

SPECIFIC ASPECTS OF THE QUALITY MANAGEMENT OF THE TEACHING AND LEARNING PROCESS IN MILITARY HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

Forming the personality of the professional Romanian officer for a modern army able to meet the requirements of permanently received missions, in any circumstances, nationally and internationally, needs constant attention and concern for the enhancement of military academic quality management and of all components that contribute to its achievement. In this respect, the management of the quality of the teaching and learning process, through its aims in terms of the performance training of the future officer particularly contributes to achieving and strengthening excellence through the quality of military academic education. The theoretical and applied scientific concerns, which started in the second half of the last century are more developed and diversified in these first decades of the 21st century, in what regards the adaptation of the final products of any type of activities, tailored on the needs of the beneficiaries. In this sense, in the field of education, the increasingly demanding requirements of the beneficiaries have generated new perspectives of approach in the domains of science education, decision theory, psychology management, organization theory etc. These realities and challenges were the essential parts of our study, as a perspective of scientific, theoretical and practical approach of what quality management represents in the teaching and learning process in military higher education. The approach, from an interdisciplinary unified perspective, of some specific aspects of the quality management of the teaching and learning process in military higher education offers a new perspective of scientific analysis of the need to rethink and reconstruct the basis, design and achievement of quality in modern military academic education.

Key words: quality, quality management, teaching-learning process, cadets, quality standards, teaching staff, institutional management.

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1. Introduction

Given the development of European and Euro-Atlantic area of military higher education and of the flexible mechanisms for collaboration and mobility offered by the European Union and NATO in this direction, it is necessary to reposition the way to see and approach the teaching-learning and assessment process in the Romanian military higher education.

This new positioning of the Romanian military higher education clearly impacts on the functions and responsibilities of all those who, in one way or another, participate in military academic education. Thus, today, the complexity and diversity of the profession of officer requires, more than ever, rethinking and rebuilding the entire architecture of the educational process, in which teaching and learning are becoming increasingly important. In this military academic educational environment the issue of quality management of the teaching and learning process must be understood and promoted as defining factors of achieving the quality of the final product of this process – the officer. The future officer will be a person of the future, with knowledge and competences, and especially with attitude towards national and international professional challenges, namely the ones specific to the environment in which they will live and cooperate.

Addressing the issue of quality and quality management of the teaching and learning process, of its content, place and role in the quality management of military higher education is to achieve a wide coverage and understanding of this process. From this perspective, our approach is focused on appropriately identifying and analyzing the role, content and importance of quality and quality management of the teaching and learning process, both

from a theoretical perspective and from a perspective that reflects, in this regard, the investigation of the options of the academic staff and the academic management in a military institution of higher education.

2. Specific content and dimensions of the quality of the teaching and learning process

Each new generation of graduates of military higher education gives a new perspective to the aspirations that shape higher education now. What appears to be the hallmark of the present generation, but especially to the future one, is a large-scale revival of the interest in the quality of the teaching-learning process, for the cultivation of the moral and intellectual perfection of the future graduates.

Quality and quality management of the teaching and learning process (*Potolea, Neacșu, Iucu & Pânișoară, 2008, pp. 46–54*) have become a prerequisite for military higher education, given the essential reason, that today, and even more so in the future, the quality is a referential standard of performance of military academic education and of higher education, regardless of specialty or geographic location (*Enache, Brezoi & Crișan, 2013, p. 43*).

Quality is a very widely used concept (*Tricker, 2010, pp. 1–2*) which generated various scientific viewpoints in the field of theoretical delineations. Philosophy, economics, social or technical sciences give different meanings to the term. If we start from the philosophical meaning of *quality*, understood as a category that expresses the synthesis of the essential qualities of things and objects and processes (*Didier, 1999, p. 89*), then the quality of teaching and learning is to radically transform the characteristics and qualities of all the factors that contribute to its realization.

Dividing predictive judgments into affirmative and negative, as an embodiment of the concept of *logical* quality, requires the necessity that the teaching and learning process must pursue learning of not only the correct notions, concepts, definitions, functions, classifications etc. but also the development of learning models in order to develop rational scientific thinking.

