

THE CONSUMER ROLE IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

The present social context is disturbed by questions, diversity, complexity, and the time and space parameters, which change, the educational institutions being obliged to adjust one at ones news requirements which oblige and which sometimes are contradictories. Thus it is justifying dwelling on higher education development by the perspective of assurance the quality in education, orientation which would deserve adopt by each academic entity. For this reason any entity for profit to a big notoriety, for use at maximum the opportunities offered by market and for neutralization the threats of external environment in the first place is necessary to invest in human component and in them perfection, the key of any success business. The study it is based by primary quantitative research method by conclusive-descriptive nature based by the divided plans or transversal research how this is know in specialty literature. The dates collect method has been “face to face” investigation and the research instrument the questionnaire. The quantitative dates processed using SPSS. This paper achieved on the basis of punctual investigation represents a photography for the time being of students and of students at master opinions referring to the perceptions which they coached by the different aspects vis-à-vis by the education institutions where they are entered in.

Keywords: educational services, consumer behaviour, quality, students, higher education

JEL Classification: M31, I21

1. INTRODUCTION

Romania is supporter of Bologna Statement by 1999 and member of European Union beginning by 1st January 2007. This aspect involves, between others that Romanian universities are in a strong computational environment, total different by the hothouse climate offers by the governmental monopoly over educational national system (Brătianu and Lefter, 2001). The statute of states universities doesn't help very much in the new market created through the realization of European Space of Superior Education.

The education consumer has a certain behaviour defined as the totality of acts and decisions regarding to turn to account of opportunities with the view to obtain and to use the educative goods and services. For this has with view to following actions succession: stimulus perception, representing information's process of mind received by the surrounding, in this case the consumers are aware to educational needs, the inform regarding the educational goods and services which are on market, their contents, the utility, the diversity, the accessibility, the axiological level etc. The attitude creation, mint bent for the consumers to “buy” these goods and services, the motivation, which represents the state of mind stress which lead the fellow at purchase, satisfying his needs and expectations.

A special accent is put on education consumer motivation, on interns' motive of his behaviour. Certain reasons are by general order; others are more specials, as: the statement and self content feeling, the feeling of creation characteristic etc. Important is the knowledge of reasons which are in opposition with the decision of education. These reasons being: the incomes level, the distance, the transport, the educational program, the availability time, other offer more reasonable.

The after consumption behaviour is considered through the estimation of satisfaction index. That is, the graduates of one school are in measure to make valuations if their expectations have been satisfied in the course of studies years and what doesn't correspond with these expectations.

Educational marketing policy must be drawled up through the motivations study and of symbolic representations of consumers, through the fundamentals options defined of groups and fellows.

2. THE EDUCATIONAL PROBLEMATIC BY DOCUMENTARY PERSPECTIVE

The news conditions make adequate the pedagogic preoccupations which regarding the issue of educational change in the direction drawing up the practical models which can be use by the managers of each university and by the teachers for project and for use the personal development strategies, but in the same time organizational. The changes impact and of the new socials requirements from Romanian education it is apparent in theoretical plan, but and in practical plan by the imperative of development strategies of Romanian schools accommodation at essential principles of quality in education.

The fellows take decisions every day, but as often as not these decisions suppose a low implication level. The decisions regarding the choice of educational services are the decisions with high implication because (Kotler & Fox, 1995):

- a. the choose one faculty have implications over the proper image and can has consequences on long term over life of potential student;
- b. taking the purchase decision of educational services suppose personals or economics sacrifices;
- c. personals and socials risks in the case to taking one "wrong" decisions are perceived as being very highs;
- d. it is a considerable stress by reference groups' part to choose a certain faculty or university, and the potential student is powerful motivated to satisfy the expectations of reference groups.

Currently, institutions of higher education, moreover and other organizations and businesses operate in a highly dynamic environment. As following of rapidity and dimension of environment changes, the institutions of higher education don't can regard each change as a separate event, which can be individual studied for increase the advantages and for minimize the negatives effects which their create. Jim Knight affirms that „the change is a present reality in the framework of education institutions must learn to operate or assume their failure risk” (J. Knight, 1997). These evolutions impose changes in the manner in which the managers will understand the relation between the institution and the market of which it address oneself. The reform higher education requests imposed by the transition at Bologna system impose of universities and faculties remarkable efforts for accommodation. With all reform elements laid, the currently informational system by educational marketing used in Romania presents big deficiencies especially regarding the information's quality supplied both the managers and others institution members.

