

## CHANGE MANAGEMENT IN BUSINESS EDUCATION: ONLINE VERSUS ON-SITE EDUCATION

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### ABSTRACT

*The closure of universities, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, had negative consequences both on the educational progress of students and on their emotional health. Our research aims to identify how first-year students want their faculty to be and their view on how the faculty should improve. COVID-19 disease forced everyone to adapt and universities were not left out in this matter, each faculty had to adopt a system that would allow them to continue their activity. Some continued with the face-to-face classes, some adopted a hybrid form and some were forced to go completely online. All this is influenced by the topic of the faculty, the number of students, and other factors like this. The second-year students are the ones that went through both approaches (online and face-to-face) so they are the ones that can offer a good view of how the faculty can improve. The results of this article are regarding the likes, dislikes, suggestions, and if the students have ever mentioned to their faculty the changes that they believe would improve their student experience.*

**KEYWORDS:** *change management, higher education, on line education, on site education, student experience, student satisfaction.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Education is the factor that allows us to evolve and reach new heights. Each generation gives the next the knowledge obtained after hard work and entire lives dedicated to the evolution of humanity. Just like a spiderweb, all areas of education complete the beautiful model obtained and sustain each other to develop through multidisciplinary research.

According to Edupedu (2022) yearly around 500,000 high school graduates are in search of a faculty, at this moment they face one of the most important turn points in their lives: choosing the field they want to study and the career they want to pursue. December 2019 was the moment when the world found out about something that no one would have guessed would force us to evolve and adapt to a new challenge: COVID-19. According to the European Commission, one of the fundamental human rights is the right to have access to education and during the COVID-19 pandemic, all educational institutions did their best to ensure that all students won't have their fundamental rights denied (European Commission, n.d.). The educational institution leaders had to make decisions in a short time taking into consideration the background and the possibilities of their attendees.

11<sup>th</sup> March 2020, was the date that Romanian mass education changed and everyone had to adapt to the new context (Miron, 2021). The COVID-19 pandemic significantly impacted education worldwide and implied new strategies to ensure safety for everyone. The effects were felt globally

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and at all levels of education, from preschool to higher education. The immediate and most disruptive measure was the school closure that opened the way to online learning. This was a big challenge for professors who had to adapt overnight to online teaching methods and use the technology that would allow them to continue the educational process (König et al., 2020). All these changes had a huge impact on students learning environment leading to negative mental health and well-being effects. The students weren't the only ones affected, the parents and the professors were going through the same struggles of isolation, stress, fear, and changes in routines that affect the mental health of many individuals (Lee, 2020). Another important effect was the educational inequalities, especially for students from low-income families who are often confronted with a lack of access to necessary technology and support, making it difficult for them to keep up with remote learning that can be easily accessed by others (Walters, 2020).

Higher Education institutions faced a crisis because of the reduced enrollment since the dropout rates increased for high school students (Moscoviz & Evans, 2022). This led to financial challenges and they had to also adapt to online or hybrid learning models. Just like other educational institutions they also had to adapt the assessment and the grading methods for remote learning including the standardizing of the evaluation. With the support of the government, the educational system took a series of measures taking into consideration factors like the evolution of the situation, the vaccination rate, the number and the age of students, and whether the institution facilities allow respect the social distance. The government ensured the general context that had to be followed in terms of conditions that had to be followed. The main conditions were to wear masks, keep social distance, adapt the educational process (on-site, online, or hybrid), encourage vaccination, improve the ventilation in classrooms, instate isolation and quarantine when needed, and encourage only the necessary travels.

Every institution evaluated the situation and decided what is the best plan to follow. The mass education that couldn't respect social distance was forced to move the classes online using online tools (such as Microsoft Teams, Google Meet, Zoom, and Cisco) in some cases the funds were limited and the professors were forced to be creative and use WhatsApp or other apps that allowed them to make a group call and wouldn't imply costs. Since Romania didn't have a national strategy that would constrain the educational institutions to use a unique platform each school, high school, or university decided on their own what would fit best for them to use.

