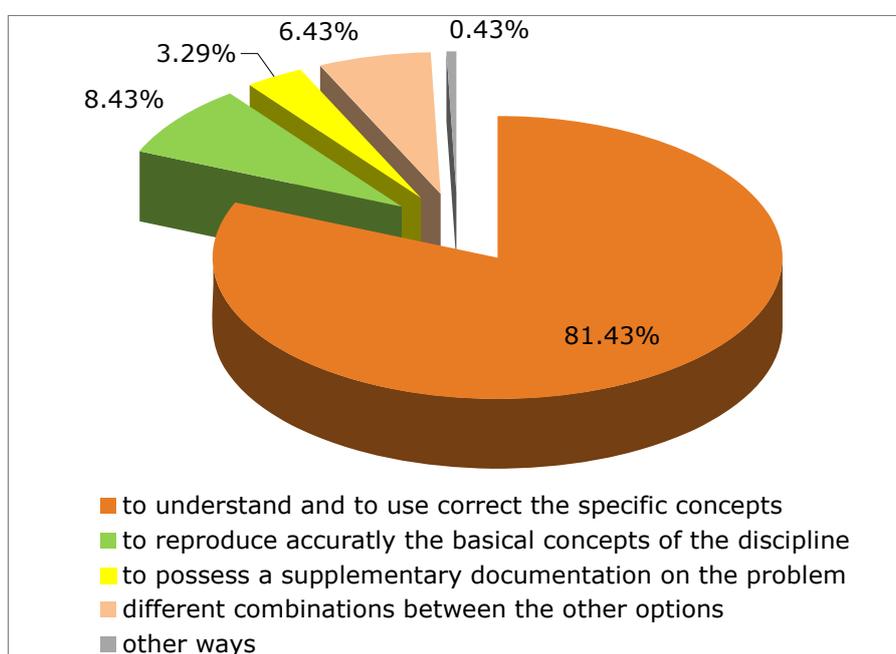


Fig. 11. Respondents' opinions on assessment criteria

Related to their level of perception about the importance that the evaluation system had in the training process, 54.14% decided that it was important and for 22.71% it had an average degree of significance (Figure 12). On the other hand, for 0.57%, the process of forming competences and achieving knowledge was not important to be evaluated. A negative perspective was revealed by the 4.29% of the respondents that considered this slightly important.

STUDENTS'S PERCEPTION ABOUT THE EVALUATION SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITY...

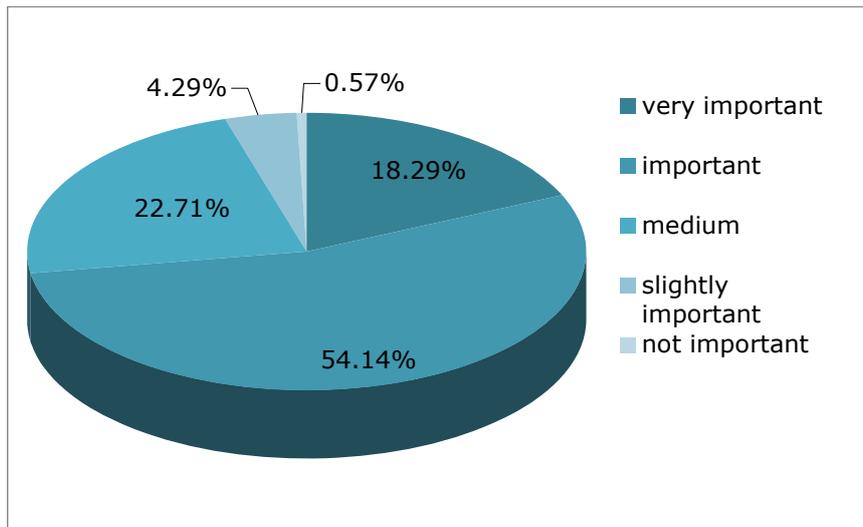


Fig. 12. Respondents' perception about the importance of assessment for their training process

For 49.86% of the respondents (Figure 13), the way that professors gave grades after an exam was satisfactory in what their correctness was concerned, while 3.71% of the respondents said that that was entirely correct. On a second position, 35% of the respondents, considered that most of the grades were quite correctly given.