From the perspective of *social sciences*, there are many guidelines regarding the definition and the new ways of approaching quality. D. A. Garvin argues that the following five guidelines could be set: orientation towards transcendence; orientation towards the product; orientation towards the production process; orientation towards cost and user orientation (*1984, pp. 25–43*). Highlighting the foundations of the concept, J. Juran defines the quality of a product or service as “the ability for the device to be used” (*Juran & Godfrey, 1999, p. 107*). If A. V. Feigenbaum considers quality as “the set of characteristics of the product or service (related to marketing, design, production and maintenance) by which the product or service meets the expectations of the customer” (*2004, p. 347*), Ph. B. Crosby considers it to represent “conformance with the requirements” (*1980, pp. 38–39*).

There are definitely other definitions of quality (*Robbins, 1932, p. 7*), but we can stress the fact that apart from the presence of these definitions (*Criiu, 2012, p. 17*) there are many meanings and therefore this concept involves different approaches and meanings for different people (*Sallis, 2005, p. 22*).

Taking and applying the concept of quality to the specific of the teaching and learning process, through the view of various stakeholders (*Shrikanthan & Dalrymple, 2003, pp. 26–36*), we present in the table below the correlation between the stakeholders and the perception on the quality of the future officer.

Therefore, the quality of the teaching and learning process appears as an intrinsic attribute thereof and can be understood as: *the entirety of the activities specific to the teaching and learning process that ensure the training and development of those professional and*

transverse skills of the cadets, meant to ensure the efficient achievement, as officers, of all tasks and requests of the military and social life and work.

Table 1. Stakeholders and the perception on quality (own study)

Stakeholders	Perception on quality
State and society, at macro level	Financial value and investment in training officers for a professional army
The Romanian Army, at medium level	Financial value and performance level of the officer carrying out national defense and international security tasks
The military institution of higher education, at micro level	Conducting qualitatively the fundamental academic processes in which the teaching and learning process ranks first
The teaching and administrative staff in military institutions of higher education	Consistency, recognition, respect for the challenges of providing quality training to various cadets

Consequently, having in view this content, we can consider the following to be the specific dimensions of the quality of the teaching and learning process:

- Quality, as excellence, emphasizes the effort to do better, more efficiently. Teaching and learning are actually excellence processes and, therefore, all the aspects that render this dimension of quality are being considered;
- Quality, as compliance to the purpose, expresses the need to understand and assure quality in the teaching and learning process but not generally, only in the concrete conditions of a definite purpose. Therefore, the quality of the teaching and learning process is not an abstract notion but it is found in the quality offered by specific performance indicators. For this, every moment of the action in the teaching and learning process must comply with the performance standards and requirements of the model of the modern Romanian Army officer;
- Quality, as transformation, expresses the need to tailor the quality of the teaching and learning process to the dynamic of the demands of the personality of the modern officer, of the progress of sciences and of the increasing levels of quality standards.

Representing the different characteristics that define, first and foremost, the performance of the future officers, the quality of the teaching and learning appears, in turn, as a fundamental component of the quality management of this process.

3. Aspects characteristic to the functions of quality management in the teaching and learning process

We can talk about the theoretical sources of quality management with the work developed by the founders of the movement for quality, since the 50s of the last century. But because of the growing needs of the society, of the permanently open challenges, of the new pace of development of science and technology and of the increased responsibility for training the future human personality, the issue of quality management was established as a centre of major interest for scientists (*Oprean & Kifor, 2002, pp. 34–47*), respectively for national and international educational policies and practices.

In this respect it is significant that, in 1988, the European Foundation for Quality Management European – EFQM (<http://www.efqm.org/the-efqm-excellence-model>), and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (http://www.enqa.eu/wp-content/uploads/2013/06/ESG_3edition-2.pdf), was established at

European level and the issue of quality is increasingly present in the activities of the European Commission, Council and Parliament.

In turn, management scholars have increasingly dedicated to quality management, in order to define and establish its fundamental pillars of understanding, explaining and achievement.

