

# THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC EDUCATIONAL SERVICES IN THE ROMANIAN ENVIRONMENT

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## **Abstract**

The objective of this paper is to find out what is the quality of educational services at higher education level, more specifically, in the Bucharest University of Economic Studies. In this regard, a questionnaire has been applied over the past two years, 2013-2014 and 2014-2015, which got answers from 550 students in the academic year 2013-2014 and 543 students in 2014-2015. The purpose of this scientific research was to determine students' perception of the degree of satisfaction towards teaching activities, educational materials and access to the courses, schedule of teaching activities, student teacher interaction as well as their practical training.

**Keywords:** Education, Quality, Academic environment.

## **1. INTRODUCTION**

Education represents one of the key pillars of the societies nowadays. This subject managed to attract a lot of interest for researchers for determining how the quality of these services can be improved in order to better describe the behavior of the population. Many other variables can be also inter-related or can be influenced by education, such as income, demographics (gender or age) and at its turn, this can become a deterministic measure for other aggregate macro indicators (e.g. GDP).

One of the primary ways for measuring the influence of education towards one country is represented by the quality of services provided by the main universities. These can be perceived as the most important part from one person's education, the well-acknowledged graduates becoming the fundamental human resources for the future industries, services and field of activities in which they would work. Therefore, it is essential for the universities to keep up with this dynamic environment, to adapt to the needs of both, the public and private sectors and probably the most important, to the ones of its main "clients", the students. The biggest universities are involving now many activities for enhancing the students' interests. From the basics logistics to the access to many important scientific databases, business incubators and laboratories, the "in-house" facilities should be always present in a

student's life, for assuring him the potential of properly developing as a future specialist. As in Maslow theory, once one level of needs is fulfilled, the next one is ready to be accomplished. Translating this into the subject matter, one could say that if a student is having the proper conditions to study (accommodation, scholarships, facilities and so on) he will be ready in a short time to evolve and become better. Thus, further on, depending on his interest, he will probably want to research and have access to international scientific databases and have libraries (classic or digital) which to suit its research purposes. After that, he would want to test its ideas in different contests and scientific sessions, in order to validate his work and become more motivated and of course, to be rewarded. Opportunities of mobility of study should be present also, the access to wider horizons having the potential of comparing his work interests with some benchmark level grounds.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The topic has attracted a lot of interest also from researchers. In searching how the academic libraries impact the quality of academic services, Dahan et al. (2016) studied the perception of the students from the Universiti Malaysia Pahang (UMP). The authors found that the library managed to fulfill the minimum expectation of the students and became the grounds for the university resource allocation towards this aspect.

Cabrerizo et al. (2015) continued this research in order to develop the quality management in what it concerns the academic digital libraries. Using a Decision Support System (DSS), the authors presented their importance in meeting the students' needs. The exponential change provided by the internet was perceived very positively by many academic communities, the academic digital libraries having in this way the competitive advantage that they can be accessed basically everywhere, being shared and storing a big number of papers, books and other related content. The purposes of academic collaboration is also very important, the grounds for international academic research being facilitated by the online resources offered by these types of digital libraries.

If until now, the quality of academic services regarded the libraries and resources provided by the universities, in the article written by Gallagher (2014), he describes that the continuous process of assuring the quality in the academic environment has many forms, the main difficulties coming from the ongoing needs of both the students and professors. If we add here also the component of paperwork, Henkel (2000) found out that the available time is diminishing from the educational and lectures' tasks. The bureaucracy, even though in some ways is leading to some independence, enters in a dispute with the academic values that a university or academic institution should have. As expected, the premises

for improving the academic conditions come from within, the important part is the awareness that has to be cultivated between them.

Albert and Dahling conducted a study in 2016, their purpose being of predicting the performance of the students by means of locus of control, learning goal orientation and academic self-concept. The authors used a regression to better describe these concepts for establishing a deeper connection towards the academic performance, other than the students' own ability (Marsh & Seaton, 2013). The findings regarding the first two concepts implied that those can be malleable in time in what it concerns the positive, strong and consistent experiences. Their limitation consisted still in the characteristics of selective institutions.