COVID-19 measures for high school students in Romania like in many other European countries have evolved and adapted over time, based on the situation evolution. It's important to highlight that these measures changed rapidly, and everyone had to stay updated with the latest guidelines from the Romanian Ministry of Health, the Ministry of Education, and local authorities. This way of organization together with all the local strategies applied by each educational institution led to obtaining a very diverse trained student population.

The move from high school to faculty was a shock for the students since they came from different backgrounds where they were accustomed to a way of working. Faculties had a unique approach and everyone was forced to follow the same way of working to ensure the quality of the final educational result. After 2 years of online education (March 2020 - March 2022) the students faced a new challenge: on site education. If the move from high school to faculty was difficult and some had to learn new technologies, the move to on site education implied a completely different approach and way of learning. Students were forced to adapt to how to learn in a new context (faculty level) a huge amount of information in a short time and to bounce between the classes.

A positive aspect that needs to be mentioned is that the COVID-19 pandemic accelerated the adoption of educational technology (online education), innovation in teaching methods and allowed everyone to understand the importance of resilience and adaptability. This could lead to long-term changes in how education is delivered and accessed. The negative effects of the pandemic are still present and it requires efforts to address the learning gaps that were caused by the sudden changes

in the educational environment and to find ways to provide support to the students and professors. This experience should be used as an example that in order to be able to survive the unpredictable changes we have to evolve once with society and technology.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Education is described McGee (2023) as being a fundamental right that has a crucial role in the shaping of individuals, societies, and economics. He continues by saying that education is a powerful tool that can break the bad cycle of poverty, encourage social mobility, and lead to a prosperous future.

The mission of the Educational Ministry in Romania *"is to generate an educational environment that ensures the harmonious development of all its beneficiaries, by promoting excellence and facilitating equal access to education."* The vision is to *"give all beneficiaries access to a quality education, which makes it possible to reach the maximum potential for each individual. The Educational Ministry wants to ensure the recognition and guarantee of the rights of beneficiaries to preserve, develop, and express their ethnic, cultural, linguistic and religious identity."* (Educational Ministry, 2022). The mission and vision of Romania show dedication and passion in offering students the best environment where they can grow and become tomorrow's responsible and involved society citizens.

### 2.1. Change management

Educational change management is an ongoing process that requires flexibility, adaptability, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Successful change management not only leads to improvements in educational outcomes but also helps build a culture of innovation and adaptability within educational institutions. In the literature review, the most mentioned theoretical concepts that influence the change management process are organizational culture, leadership, resistance to change, and communication.

Organizational culture is the sum of beliefs, values, and attitudes that influence and affect the employees' behavior and from this short definition, we can see the importance of it in the change management process. A good organizational culture will sustain the change process that aims to improve the organizational status.

Leadership is an important concept for change management since the leader is the one who will put the change into motion and will share his view with the stakeholders that will react to the proposed initiatives. The transformative approaches presented by Mader, Scott, and Razak are a shared vision, trust, shared responsibilities, continuous learning, and research integration (Mader, Scott, & Razak, 2013). The factors that determine the outcome of transformational initiatives are the duration of the project, performance integrity, commitment to change, and the efforts invested in the change (Sirkin et al., 2014).

Regarding resistance to change, there are models (ex. Kotter and Schlesinger 1979) developed that help to understand and overcome this essential concept that can lead to the change management process failure. Communication is an important part of all organizations and the results of the activities depend on how efficient it is. For a successful change, the communication needs to be clear, complete (to have all the information required to understand the importance of the changes) and to be transmitted to everyone from the same source to avoid eventual misunderstandings.

Over the years the change management literature review grew and various models were developed to sustain the change process. Below we present a part of the Change Management Models that were developed over the years and identified in different articles.

The most mentioned change management model is the one developed by Kotter which has eight steps that aim to sustain the change in the early stages (the adoption and implementation phases), engage the dedicated partners, and develop a climate of change (Graves et al., 2023).