Considered lead the way in the field of management, the Romanian-born American Professor J. M. Juran defines quality management through its functions in terms of quality trilogy (2005, p. 55), i.e. quality planning, quality control and quality improvement. According to Kélada (1990, p. 27), quality management is “a set of activities aimed at achieving objectives through the effective use of resources”, and has the following functions: planning, organizing, coordinating, quality control and assurance. Other authors (Rinne & Mittag, 1993, p. 15) use the concept of “quality in the broad sense” instead of using quality management, including in the former “all activities aimed at achieving quality”. For these authors (Rinne & Mittag, 1993, pp. 16–17) the basic functions of quality management are planning, evaluation and control.

Considering the general features specific to management (Ghițescu, 2006, pp. 64) and the peculiarities specific to quality management, namely that the postmodern academic staff is understood as facilitator, advisor, moderator (Crișan, 2013, p. 64) and as manager of educational activities, we can analyze from this perspective some aspects related to management of the quality of the teaching and learning process, in terms of revealing the particularity of its functions.

The first function of quality management in the teaching and learning process, its *design*, consists of a coherent set of operations, actions and events that, at the level of the thinking and practical work is conceived and encompasses the scope and its specific educational content. The design ensures the primary requirements for the achievement of the quality in the military educational environment where the teaching and learning process is carried out. Therefore, the design of teaching and learning is a process of anticipation on:

- Objectives, content and teaching strategies, according to the curriculum and to the course description;
- Correlation of teaching and learning objectives with the direct and indirect learning experiences of the cadets (Cristea, 2010, pp. 324–325);
- Rigorous division of teaching and learning in certain units of time;
- Concrete activities, according to specific sequences of the teaching and learning, of the teaching staff and cadets;
- Correlation of teaching-learning content with specific aspects of activities of the future officer in the military environment (Cosma, 2006, pp. 61–64);
- Euro-Atlantic requirements and demands for a proficient military higher education (Cosma, 2005, pp. 47–55);
- Choosing appropriate strategies for organizing learning and the right assessment methods (Barbier, 1985, p. 28; Cucos, 2006, pp. 365–368);
- Establishing the overall teaching framework for the teaching staff to be able to fulfill the role of organizer, leader, facilitator and tutor, creator of learning situations;
- Adopting a relationship of mutual communication between the teacher and the student, based on openness, consideration, trust and mutual respect (Locke, 200, p. 414; Buzea, 2010, p. 99);
- Clear and concise communication (Wright Mills, 2000, p. 55; Babad, 2009, p. 174) of data in order to solve tasks.

A second function of the quality management process of teaching and learning is the *organization*. As specific activities of this function we can mention:

- Identifying and filling out the necessary information as to have a better knowledge of the cadets in terms of their scientific level, individual potential, interests and expectations, i.e. their personality traits;
- Continuation of the selection and study of scientific and documentation resources in the field of the specific discipline and its didactics;
- Checking the quality and availability of the future auditorium or hall where the lecture course will be held;
- Verifying the existence and quality of the teaching tools to be used (computer, projector, flip chart etc.).

The following functions, i.e. training and coordination are mainly specific to the proper conduct of teaching and learning. For *training*, the key element that assures the quality of this function is motivation (Pop, 2007, p. 68). On the one hand, training consists in the correlation of the needs and interests of the cadets with the achievement of the objectives of the teaching and learning process, and, on the other hand, in supporting the motivation of the teaching staff by the academic management, for the production and assurance of quality standards at the level of the performance standards.