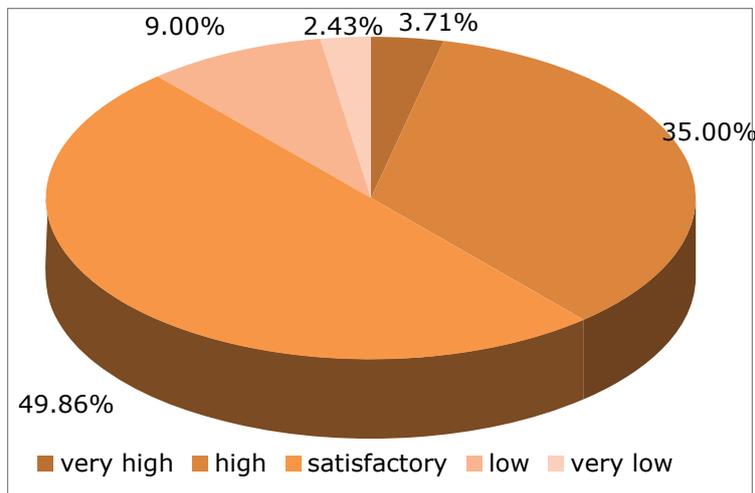


Fig. 13. Respondents' perception about the correctness involved in their assessment

About the existence of some precise evaluation criteria for the exams within the years of study until present, 56% of the questioned students considered that this part of the evaluation process was satisfactory (Figure 14). After

ALEXANDRU-SABIN NICULA, DĂNUȚ PETREA, IULIU VESCAN, IOAN FODOREAN,
CĂTĂLINA-ELENA ROȘU

them, 30% considered that, in this process, the criteria were correctly applied. Only 2% had a negative perception about this.

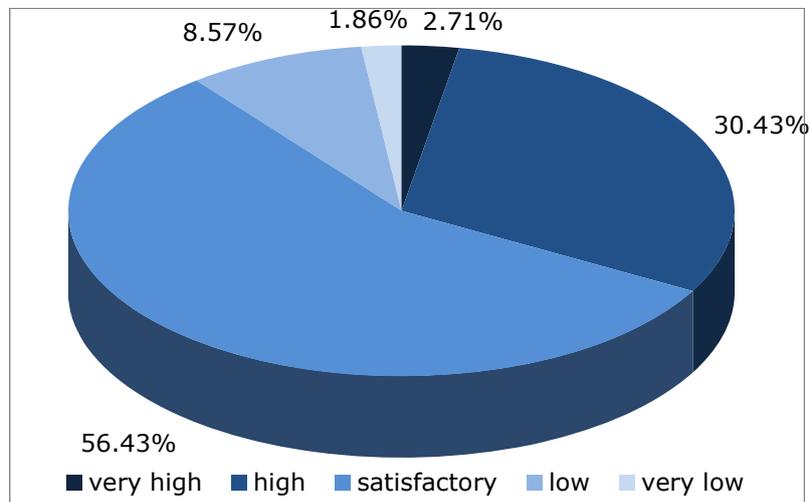


Fig. 14. Respondents' perception about precise assessment criteria

The tenth item approached the importance and the usefulness of feedback got from professors after exams. 47% of the students considered feedback very useful, while 2% thought it was useless (Figure 15).

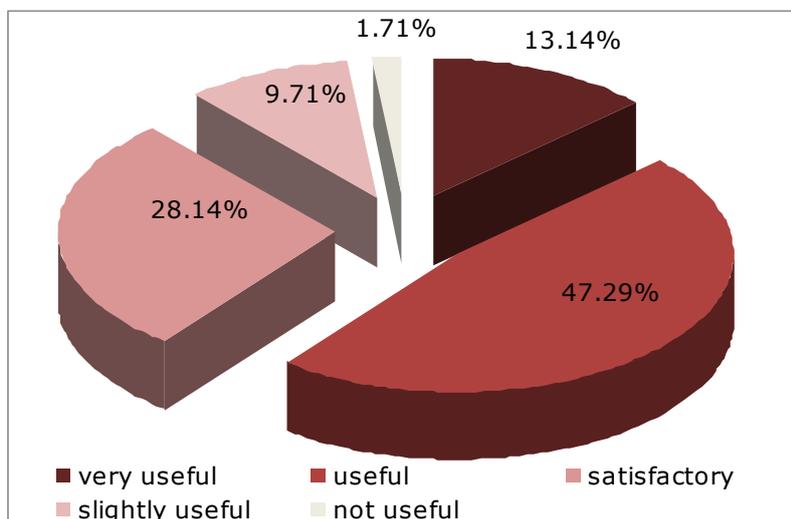


Fig. 15. Respondents' perception about the usefulness of professors' feedback

The answers to the last item about the use of reevaluation for getting a higher grade, indicated, also, a high dose of subjectivity, most of the respondents, 90%, willing to participate to a second examination (Figure 16).