Prosci is the company that developed 2 models (the PCT Model and ADKAR Model) and the framework Prosci 3-Phase Process. On the website, they answer the question "Why do we need change management?" placing emphasis on the importance of helping individuals through their journey of change that will enable organizations to (1) predict how the change will impact teams and people, (2) succeed in a changing world, (3) increase the return of investment by increasing the people contributions and have better results, (4) align the requirements in order to achieve better results, (5) increase the project's success, reduce the risk of change implementation failure, and (6) decrease the variability in change (Prosci, 2023).

**Table 1. Change Management models**

|     | <b>Model/Source</b>                                   | <b>Cameron &amp; Green, 2019</b> | <b>By, 2005</b> | <b>Siebert, Paton, &amp; McCalman, 2015</b> | <b>Pryor, Taneja, Humphreys, Anderson, &amp; Singleton, 2008</b> | <b>AlManei, Salonitis, &amp; Tsinopoulos, 2018</b> |
|-----|-------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------|-----------------|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------|
| 1.  | Lewin's Change Management Model                       | V                                |                 | V                                           | V                                                                | V                                                  |
| 2.  | Bullock and Batten, planned change                    | V                                |                 |                                             |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 3.  | Kotter, eight steps                                   | V                                | V               | V                                           | V                                                                | V                                                  |
| 4.  | Beckhard and Harris, change formula                   | V                                |                 |                                             |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 5.  | Nadler and Tushman, congruence model                  | V                                |                 |                                             |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 6.  | William Bridges, managing the transition              | V                                |                 |                                             |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 7.  | Carnall, change management model                      | V                                |                 |                                             |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 8.  | Senge, systemic model                                 | V                                |                 | V                                           |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 9.  | Stacey and Shaw, complex responsive processes         | V                                |                 |                                             |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 10. | Luecke's Seven Steps                                  |                                  | V               |                                             |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 11, | Kanter et al.'s Ten Commandments for Executing Change |                                  | V               | V                                           |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 12. | ADKAR Model                                           |                                  |                 |                                             |                                                                  | V                                                  |
| 13. | Force Field Analysis                                  |                                  |                 | V                                           |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 14. | Learning Organizations                                |                                  |                 | V                                           |                                                                  |                                                    |
| 15. | Balanced Scorecard                                    |                                  |                 | V                                           |                                                                  |                                                    |

Source: adapted from Cameron & Green (2019); By, 2005; Siebert, Paton, & McCalman (2015); Pryor et al. 2008; AlManei, Salonitis, & Tsinopoulos (2018)

## 2.2. Online Education

In the article *"It's hard to feel a part of something when you've never met people: defining 'learning community' in an online era"* Prodggers et al. (2023) analyzed the way the learning communities adapted from face-to-face teaching to the "online era" during COVID-19 pandemic. The authors highlighted that if in the beginning online teaching was the solution to an emergency and people had to adapt their methods, now, remote/online education has developed the pedagogy that is intentionally designed to be used for this context.

**Table 2 Advantages, disadvantages, and challenges of online learning**

|    | Stakeholders | Benefit                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Challenges                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |
|----|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 1. | Students     | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Content availability</li> <li>• Reduced costs</li> <li>• Freedom of study</li> <li>• Fast learning</li> <li>• Anytime anywhere learning</li> <li>• Saves time</li> </ul>                                       | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requires more discipline</li> <li>• Lack of clarification in a timely manner</li> <li>• Difficulty in sticking to the schedule</li> <li>• Health problems</li> <li>• Lack of face-to-face interaction</li> <li>• Lack of interaction with the tutor</li> <li>• Lack of motivation</li> <li>• Need for technology</li> <li>• Practical experiences</li> </ul>                                  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical and Internet problems</li> </ul>                                                                                                                                                             |
| 2. | Professors   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ability to take up other kinds of jobs</li> <li>• Cost-effectiveness</li> <li>• Ease of access</li> <li>• High levels of confidence</li> <li>• Anytime anywhere learning</li> <li>• Reduced pressure</li> <li>• Saves time</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Health problems</li> <li>• Lack of experience on the part of instructors to deal with online courses and international students</li> <li>• Lack of face-to-face interaction</li> <li>• Lack of monitoring</li> <li>• Lack of motivation</li> <li>• Need for technology</li> <li>• Plagiarism and cheating</li> <li>• Reduced reliability</li> <li>• Reduction of job opportunities</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Course-related issues and workload</li> <li>• Technical and Internet problems</li> <li>• Insufficient tools for student assessment</li> <li>• Student commitment, awareness, and psychology</li> </ul> |