The simultaneous fulfillment of requirements specific to the motivation of the cadets in order to achieve effective training, in terms of complexity, gradualness and differentiation necessary for carrying out the student-centred teaching and learning process, takes into consideration the following:

- The cadet is considered a partner of the teacher in building the cognitive process (Cocoradă, 2010, pp. 89–90);
- The teacher does not transmit knowledge as a product, but approaches it as a process by focusing on the learning needs of cadets (Alexander & Murphy, 2000, pp. 25–60);
- The logical structure of the material to be taught, from simple to complex, based on the learners' prior knowledge and experience and on the association with other disciplines in order to achieve interdisciplinarity and transdisciplinarity (Ciolan, 2008, pp. 38–43);
- The diversification of teaching styles, while maintaining their attractiveness;
- The use of critical thinking and reasoning in teaching in order to stimulate the cadets' critical senses;
- Stimulating the cadets to solve problems (Negreț-Dobridor & Pânișoară, 2008, pp. 191–208), to find solutions using problem solving, case studies etc.;
- Encouraging creativity (Stoica-Constantin, 2004, p. 95), expression and active involvement of the cadets to ask questions, express suggestions, opinions, formulate hypotheses;
- Combining teaching-learning strategies (Iucu, 2006, p. 109) (inductive, deductive, transduction, dialectical, hypothetical, analytical, interrogative, descriptive, interpretative, innovative etc.) to include as many elements of military students' motivation in order to achieve the quality of their training.

Another specific function, *coordination*, refers to the harmonization and synchronization of all the activities in the teaching and learning process by correlating the activities of the teaching staff, in their capacity as facilitator, counsellor and moderator of knowledge, with the activities of the cadets, in order to use all resources planned according to the time, quantity and quality established in order to meet the objectives with maximum efficiency. For this, it is necessary to achieve:

- Effective management of the teaching time by using a teaching pace that supports the understanding and the creative accumulation of new knowledge (Cerghit, 2006, pp. 45–46);

- The objectives envisaged to be SMART (specific, measurable, tangible, relevant, achievable over time);
- Adopting an appropriate pace of the teaching and learning methods as to exploit the facilities planned for the scientific curiosity of the cadets (Iucu, 2008, pp. 28–30).

Given the theoretical approaches of quality management (Lila, 2010, p. 62), we believe, in our turn, that the following functions of the quality management of the teaching and learning process are *providing control*, i.e. *quality assurance and improvement*.

With intention of providing a small range of variation in the level, as compared to the prescribed one, *controlling* requires a continuous comparison between the values of the qualities characteristics to the teaching and learning process with its specific standards. Depending on the results of these evaluations, a series of measures are established in order to correct the quality of the training of the military students' personality skills throughout the course of teaching and learning. As compared to the quality standards specific to the discipline, the results of the initial assessment, conducted at the beginning of the teaching-learning-evaluation process, will help the teaching staff ensure a continuous evaluation of the level achieved by the cadets, by communicating with them during the process of teaching and learning, but also through specific assessments that can and should be provided during seminars and laboratory activities.

By the function of *quality assurance and improvement*, quality management in teaching and learning requires a new perspective regarding the performance of existing standards at a specific time. This is because the contents of this function are to ensure the elimination of losses due to "significant" problems of the quality of the teaching and learning process and the achievement of performance superior to the current standards. Given the nature of the emerging issues, quality management itself will undergo some changes by the intervention and support of the academic and administrative management, but primarily, through the qualitative self-improvement of the teaching staff.

Therefore, in order to determine the level of fulfillment of specific standards in the teaching and learning process, the managers and the teaching staff in the military institutions of higher education will permanently refer to the results of the academic evaluation of the cadets and to those obtained by the students as Romanian Army officers.

The theoretical analysis and approach that can configure a specific approach of the quality and quality management of the teaching and learning in military higher education demonstrates the necessity and appropriateness of the presence, action and their enhancement in order to meet requirements of the military and society regarding the level of performance of the future Romanian officers.

The specific diagnosis of aspects related to quality management in the teaching and learning process by gathering and processing the opinions of the teaching staff and of the academic institutional management has been conducted as part of a complex field investigation, from the content of which we will present some conclusions.

4. Research methodology

In order to assess realistic goals of the way in which quality management in the teaching and learning process is perceived, we applied the scientific research methodology specific for this task.

4.1. Aims and objectives

The overall aim of the investigation was to identify the know-how and the action methods in quality management of the teaching and learning process. For conducting the investigation the following *objectives* have been formulated:

- To identify the role of the functions of quality management of the teaching and learning process in achieving its performance;
- To analyze teaching styles that contribute to the performance of quality management of the teaching and learning process;
- To know the main effects of increasing the efficiency of the management of the teaching and learning process.