Thus, in the current dynamic environment, the universities begin to recognize the bigger and bigger importance of services which they offer and, in consequence, to focus on students' needs and expectations. For to have success one university must to identify which are the important aspects for students and, in consequence to offer of students what they expect.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

With the view to realize the study I resorted to make one punctual investigation using a quantitative research which provides too qualitative information's. The sphere of research included is representing by „customers”, following to emphasize the factors which in students' opinion would lift the quality level of educational services offer by FSEGA, elements which would prop the increase of educational services quality in economic area within the framework of “Babeș-Bolyai” University, Cluj-Napoca.

The purpose of research is to diminish the errors in decisions taking at the management level of one entity and to help with coaching and improvement those marketing decisions.

I resorted to using a quantitative research realized in base investigation, what is a method of primaries dates collect through addressing questions included in a questioner at one representative pattern (100 masters students and 168 students) by the mother population (students register in 2008-

2009 of FSEGA-UBB, in last year of study in faculty and masters – one year, daily classes). The dates collected in June 2009.

Thus in study I used a structured investigation which supposes using one questioner with questions which was established to begin with and was arranged in a certain order which must respect. In same times the investigation was one not dissimulate, the fellow being informer about the purpose of research and he could identify him with rapidity in the base of questions of questioner. Much, I used the classic personal investigation which supposes a discussion face to face between the interview operator and fellow asked, which permit obtaining the necessities information's for research.

I resorted to using one conclusive descriptive research based by the divided plans or transversal research how this is know in specialty literature (Plăiaș I., 2008) which supposes collecting the information's by the representative pattern level, all of a sudden.

A devised plan, some times named too pattern examination; can be seen as a snapshot about market in a certain moment. In plan, the people group selected is measured only one date. This examination type is the most use descriptive research type in marketing research. The devised plans, generally, constitute them in a support of transversal research. This form of research following discovery and define the relations between the aspects, the phenomenon's and the processes which have place all of a sudden, without proposes him some form of prediction. In this case, it is obtaining photography of marketing phenomenon and the influence of different variables of consumer over fellows asked behavior.

In this study I used the pattern proportional stratification in report with the students' percent and the students' percent at master of each section and their percent in "mother population". Thus, the method used is framing in the category probabilistic inquiries in which are included there methods based by methods the constitution of patterns in which the choice of units by population makes in accidental manner, each unit having a probability known and different by zero to belong to frame of the pattern selected. Therefore, I resorted to at proportionally stratification investigation because this supposes as the universe population to be divided in k clusters (in concrete mode in this case in 20 clusters at masters, represented the master sections and 10 clusters at faculty), the pattern being constituted through the building of independents patterns at level of each cluster.

Much more, this method is used when the population studied is heterogenic, the variables register big variation, and the using of simple investigation not is efficient. Thus, the population studied will be divided in homogenous clusters, named to layers, each unit belonging to an only cluster, not being any unit common in clusters.

The accidental extraction realized after the not return ball plan, when a ball extracted sometimes after the number is noted it is not put in urn. In this case a subject one day asked will not be asked once again even if he is register simultaneity at more masters programs or sections in faculty.

With the view to realize the research I extracted a pattern with 100 persons by master population and 168 students, that is 10% by persons of each study form. Total population (investigate universe) have 1000 subjects at masters and 1680 subjects in the last year of study in faculty. I used the proportionally stratification investigation in function with the students percent in mother population and in same times in report with repartitions by section. One advantage of stratification investigation in report with others probabilistic method is the increase of accuracy of estimations made. Only the proportionally stratification investigation ("representative stratification") is which can be interpreted as a census. The interest of this investigation type is that number of persons asked having common characteristics is proportionally with layer population. The proportionally stratification investigation assures a investigation rate " n/N " in each layer equal with on the whole population " n/N ".

4. PARALLEL STUDY BETWEEN THE STUDENTS' OPINIONS AND THE STUDENTS AT MASTERS OPINIONS

The process of take decision for to follow a faculty isn't straight or rational, but is a complex process affected by numerous factors as: register fees and school fees and others prices involved, the available information, the academic prestige, the entrance examination method in faculty, the opportunities offered by diploma, the life experience and the school experience (Moogan & Baron, 2003).

A lot of human needs are never wholly satisfied. The education need represents an answer of fellow at environment requirements, of his interactions with others and of his former experiences. For this reason must given a special importance of educational services needs.