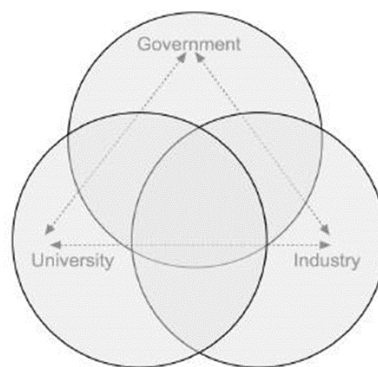
Going on the next level, Chang et al. (2016) developed the concept of research ambidexterity (RA). This is implying also the concept of entrepreneurial universities, referring from the activities that a university is deploying in order for enhancing this characteristic of activity in the internal environment (Etzkowitz, 1983). Chang et al. (2016) found that both, the individual and departmental levels of one academic institution could have an impact of the performance of such an entrepreneurial university, hence developing this research ambidexterity (RA).

Huang and Chen (2016) contributed to the quality of academic environment by studying further how an entrepreneurial university can be linked with the main actors from the industry. They denominated this concept as university-industry collaboration (UIC) and described the main benefits and advantages that exist in this double flow of knowledge. The same idea is described also by Ankrah and Al-Tabbaa in 2015, the idea of collaboration between the universities and industries being associated with the concept of innovation and strengthening the exchange of knowledge.

The same topic is discussed by Bektas and Tayaouva in 2014. In studying the relationship between the universities and industries, the model describing the quality of educational services implied four factors: university, industry, government and civil society organizations. On the grounds of the importance of the collaboration in the field of higher education, many other variables and factors are described, with the purpose of better explaining the core activities that can be realized by the two entities. Coming back to the factors previously mentioned, it can be stated that the cooperation between the universities and industries can refer to the added value provided by the trainings, R&D component and other opportunities related to the transfer of knowledge. If we add the Government variable in the model, the authors found out that such a triple helix model has the potential of increasing the efficiency of the two sectors previously mentioned.

The civil society organizations, most commonly known as Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) are considered to be also facilitators in the fields of cooperation.

As it was described above, the quality of academic services is depending on many variables. While it can be said that there is no such thing as a perfect solution, probably the most important alternatives imply the pro-active role of academics in education, the well-collaboration and partnerships with the industry, government and civil society, and of course, the capability of the professors and universities to keep with the increasing needs of the students for becoming professionals.



**FIGURE 1 THE TRIPLE HELIX MODEL**  
Source: Bektas and Tayauova (2014)

The educational services provided by the Romanian universities, their features and quality have been studied by many authors (Corbos et al., 2013; Corbos, 2005, 2011; Plumb and Zamfir, 2011a, 2011b; Zamfir et al., 2009; Zamfir, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2013; Zamfir and Plumb, 2011). However, the students' opinions regarding the quality of academic educational services have not been yet revealed.

### 3. STUDENTS' OPINIONS REGARDING THE QUALITY OF ACADEMIC EDUCATIONAL SERVICES

#### 3.1. Didactic materials

The first point of this questionnaire refers to the accessibility of the didactic materials for students. Figure 2 and Figure 3 highlight the respondents' answers on this aspect, recorded during the 2 years of analysis.

It can be observed that in the academic year 2014-2015, 95% of the respondents claimed that they had access to course support for the studied subjects, which indicates that this issue has improved

compared to the previous year, when only 73.24% of the students had access to course support for each studied subject.

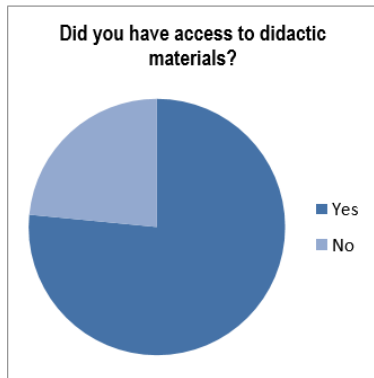


FIGURE 2 DEGREE OF ACCESSIBILITY OF DIDACTIC MATERIALS IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2013-2014

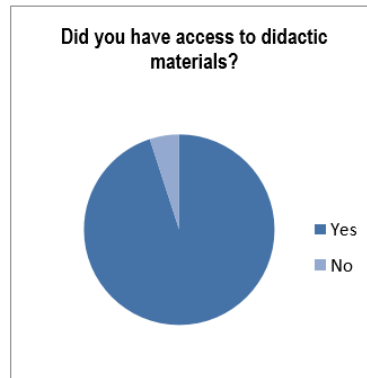


FIGURE 3 DEGREE OF ACCESSIBILITY OF DIDACTIC MATERIALS IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2014-2015

Being asked how they would like to have access to the didactic materials, 30.02% of respondents consider that the materials should be posted online, on their personal pages, 10.50% of them support the distribution of the materials in physical format, 4.05% consider that the teacher's web page can be a good means of disseminating teaching materials, while 9.76% of respondents prefer to access the information on www.online.ase.ro and 4.97% of respondents prefer to receive the support through the students' representative. The remaining students (40.70%) opt to receive the didactic materials through any of the options listed above.