4.2. Research hypotheses, method and sample

- If the teaching staff and academic management apply the requirements of the quality management functions in the teaching and learning process, then its performance increases;
- The higher the increase of the performance of quality management in the teaching and learning process, the better the professionalization of the training of the modern officer;
- If the teaching style is appropriate to the learning situations, then the performance of the training of the cadets increases.

In order to collect the opinions of the teaching staff and academic management, we have used the survey as method and the questionnaire as a tool for investigation.

In order to collect meaningful information from the respondents we have established a representative sample consisting of 30% of the academy managers and teaching staff of that specific military institution of higher education.

4.3. Results and discussions

The analysis of the results of the investigation conducted at the level of academic management and of the teaching staff sought to highlight both a quantitative and a qualitative interpretation of their opinions. In order to identify the views of the importance given to the functions of quality management in the teaching and learning process, the following item was formulated:

How would you rate the extent to which the following functions have a decisive role in achieving performance of the quality management in the teaching and learning process in your institution? (Check the option that corresponds to your opinion). Table 2 shows the considered functions and the possibilities for marking appropriate level of answers.

Table 2. The role of the functions of quality management in achieving performance (own study)

FUNCTIONS	To a very small extent	To a small extent	N/A	To a great extent	To a very great extent
a) Designing the teaching and learning process	1	2	3	4	5
b) Organizing the teaching and learning process					
c) Training the teaching staff					
d) Coordinating the teaching and learning process					
e) Controlling quality standards					
f) Quality assurance and improvement					