The competition very big by present emphasized the strategic importance of satisfaction and of quality in the contest from the win of consumers and from to maintain of important advantages. Thus, the satisfaction is based on consumers' expectations and on their perception regarding the services quality (Johnston and Lyth, 1991; Ekinci, 2004; Cronin and Taylor, 1992; Christou and Sigala, 2002). Therefore, the universities must to try to understand their target markets, to value the needs of these markets and they modify their offers from to meet with these needs, contributing thus at a growth of consumers satisfaction through services with a lifted qualitative level (Keegan and Davidson, 2004).

Table no. 1 Academic education on a tuning dials -3 at +3 for students:

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"Very unimportant"	1	0.60
	"Unimportant"	1	0.60
	"Less important"	1	0.60
	"Indifferent"	4	2.38
	"Quite important"	16	9.52
	"Important"	56	33.33
	"Very important"	89	52.98
	Total	168	100

Table no. 2 On a tuning dials -3 at +3 for students at master the academic education:

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"Less important"	2	2
	"Indifferent"	5	5
	"Quite important"	8	8
	"Important"	43	43
	"Very important"	42	42
	Total	100	100

Better half between the students which answered at questions by investigation consider the higher education that being very important, while 33.33 % between they are agree with the fact that is important. Modest percents obtained the options "Very important", "Unimportant", "Less important" and "Indifferent", and 9.5% between they assert that to have academic studies it is a thing "quite important".

Thus, in follow of study realized to confirm that for the students asked registered at Faculty of Economics Science and Business Administration within the framework of UBB at masters the higher education represents one important factor in professional prepare.

A lot of students of masters asked consider that the higher education is important or very important (85%), while only 15% between they value this aspect between quite important and less important.

The rapid development of universities, as well as the growth school fees, together with the intensity of competition in educational surrounding oblige the universities to adopt a strategy orientated to market for make difference and for distinguish the offer in report with the

competition. Too, in the context of one birth rate in reduction, of the government priorities regarding the education quality and of the public finances reduction, much European states suffered a stressed diminution of students number (Alves, 2005).

In these conditions, the universities confront with the need to accommodate at certain important changes, taking a big accent by the attraction and the maintaining of students in faculty, through the satisfaction of needs and expectations of those. In the first place is necessary the needs knowledge, through the attentive study of dimensions educational experiences of students. Their knowledge will allow the determination of interest for futures studies, but too for present studies, because a student can renounce at the courses of one higher education institution in any moment. If approximate 86% between the students which answered considered that the higher education is important or very important 82.14% believe that they have need too masters graduates studies from to improve their professional prepare.

The students' satisfaction it is in generally defined as an attitude on short term, which results from a valuation of educational experience (Athiyaman, 1997). The satisfaction comes into sight then when the effective realizations meet or surpass the students' expectations (Szymanski, Henard, 2001). Browne, Kandelberg, Brown and Brown (1998) showed that the global satisfaction in report with a university is determined by a valuation of quality of courses, as well as others factors associated with this university. As services purveyors, the universities must to try to satisfy the students needs through the information and diplomas offer, and the orientation to a carrier, all these in the change students time, of their effort, of fees and of one positive advertising by type „word-of-mouth” (Kotler and Fox, 1995).

Very much between students asked wish the studies continuation immediately about they graduate from the faculty, 74.40% wanting to obtain a master graduate qualification in the next period. A reduced number say that they will expect a certain period just they keep this decision or just in the moment in which they have financials resources which to permit their this thing, fact owed of reduced number of budget places offered in the framework of faculties from masters, the fees very big and the big number of graduate who wish to complete the professional prepare. Insignificant percent declared that they will make this thing when they will feel prepared.

But the perception about education often differs between the members by inside (teachers) and the members by outside (students, potentials students, employers or others public categories). The United States of America researches show that the universities accentuate much more the research role and of one competitively development, while the population has need by a very well education of students for to lighten the process of finding a job.

When intend to continue the studies?