STUDENTS'S PERCEPTION ABOUT THE EVALUATION SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITY...

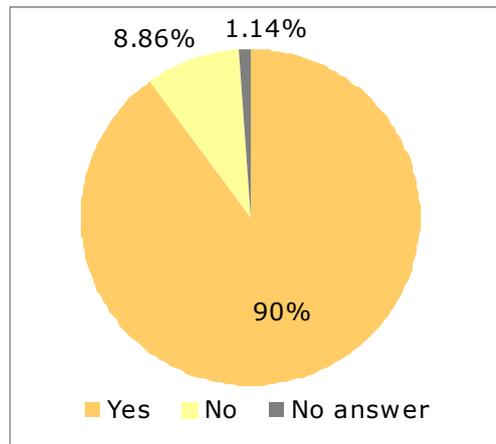


Fig. 16. Respondents' perception about re-evaluation

CONCLUSIONS

Nowadays most evaluation practices focus on the classic method: the written exam. In this context, most respondents considered that the short answer set of questions and the grid one were the most efficient means of evaluation.

Another conclusion generated by this study was that there was a high dose of subjectivity among students. This fact was supported by the high percentage of respondents, over 90%, considering a re-evaluation as useful.

The disparity between the effective of each specialization influenced most of the applied items. The Geography of Tourism specialization had 350 respondents, while Geography and Cartography had each 30 students.

References

- Dulamă, M.E., & Roșcovanu, S. (2007). *Didactica Geografiei. Manual pentru studenți și profesori*. Chișinău: Editura Bons Offices.
- Opre, D. (2010). *Expertiza didactică universitară*. Cluj-Napoca: Editura ASCR.

Annex 1

Questionnaire for the I cycle for students' perception about the evaluation system

I. General data

1. Specialization:

- Geography
- Geography of Tourism
- Territorial Planning
- Cartography
- Meteorology-Hydrology
- Other specialization_____

2. Educational form On-site learning/Distance learning/No frequency

3. Year of study

4. General average grade got in the previous year (approx.)...

II. Students' perception about the evaluation system

1. Do you consider that the final grade for each discipline should:

- a) result from the average between the seminar grade and the final exam grade;
- b) represent just the final exam grade;
- c) represent the result of a continuous evaluation;
- d) do not know/unable to answer

**Choose only one variant*

2. Which form do you consider to be efficient?

- a) written exam
- b) oral exam
- c) exam + evaluation during the entire semester
- d) colloquium
- e) verification
- f) other forms

**Choose only one variant*

3. Which should be the percentage of seminars and practical works for the final evaluation?

30% 40% 50% other percentage....

STUDENTS'S PERCEPTION ABOUT THE EVALUATION SYSTEM IN UNIVERSITY...

4. Which is the means of evaluation that you consider to be efficient for a written exam?

- a) grid test
- b) short answers set of questions
- c) written essay upon a given subject
- d) case study applying the concepts of the discipline
- e) do not know/ unable to answer

** multiple answer possible*

5. What forms of evaluation do you consider to be efficient during the semester?

- a) seminar answers
- b) paper presentation
- c) written papers
- d) projects presentation
- e) other forms _____

** multiple answer possible*

6. What do you consider that a student should prove for getting the maximum grade in a discipline?

- a) to reproduce precisely the basic concepts of the discipline
- b) to understand and to use correctly specialised concepts
- c) to possess a supplementary documentation on the problem
- d) others _____

** multiple answer possible*

7. How important do you think the evaluation system is for the training process?

Not important slightly important average important very important

1	2	3	4	5
----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

8. In what way do you consider that the exam grades were correct?

Very little little satisfactory high very high

1	2	3	4	5
----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

9. In what way do you consider that you had precise evaluation criteria for the exams within the years of study?

Very little little satisfactory high very high

1	2	3	4	5
----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

ALEXANDRU-SABIN NICULA, DĂNUȚ PETREA, IULIU VESCAN, IOAN FODOREAN,
CĂTĂLINA-ELENA ROȘU

10. In what way do you consider useful for your future development the feedback got at the exams from your professors.

Not useful slightly useful satisfactory useful very useful

1	2	3	4	5
----------	----------	----------	----------	----------

11. Do you consider that reevaluation for getting a higher grade is useful?

Yes No

III. Identification data

University...

Age...

Gender : F / M

City/Home district/.....

Are you employed? Yes..... No.....