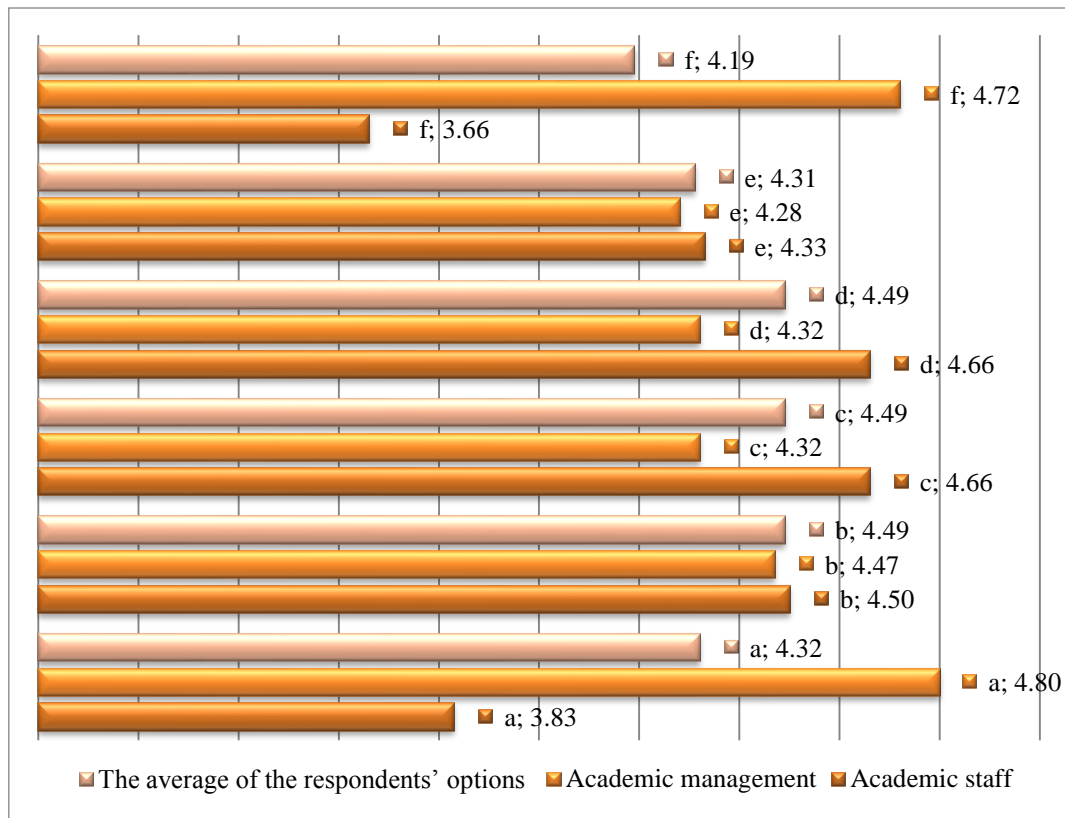


Figure 1. The ratio of opinions in appreciating the functions of quality management (own study)

The data and results presented in Figure 1 reveal that academic management places first the design of the teaching and learning process and second quality assurance and improvement, while the teaching staff ranks first, with the same score, the training of the teaching staff and coordinating the teaching and learning process. Controlling the level of quality standards by the academic management and quality assurance and improvement are considered by the teaching staff to be in last place.

If we calculate the average of the options, we discover an interesting situation, namely the location on the same place of three variables that influence equally the organization and the development of the teaching and learning process. We also appreciate the need to identify new initiatives and measures to increase the activities carried out by the academic management and by the teaching staff towards increasing the interest and responsibility for the functions identified as last.

In the same vein, we can take into account the opinions expressed for the following item: *Steady and continuous support of the effort that you make in order to obtain the performance of quality management in the teaching and learning process is determined by several factors. Please order the following factors on a scale from 1 (very important) to 6 (least important):*

- The efficient provision and use of resources necessary for the teaching and learning process.
- The involvement of institutional academic management.
- The professionalization of the teaching staff.
- The evaluation of the teaching staff by the academic management.
- The evaluation of the teaching staff by cadets.
- The stimulation of a competitive environment in the academic institution.

The analysis of the views expressed by the respondents, as shown in Figure 2, shows that they placed first teaching staff professionalism, and last teaching staff evaluation by cadets.

We also note the different options for second ranking: if managers choose institutional academic management involvement (26.04%), the teaching staff prefers the stimulation of a competitive environment in the educational institution (25.15%).

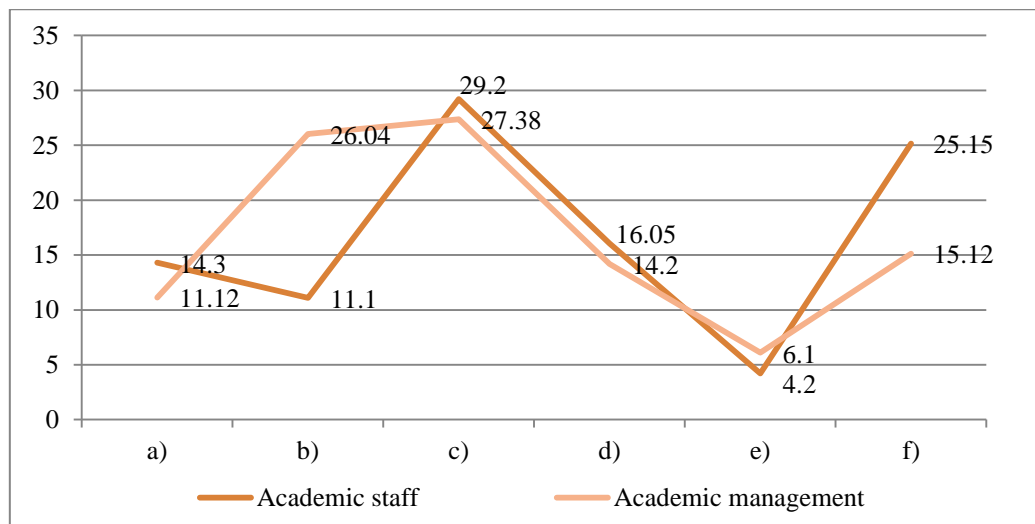


Figure 2. Hierarchization of the importance of the factors that contribute to achieving performance of the quality management in the teaching and learning process (own study)

For the future, we think it is necessary to maintain and strengthen a framework that is favorable to teaching staff professionalization, namely boosting the competitive environment through a greater involvement of the institutional academic management.