|    | Stakeholders | Benefit                                                                                                                                                                                           | Disadvantages                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | Challenges                                                                                                                                                                                |
|----|--------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| 3. | Institution  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost-effectiveness</li> <li>• Space availability</li> <li>• Better use of employee resource</li> <li>• Reduced pressure</li> <li>• Saves time</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decreases in educational quality</li> <li>• Feedback students process is delayed</li> <li>• Defocused employees</li> <li>• Need for technology</li> <li>• Plagiarism and cheating</li> </ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Technical and Internet problems</li> <li>• Insufficient tools for student assessment</li> <li>• Lack of clear visions and regulations</li> </ul> |

Sources: adapted from de Oliveira, Penedo, & Pereira (2018); Haider, & Al-Salman, 2020; Alshamrani, 2019; Hockridge, 2013

If we take into consideration the evolution of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies we can be sure that remote/online education will be able to use some of them to improve this process and turn it into a completely new experience over time. A study published in 2023 concluded that AI technologies such as applications could be developed and used for (1) data mining, analytics, personalized learning in education, (2) algorithmics online educational spaces, human agency and ethics, and (3) online learning based on 4 stages (detection, identification, recognition, prediction) (Dogan et al., 2023). Remote/online study advantages, disadvantages, and challenges are presented in the table below for the stakeholders involved in the educational process.

Wong (2020) present the four basic learning needs identified by her in the literature review as being (1) arousal, (2) autonomy, (3) relatedness, and (4) competence. The results were that the 2<sup>nd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> learning needs were met with no problem since online learning allows students to set a self-paced course allowing autonomy, this facilitates learning and improves self-confidence which encourages the gain of new competencies. The 1<sup>st</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> learning needs were not fulfilled since online learning isn't able to arouse students' motivation and keep them focused and the lack of human contact leads to a lack of relatedness.

### 3. METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study aims to identify how the activities and the environment offered by the faculty of economics should be improved. The main objective of this study is to find out (1) what students like (positive aspects), (2) what students don't like (negative aspects), and (3) if they tried to address the faculty the changes they would like to see implemented. Section 3 entitled The Evaluation of the Professors, article 303, number (1) in the Educational Law from Romania states that the professor's activity should be evaluated at least once at 5 years, and the same article number (2) specifies that the evaluation made by students is mandatory (Romanian Parliament, 2023).

In order to find out the students were asked via questionnaire, 3 open questions where they could express their thoughts related to their experience with the faculty. All the answers to the questionnaire were anonymous and the obtained data was used only for the communicated purpose. It's important to mention the faculty of economics where the study was applied the evaluation of the professors is done at the end of each semester. The students are involved in the change process of their faculty and have the chance to express what they like and dislike about the learning process.

Students have the freedom to decide, if they will share their opinion or not, without being forced by anyone.