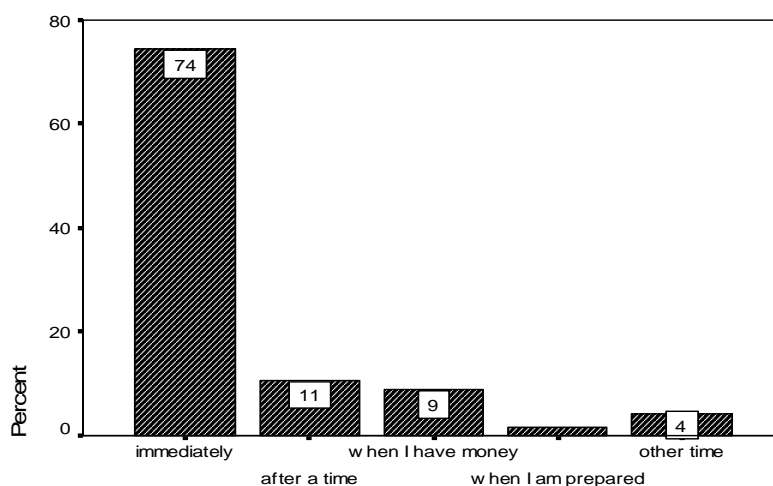
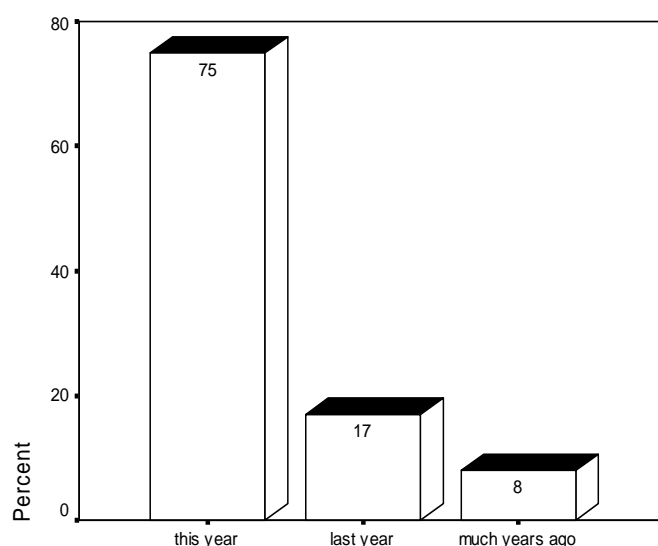


Figure no. 1 The data finished studies



When graduated from the faculty?

Figure no. 2 The year of faculty graduated form

Thanks to the fact that in measure which the fellows touch they aims they develop others news, can see in the base of the study made through the responses analyze obtained by the persons asked that three quarters between they which follow a master program are fresh licentiates, while 17% between they graduated form the faculty with one year before the master program, and 8% let the sands are running out much more years by the moment which they graduated form the classes of university till to enter in master. The most important reasons which are of base the studies continuation through graduates are: advantage in finder a job and looking into of knowledge, only a little percent don't feeling prepared to work.

Table no. 3 Principal reason to continue the studies

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"I don't feel prepared to work"	4	2.38
	"looking into of knowledge"	58	34.52
	"advantage in finder a job "	75	44.64
	Total	137	81.55
Missing	"no answer"	31	18.45
Total		168	100.00

The competition intensity between universities become more difficult the current situation, because these must to put a powerful accent on the students attraction in a big number, what is a difficult task and this involved a compromises series in quantity favour, with the risk to reduce the quality level of higher education.(Bailey, Rom and Taylor, 2004).

The motivation can manifest fewer than two different forms: negative or positive. Than this is negative the persons not to feel comfortable and they skulk to fulfil an activity with much levity. The fees are the principal hindrance in the way of continued the studies, approximately half of students manifest the fear than they are obligated to give up at wish to continuation them studies because this reason. Also, the graduates are lively by wish to work and probably for fear than the job which they choose will request big resources temporal they don't have time which to allot of study. The reduced numbers of budget places represent other obstacle in the way of continuities studies, especially in the context of fees extremely big for the Romanian students.

Table no. 4 Principal's reasons will determine you don't continue your studies

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"reduced number of budget places "	20	11.90
	"the fees very big"	81	48.21
	"the wish to work"	56	33.33
	"other"	11	6.55
	Total	168	100

The managers of higher education institution must to understand each aspect of consumer behaviour of educational services. Because the higher education was transformed in a very competitive domain the decision taking in this sector became by a special interest from researchers. The students have a wide game of options and they confront with complexes decisions for to reach at fair choice. Thus, the most wished destinations for the master following are: Germany, Italy, France and United Kingdom. The results regarding the factors which have the most influence about this process of decision taking as well as the number of factors take in consideration are contradictories (Hoyt & Brown, 1999). Anyway, the qualitative factors as: the academic reputation and the faculty fame are considered as being very important (Soutar & Turner, 2002).