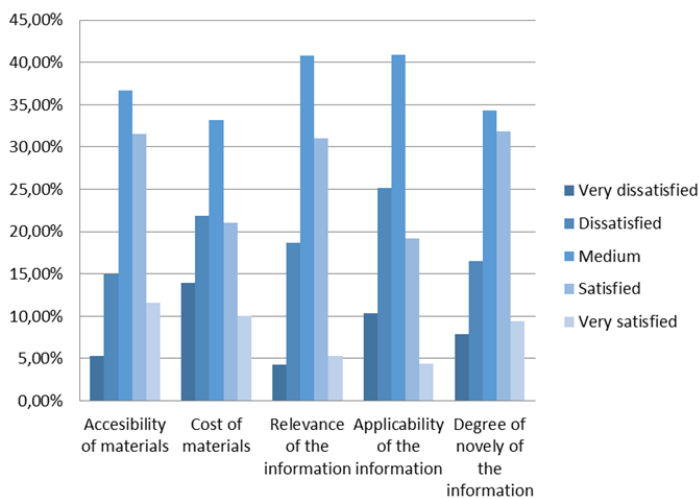


FIGURE 4 DISTRIBUTION OF THE OPINIONS REGARDING THE DIDACTIC MATERIALS USED IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2013-2014

Analyzing Figure 4 and Figure 5, it is noted that during the 2 years of research, students have proven to be very satisfied and pleased with the accessibility of teaching materials (44.71%) and also with the cost of didactic materials, which they consider to be small (65.06 %).

As regards the relevance of the information used in teaching and learning activities, it is observed that, unlike the academic year 2013-2014, when 76.98% of students were content of this aspect at a medium or satisfying level, in 2014-2015, only 68.96% of students took favorable notes of the issue.

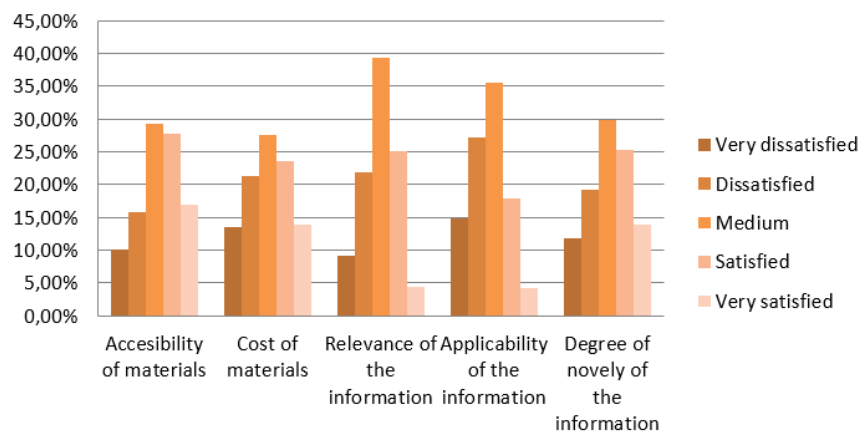


FIGURE 5 DISTRIBUTION OF THE OPINIONS REGARDING THE DIDACTIC MATERIALS USED IN THE ACADEMIC YEAR 2014-2015

Relating to the novelty of the information submitted, it appears that this is also falling, from 75.65% of students being satisfied or very satisfied to 69.09%.

It is recommended for teachers at the Bucharest University of Economic Studies to continuously update the information transmitted to students within the educational process, so they can achieve a higher level of student satisfaction.

### 3.2. Didactic Activities

Evaluating students' perceptions of the teaching activity and seminars, we can see that they are satisfied by the knowledge acquired during courses and seminars, which are highly regarded in the academic year 2014-2015 at an average, satisfying or very satisfying level (70.20% of respondents). Compared to the previous year, when the percentage was 70.42%, this issue remains unchanged. Regarding the topicality of the themes in seminars and courses, students believe it to be average at the rate of 78.81%. In the matter of the resources used by teachers (PPT presentations, articles in specialized press, statistics and other data), the majority of respondents (67.91%) considers them as

medium level at least, the percentages not being significantly different from the previous academic year (2013-2014).