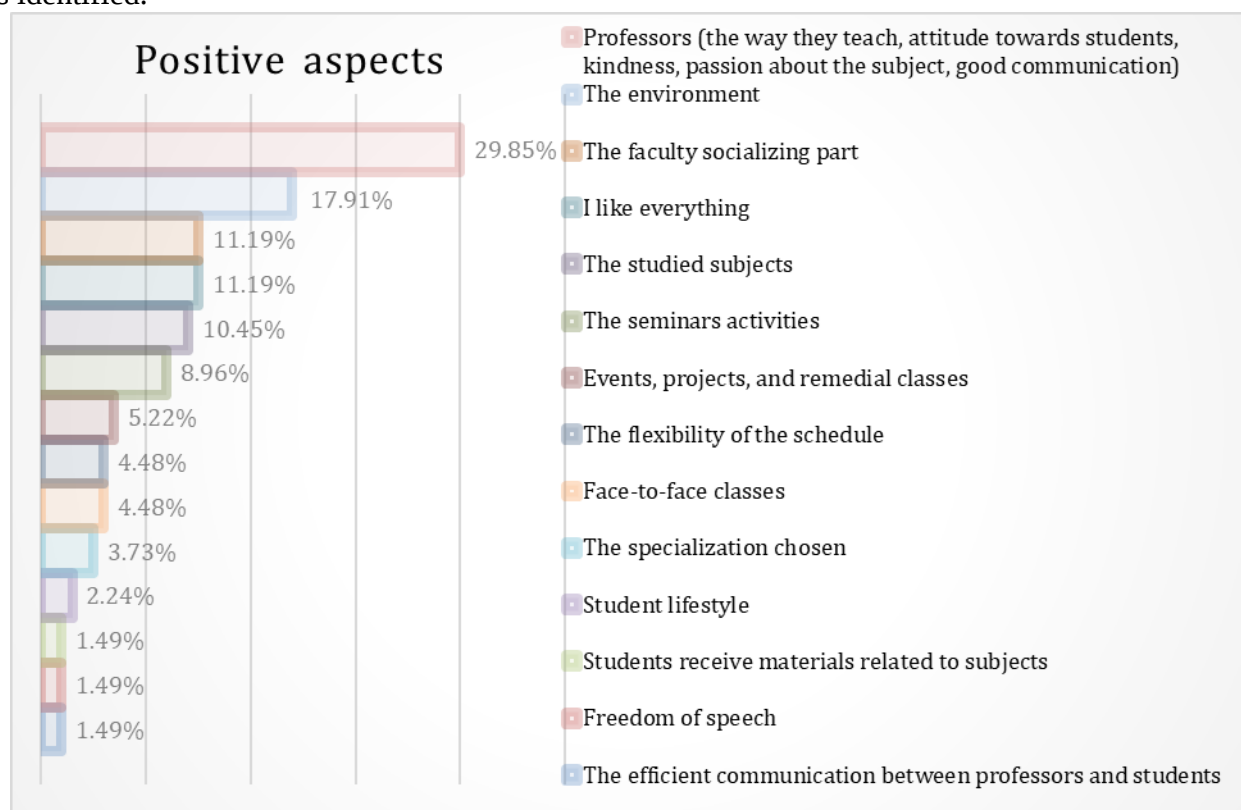
The target population was the students who studied both online and offline during their bachelor's degree studies. The answers to this survey were gathered at the same time as the faculty did the internal evaluation of the activity at the end of the second semester of the freshman year. In total there were 1413 participants in the study who willingly answered the survey questions and shared their views, 76.12% were female and 23.88% were male. All the students participating in the research were at the end of the first year in the bachelor's degree cycle and enrolled in the second year. Most of the students are for the first time enrolled in the bachelor's degree cycle and a few have other studies done as well (1.48% students).

#### 4. RESULTS

The findings are presented as being grouped into: positive aspects, negative aspects, suggested changes, and students' attitudes toward the implications of the change management process.

##### 4.1. Positive aspects identified

From a total of 1413 respondents, 41.79% of students mentioned only positive aspects related to their experience so far in the bachelor's degree cycle. The rest of the 55.97% students mentioned that even the positive aspects identified can be improved without mentioning them. 2.23% of students didn't take a side adopting a neutral attitude. In the figure 1 are presented the positive aspects identified.