Table no. 5 Options for to follow a master

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"the faculty which I finish"	110	65.48
	"at other faculty, but the same university"	15	8.93
	"at other university"	17	10.12
	"other option"	26	15.48
	Total	168	100.00

Table no. 6 Intend you to follow a master program at other option

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"no answer"	142	84.52
	"to find a job"	1	0.60
	"abroad"	17	10.12
	"no intend"	5	2.98
	"I don't know"	3	1.79
	Total	168	100.00

A lot of students (65.48%) wish to continue the studies un the framework of same faculty of graduates they are, a little number between they wishing to change the faculty (8.93%) or the academic centre (10.12%). Between the people who opt for other option a lot of they wish to study in the framework of foreign university. Much more students go in others countries for to realize a part of their studies and they go then at work in Europe or in outside and after they are graduates from (Hapenciuc C.V., Hapenciuc C., 2002).

Table no. 7 Principal reason from which I intend to change the academic centre is:

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"much more professional prepare"	23	13.69
	"the access at one superior quality of education"	14	8.33
	Total	37	22.02
Missing	"no answer"	131	77.98
Total		168	100.00

Everywhere in world, and especially in the European space, the universities must to manage of accommodation need for significant changes (Brătianu, 2002). The fellows which wish to change the academic centre in the view of studies continuation hope to profit in the new faculty by much more professional prepare (62.16% between the people which wish this change), or for to beneficiate by educational services which have much more quality (37.84% between the persons which don't opt from master in Cluj-Napoca).

Table no. 8 The knowledge of educational proposal for masters of your university

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"no"	101	60.12
	"yes"	67	39.88
	Total	168	100.00

What they buy, where they buy and when buy the consumers will depend by the knowledge's haven by these, these aspects being important in the taking of purchase decision. In spite of students number which wish to obtain a master diploma is considerable, only 39.88% between they knew the master offer which UBB proposed.

Table no. 9 The knowledge degree of masters' proposal

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"very little"	41	24.40
	"little"	29	17.26
	"quite little"	16	9.52
	"neutral"	22	13.10
	"pretty well"	40	23.81
	"well"	18	10.71
	"very well"	2	1.19
	Total	168	100.00

The master offer has been studied with very much attention only 1.19% between the students asked and well by 10.71% between these. 23.81% are pretty well in this regarding. A lot of students but recognize that they don't given a very big attention of this subject just the moment of this marketing investigation.

Table no. 10 Reasons to follow the master program selected

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"domain attractively"	58	58
	"the knowledge of a new domain"	37	37
	"enforce"	2	2
	"other"	3	3
	Total	100	100

The motivation can be described as o guidance inborn power in the intern structure of fellows which stimulate at action. Much more persons (58) decided to follow the master program of which they are register in fact because the domain studied is attractive.95% between the persons asked affirmed that the domain attractively or the knowledge of a new domain has been the reason which it is at the base of choice made.

Table no. 11 The quality of educational services of FSEGA

		Frequency	Percent
Valid	"no"	22	22
	"yes"	78	78
	Total	100	100

Much more three quarters between the subjects consider the quality of educational services offered by FSEGA as being lifted and corresponding of the waited for quality standards.

The motivation can manifest fewer than two different forms: negative or positive. Than this is negative the persons not to feel comfortable and they skulk to fulfil an activity with much levity. The needs set activated all of a sudden are often determined in while by specific hints concretization in motivations which manifest in environment.