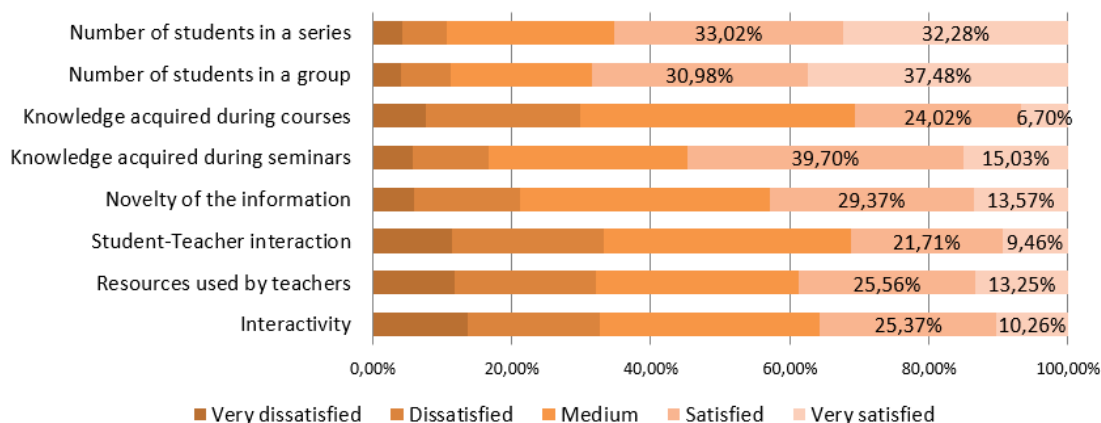


FIGURE 6. STUDENTS' OPINIONS REGARDING DIDACTIC ACTIVITIES

Analyzing the student-teacher interaction, it is evaluated by 31.17% of respondents as satisfying or very satisfying. Even though, 33.21% of respondents claim to be dissatisfied with the degree of interactivity of didactic activities, percentage which does not change compared with the academic year 2013-2014. Lowering the need of a higher level of interactivity with the need of didactic activities applicability, we recommend that the teachers approach measures such as involving students in case studies and visits at different companies or in national and international conferences, increasing the period of specialized practice, inviting experts at courses and also involving themselves in the exchange of experience and knowledge with the business and with experts in the field.

### 3.3. Conduct of specialized practice

Bucharest University of Economic Studies encourages contact between students and the job market, by developing specialized practice. There is a methodology with respect to specialized practice organization, which has basic principles such as flexibility (students can equate with previous internships or employment periods), facility in conducting specialized practice (the chart of activities provides a specific period of practice, allowing students to opt for internships and jobs outside of Bucharest).

Regarding the access to internships, 33.84% of students are shown to be satisfied (the same percentage as the unsatisfied students) and the other 33.33% of them consider that access to practice is of average satisfaction. 37.97% of respondents are dissatisfied with the information provided by the

Coordinator of practice and 33.33% of them are dissatisfied with communication in general with the coordinator, their contact information or their availability of answering questions from students.

With respect to the knowledge acquired during the stage of specialized practice, 36.94% of respondents are very satisfied and 28.83% of them are satisfied at a medium level. A final aspect is the one related to the assessment of the practice at the end of the internship and thus 31.81% of students are partially satisfied with this issue, 35.47% are satisfied and the remaining 32.72% are not satisfied with the assessment.

In the matter of students' opinion about the conduct of specialized practice, most respondents (84.20%) believe they need help from the University or faculty in finding a place to practice. More than half of respondents are aware of the fact that the faculties can make available a list of companies which, on the basis of inter-institutional agreements, can carry out their internship.

Although it is stated that students are informed about the various job opportunities, they claim the opposite: poor information, lack of instructions on how to complete the notebook or the practice project. A potential solution to this problem was proposed and includes: the establishment of specialized committees for each of the faculties (composed of representatives of the teachers and students) who, based on the model of the boards for the election of beneficiaries of Erasmus mobility, will make a selection of interested students to benefit from the practice places made available by the College or University. The situation has been improved with the help of practical internships provided through numerous projects funded by the European Community, which aimed at connecting students to the labor market.