Only in this way can we ensure an increased efficiency of quality management in the teaching and learning process, with beneficial effects on the quality of military higher education. This can also be identified from the responses to the following item: *Which do you think is the main effect of increasing the effectiveness of quality management of the teaching and learning process? (Select one answer by writing an x next to your response)*

- Increasing the quality of the training of future officers.
- Increasing the motivation of teaching staff.
- Increasing the performance of academic management quality.

As shown in Figure 3, the analysis of the responses to this item shows that both the academy managers and the teaching staff placed in the same hierarchical order the effects of the efficiency improvement of quality management, but with different percentages.

Given the radiography of this item we consider that, for the future, it is important to diversify and improve the possibilities for increasing the effectiveness of quality management of the teaching and learning process and, on this basis, to raise academic excellence in training the future officer and the performance of institutional quality management.

In this context, knowing and using teaching styles appropriate to the disciplines and learning sequences has been a permanent concern for the quality management in the teaching and learning process. The next item is considering highlighting the opinions related to the teaching staff choosing the style which assures the quality of teaching and learning process. The item reads: *Please rate which of the styles listed below are appreciated as most effective for conducting a qualitative teaching and learning process, on a scale from 1 (not at all) to 5 (very much), by writing an x next to your response (Table 3).*

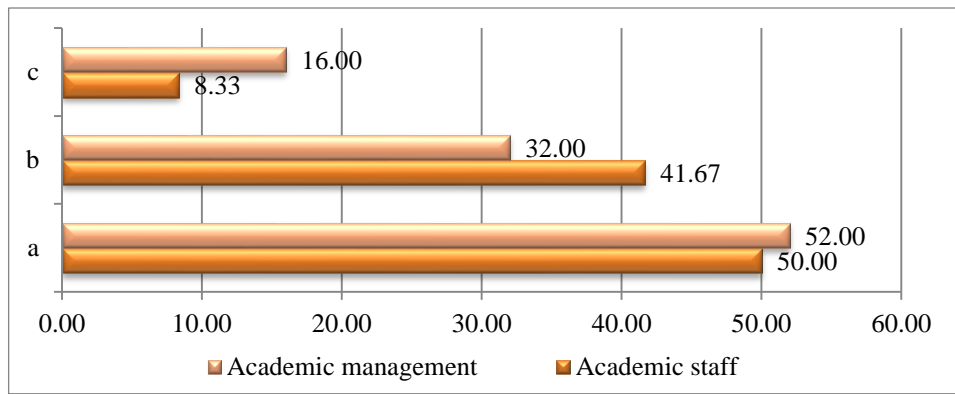


Figure 3. Appreciating the most important effect of the increase of the efficiency of the quality management in the teaching and learning process (own study)

Table 3. The typology of the teaching-learning styles (own study)

The typology of the teaching-learning styles	Very little	Little	N/A	Much	Very much
	1	2	3	4	5
Flexible style					
Democratic style					
Interactive style					
Innovative style					
Student-centred style					
Communicative style					
Rational style					

First of all, this item asks for views that are directly related to the personality and didactic expression of the teaching staff and their influence on the quality of teaching and learning, and on the development of the cadets’ skills.