**Figure 1. Positive aspects identified by students**

Source: Made by authors

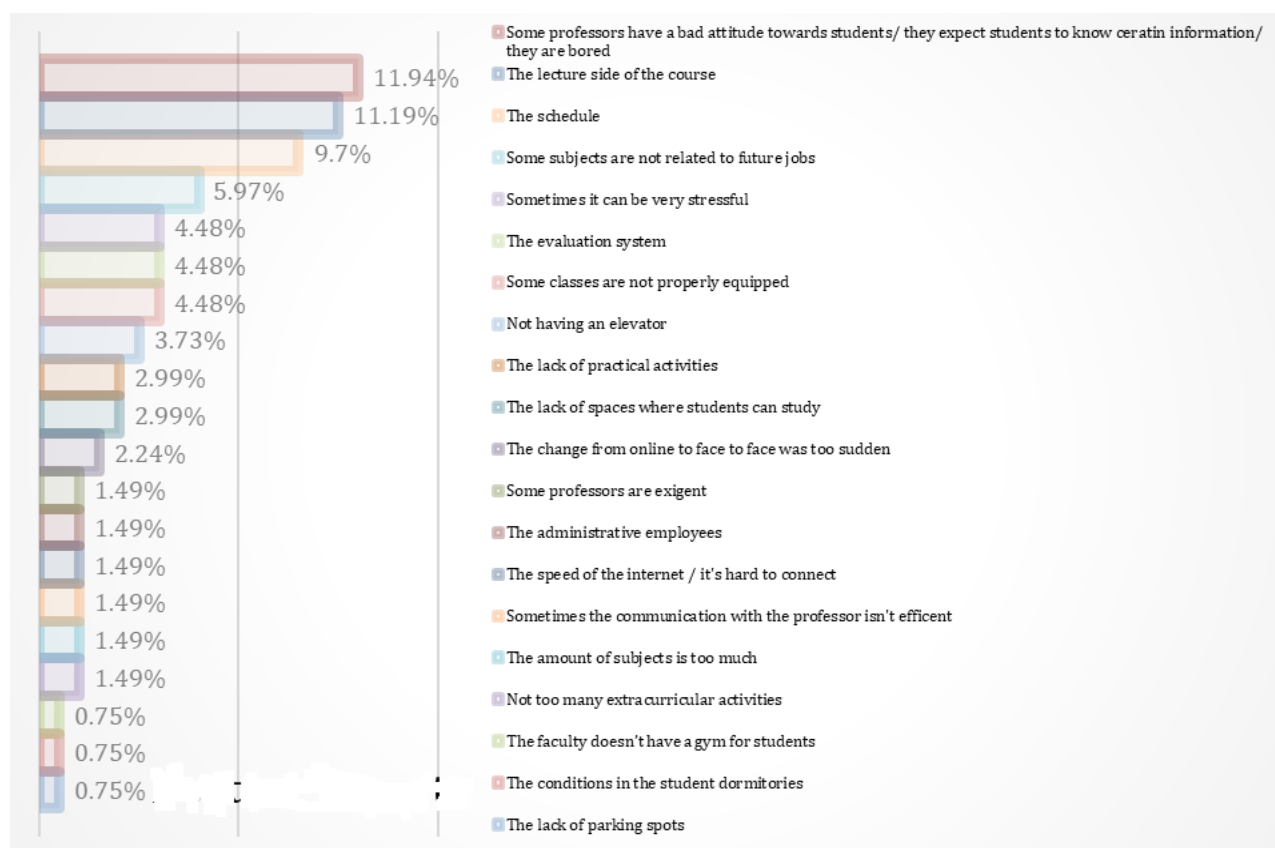
The first positive aspect identified by students are the professors, since we talk about an educational organization human resource being the first identified positive aspect is a good sign. If we correlate the second with the third positive aspect identified (the environment and the social part of the

faculty) we see that this is still in the second spot, during higher education most students create long-term relationships and they are increasing their network. Next in the answers of the students are those who like everything followed by the ones who like the subjects, seminar activities, projects, remedial classes, the flexibility of the schedule, face-to-face classes, chosen specialization, student lifestyle, the materials they receive, freedom of speech and the efficient communication between professors and students.