### **3.4. Student Scientific Session**

Scientific sessions organized by every faculty in Bucharest University of Economic Studies have encouraged the research activity in the field of economic development, supporting the elaboration and presentation of projects in front of specialist committees. The participation at the sessions is encouraged by the University through granting, from own funds, scholarships for research to those who have the greatest work at the level of each faculty. However, only 21.07% of the respondents participated in the 2014-2015 at these scientific manifestations, their number being in decline compared to the year 2013-2014 when 29.68% of respondents attended this session.

Analyzing Figure 7 it is observed that, as regards the scientific session organized in the academic year 2014-2015, most students have expressed a positive opinion about this activity: 76.32% of students say that it offers a large and very large opportunity to tackle a theme from one's own area of interest, but



also represents an opportunity for personal and professional development (68.42%) increasing the percentage with 1% from last year. A high percentage of students (53.98%) believe that the session of scientific communications contributes in a very satisfactory way to the establishment of a solid economic culture and 77.46% of respondents appreciate students' involvement in scientific research activities in a good measure towards average.

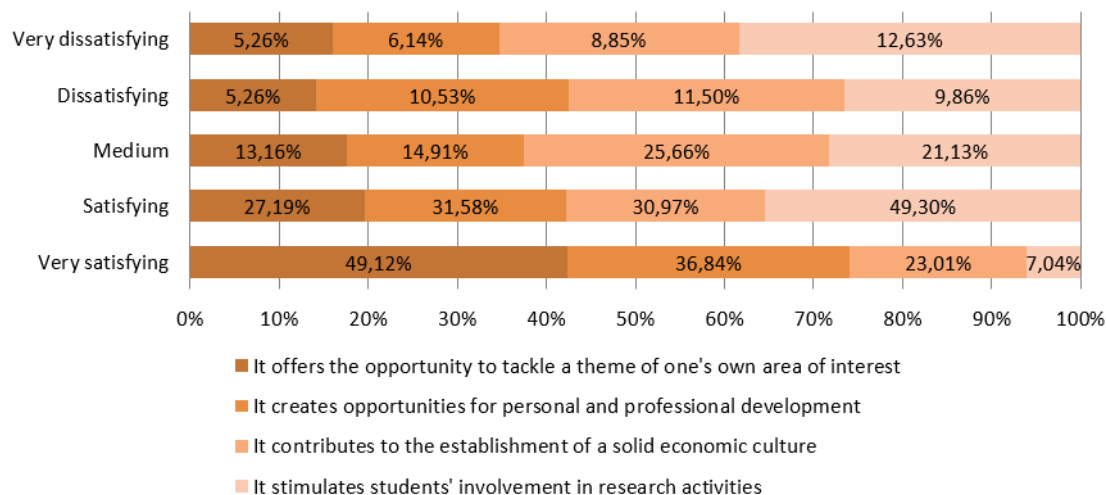


FIGURE 7 STUDENTS' OPINIONS REGARDING THE SCIENTIFIC SESSION

Among the main reasons why students claim to have participated at the Session of Scientific Communications we can mention: the opportunity for personal and professional development, the desire to accumulate experience, novelty, the desire to bring an innovative idea which exceeds the theoretical limits, curiosity. Some students were interested in the diplomas they have been granted and wanted to improve their knowledge by tackling new topics. Also, many students said that their motivation to participate at the session of scientific communication was determined by the Coordinator teacher.

### 3.5. International Erasmus Mobility

Research shows that in the academic year 2014-2015 only 39% of respondents were informed of the Erasmus mobility program, their number being in decline, compared to the previous year when 72.16% of students had access to this information. Questioned about the number of Erasmus mobility opportunities available through college partnerships, the diversity of partner countries, the contest for Erasmus scholarships and the Community Programs Office, students declared themselves satisfied at a medium and good level, during both years of research.

Regarding the opinions of students who have benefited from the Erasmus program, most of them are very satisfied and pleased with the social experience at the host university (92.31%) along with the academic experience (92.31%) and overall experience. Also, students appreciate the communication with the administrative personnel of the host University (87.69%) and also the communication with the specialized office of Bucharest University of Economic Studies (64.71%).

### 3.6. University Endowment

Regarding students' opinion related to this aspect, it can be observed that they are very satisfied. They appreciate the endowment of seminar rooms at an average level of satisfaction and the equipment in the laboratories of Informatics or foreign languages at a good level. At the opposite pole lies their opinion of sanitary facilities in Bucharest University of Economic Studies, this area requiring increased attention in order to improve the current negative perception of the students.