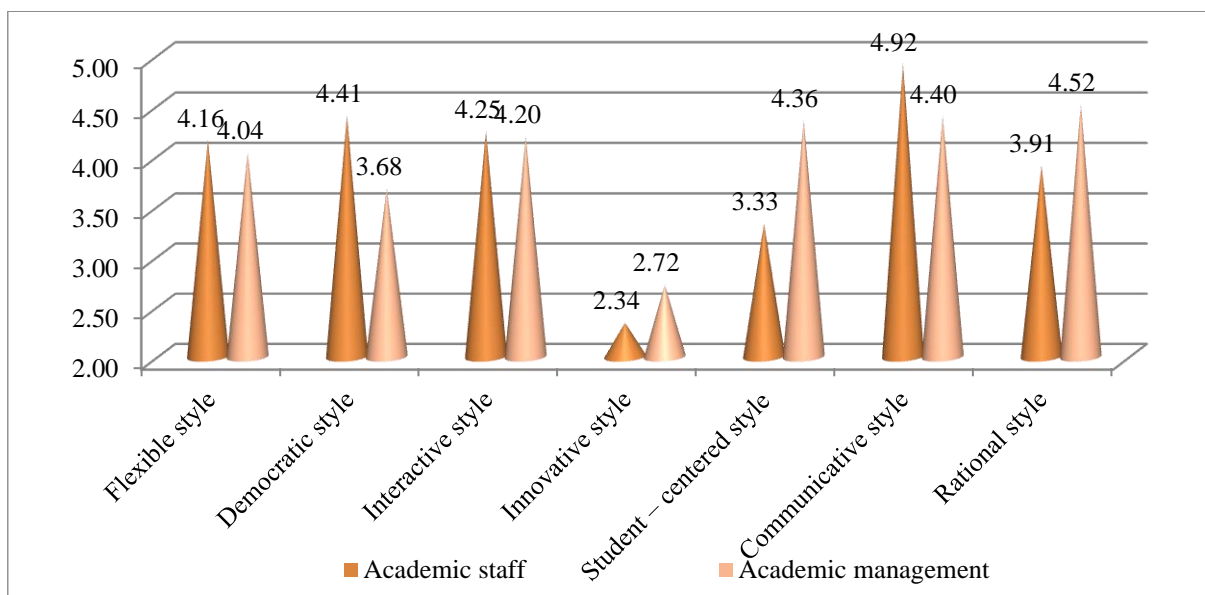


Figure 4. Choosing the most effective teaching style (own study)

In Figure 4 we can observe that the academy managers placed first the rational style, while the teaching staff opted for a communicative style. Regarding the positioning of the innovative style on the last place by the two groups of respondents, it shows that there is still some restraint, also influenced by the military environment, to introduce, in a more obvious manner, new and original elements. The existence of this variety of teaching styles situating is normal, as one cannot say that there is only one style of teaching and learning as the best. But it is necessary to understand that teaching and learning are increasingly requesting student-centred activities.

5. Conclusion

Addressing the concerns of scientists and of successful managers shows us new directions of their concerns. They are based on new openings of the knowledge-based society and the growing needs of each area to efficiently manage and solve the emerging problems. Those sciences and societal practices that revolve around quality and quality management are increasingly brought into the spotlight. To do this, especially for a swift generalization of the theoretical and practical knowledge acquired in the field of quality management of human and social activities, it is necessary to identify and apply scientific methods to approach them in the area of education, in general, and of academic education in particular.

Based on these major coordinates of the challenges of today, military higher education, as a responsible part of the national academic education in each country, is called, in turn, to base, design and make the necessary options specific to quality management, with its main component – quality management of the teaching and learning process. In this regard, the analysis of the opinions and scientific theoretical and pragmatic requirements reveals that the quality management of the teaching and learning process is influenced by theoretical approaches and by the quality of the perception and performance of the actions of the academic management and of the teaching staff.

The investigation shows a diversification of the respondents' options, which either sometimes placed actions specific to quality management in the teaching and learning process on the same level, or on different levels, sometimes diametrically opposed. This finding indicates that, although there is consistent knowledge and application of the requirements of the quality management in the teaching and learning process, the same cognitive and actional level is not found in terms of quality management of the teaching and learning process.

Therefore, the quality of the teaching and learning process cannot be restricted to the specific activities conducted by teaching staff in the auditoriums, but extended to a varied and coherent overall array of activities circumscribed to quality management of the teaching and learning process. Thus, in order to meet the requirements of the quality standards of the training of the future Romanian officers, postmodern military academic management needs to situate the quality management of teaching and learning at the centre of its concerns.

Only when full synergy between the actions of the military managers, the military institution of higher education, the teaching staff and the cadets is achieved, will the quality management of the teaching and learning process reach and exceed its own levels of quality standards.

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