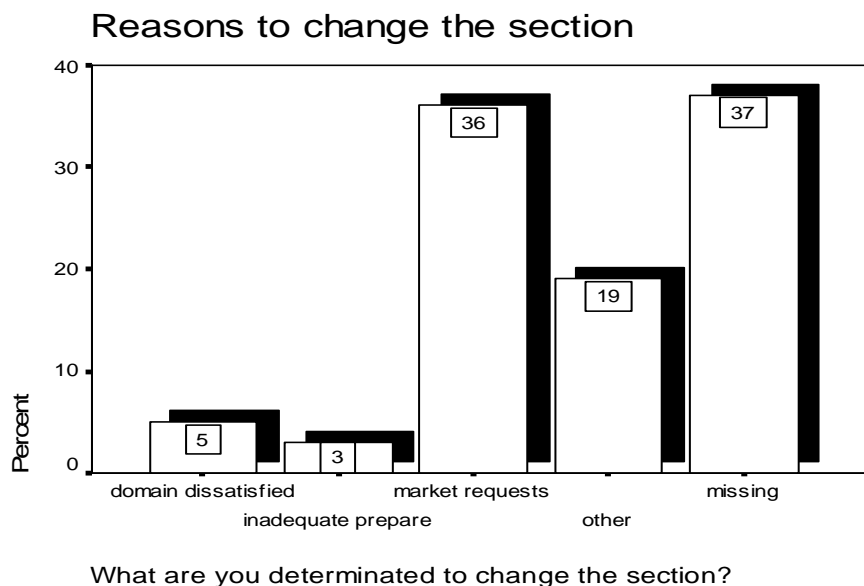


Figure no. 3 Reasons to change the section

Between 63 persons asked which affirmed that from the master studies they decided to change the section, about 60% motivate the choice as being determined by the requirements imposed by the work market, re orientate towards the domains which they consider that their will assure possibilities from professional realization. Reduced percents chosen this option because they don't like the domain formerly studied or because they aren't satisfied by the teachers prepare which carry on didactic activities at that section. 30% between the investigation participants mentioned others reasons. Between the fellows who said that other motive has been at the base of change section followed at master, the majority justify their option as being result from diversity desire (42.10%). Others specified reasons have been as in Figure no. 4.

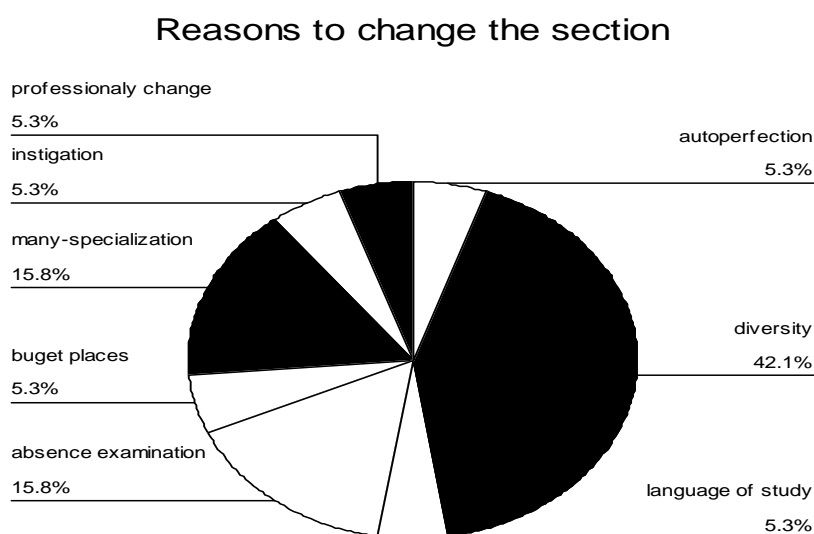


Figure no. 4 Others reasons to change the section

5. CONCLUSIONS

The idea of fellows preparation in agreement with the society requirements in which they live lead at initiation the instructive-educative ways capable to respond of formative exigencies for the moment, but in the same time and for perspective. The educational institution has moreover the responsibility to form ablest citizens to build all the time the new society, a task more difficult: that to reform/to restrict in such manners so that they majors objectives to realize more rapid as the changes of societal paradigm. In a different way spoken, the dynamic school change to be more rapid as the change of societal facto, the school institution taking the role of civilization engine, and not preservation engine, hindrance of societal dynamism. They majors objectives are determinate by the necessity of development resources by the measure of increases complexity of life conditions and aspirations.

The marketing – through her traditionalises functions of consumer research and of increase of adaptability entity at environment in which this work – will play a determined role in the assurance of success on market. At his place, the marketing will constitute the subject of some important changes in the years which will come, changes which will intervene on all this landings: marketing research, communications with potentials clients and current clients, sales, services addressed of clients etc.

It dare say that isn't no argument which to contradict the marketing methods and techniques using within the framework of educational system, methods and techniques which they proved their efficiency in all the sectors in which they has been used, especially that these can lead at an improvement of change process which have place between communities and education institutions.

Absence using marketing view within the framework of educational system it is similarly with the disagreement educational institutions access at the ensemble valuables tools which can eliminate the status quo problem present within the framework of this.

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