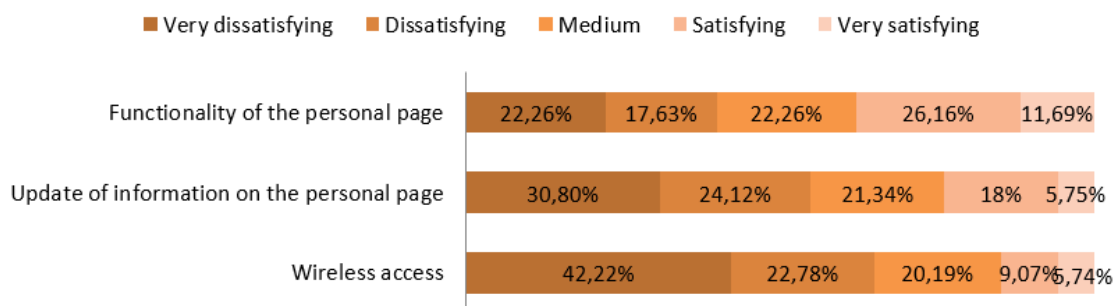


FIGURE 8 STUDENTS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE FACILITIES OFFERED BY THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES

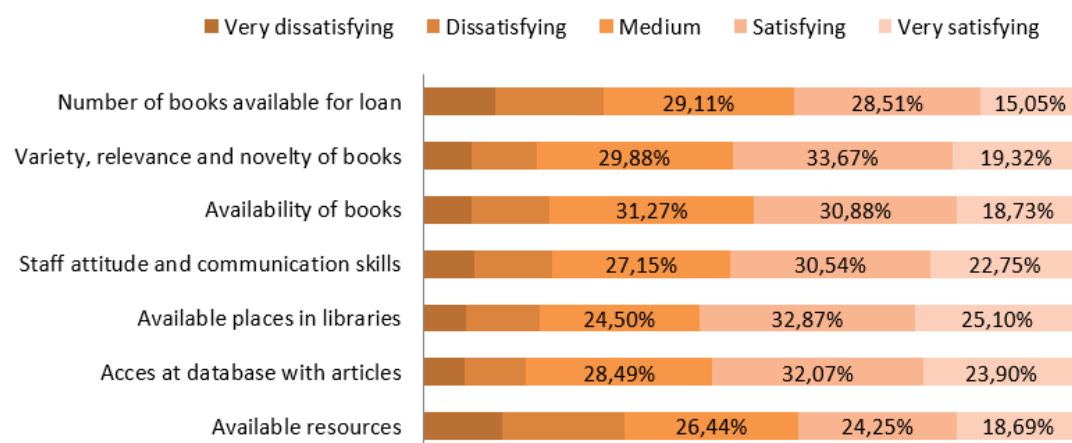
On the subject of students' satisfaction towards the functionality of the personal page, only 39.89% are satisfied at an average level with this issue and 45.45% of them with the speed of updating the information on the page.

However, we recommend an increase in the frequency of use of this interface, as well as a permanent update of it, much of the information presented being exceeded in temporal terms. Answers recorded reflect that wireless Internet service is considered to be problematic, 42.22% of respondents appreciating it as very unsatisfactory.

### 3.7. Library services

Our research found that, in general, respondents have a favorable attitude towards the services provided by the library, most of them appreciating the number of books available for loan or for

consultation in the library, the variety, relevance and topicality of the books and other materials as well as the communication skills and attitude of the staff in the library, these aspects satisfying the students at least at an average level.



**FIGURE 9 STUDENTS' OPINIONS ABOUT THE LIBRARY SERVICES OFFERED BY THE BUCHAREST UNIVERSITY OF ECONOMIC STUDIES**

The suggestions of improvement made by the students include increasing the funds used for the purchase of large numbers of copies of the available publications and stimulating teachers in proposing books to purchase.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

After this evaluation, one can state that the level of satisfaction perceived in terms of academic quality services by the students in this specific case is continuously improving. The orientation towards students by means of a performing management, while having as big picture the international quality level of education can represent one direction of reaching their expectations. As it was described, the students have a lot of opportunities to benefit from, in order for their personal and professional development to be at high levels and preparing them for their future careers. The active role of communities, the students and teachers is underlined and over time, the best practices illustrated how important it is to have a strong collaboration between them for becoming the best economic profile university and one of the best in Romania.

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