#### 4.2. Negative aspects identified

Of the total 1413, 29.85% of students mentioned only negative aspects related to their experience in the bachelor's degree cycle. 67.91% of students mentioned that the negative aspects identified by them are not actually that bad, some mentioning them, some saying that they aren't that bothered or affected. 2.24% of students didn't take a side adopting a neutral attitude. The extended results are presented in Figure 2.

The first negative aspect identified by students is that some professors don't have an attitude that's on their like and we can see that related to this are a few others such as exigent professors, administrative employees, and some issues in the communication with professors. The next aspect identified is the lecture side of the course and someone even suggested moving this part online. The list of negative aspects continues with the fact in some students' perspective some subjects are not related to future jobs they want to pursue and that is stressfully accompanied by an evaluation system that's not liked by a few. We can see the suggestions to have better-equipped classrooms and other aspects related to the lack of things such as elevators, parking lots, a gym, and the student's dormitories.



**Figure 2. Negative aspects identified by students**

Source: Made by authors

#### 4.3. Suggested changes

The students were interested in making suggestions of what should be improved from their point of view. The suggestions were gathered from their answers to the question if they ever made suggestions of how their experience could be improved (19.40% of students) and a small part from the negative aspects where they expressed clearly that they would want that aspect to be improved (7.46% students). Before completing the list of suggestions we checked to be sure that they weren't the same students to not count the same answer twice. The suggestions mentioned by students were related to the following topics: more interaction between students and professors to improve the relationship (14.18% students), a better schedule (13.43% students), more spaces for social interaction (8.96% students), better-equipped classrooms (5.22% students), to receive information that's already synthesized (3.73% students), more options for the optional subjects (2.23% students), more events with entrepreneurs (2.23% students), online classes for the lecture part of courses (1.49% students).

#### 4.4. The attitude toward implications in the change process identified

From a total of 1413 students who answered the open question of the questionnaire regarding whether they tried to get involved in the change process of the faculty with suggestions of how their experience can be improved 79.10% answered negatively. Some of the negative answers were a simple no (50.75% of students) or a short phrase offering a negative input. The reasons that they haven't made any suggestions are: that no one would listen to them (14.92% of students), they haven't had the chance (11.19% of students), everything is good for me (3.73% of students), and some people have better ideas than me (0.74% students). 1.49% of students said they will suggest changes when they feel or when situations that appear will affect them. 1.49% of students didn't want to offer an answer to this question. The rest of the 19.40% of students that haven't offered a negative answer to this question and mentioned that they offered suggestions either to the professors they have classes with (2.98% students) or to other people that they interacted with from the administrative employees (2.24% students) or just simply stated their suggestions.

### 5. CONCLUSIONS

The results obtained in this paper highlight the main positive aspects that the students identified for their faculty (professors, social life and lifestyle of students, and the entire environment of the faculty). Since we can't talk about good without to try and identify if there are negative aspects the students offered their views on this matter as well (the attitude of some professors, schedule, subjects that are not related to future jobs, stress, lack of some facilities and that some classes need to be better equipped). Related to the negative aspects, students made some suggestions that aim to eliminate them and have a better student experience. The general attitude toward the implication of the change process is negative but there is a chance that this will change if the students are invited to help since most of them were open to answering the survey.

It's impossible to satisfy the needs and expectations of everyone, especially when you have to offer a public education that gathers together yearly all the students who finished high school and decide to step over the open doors of a faculty with their vision and hope. As we can see from this research some students like everything while others consider some aspects still need to be improved. But what's interesting is that they are open to being involved, to say how they honestly see their faculty. Future research implies opening the survey to a larger number of students and adding to those three questions an extra one that will separate the suggestions students make by their answers related to "if they ever made a suggestion" for more clarity in answer and a better interpretation.

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