

Exemplification of Expectations and their Implications for Trust and Credibility of University Teachers in the Students' Opinion

ABSTRACT

The article describes the question of trust and credibility of university teachers, i.e. fulfilling the expectations and obligations towards students who have placed their trust in the teachers. It focuses on the importance of credibility understood as expectations concerning relations. The discussion aims at presenting the significance of academic teachers' credibility for students and finding the answer to the question about the basis on which the teachers' credibility is evaluated in students' opinion. The conclusions base on the analysis of the subject literature and the author's own research results.

The article explains the notions of trust, credibility and expectations, discusses ideas and various meanings of a trusted person's credibility. The author refers to the theoretical model of trust by P. Sztompka, particularly credibility as a relation, as well as classification of credibility as instrumental, moral and care-taking one basing on characteristics of expectations and obligations. The research results exemplify the fulfilled and unfulfilled expectations of students on the basis of which the author attempts to create a system of expectations referring to the mentioned above credibility variants.

Conclusions point to mutual benefits following from the fact that a university teacher is credible in the opinion of students. The area under discussion seems to be particularly interesting as credibility is a model of the interpersonal capital and the credibility capital in turn defines the notion of authority.

KEYWORDS: *trust; credibility; teacher; student.*

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Trust has become one of the most often analysed sociological phenomena of the first two decades of the 21st century as it is one of the basic elements in human interaction and macro- and micro-structure bonds (Domański, 2014).

A simplified assumption that trust is an long-time relation between people is an approach not taking into account the time flow and frequent, radical and violent changes. However, new conditions, new contexts and continuous transformations generate new circumstances affecting the nature of trust. It is difficult to assess what prevails in the modern world, whether it is violation of trust, its misappropriation and infringement, or perhaps, in spite of everything, actions aiming at its renovation, rebuilding, respecting and developing. Nowadays, the crisis of trust seems to be more and more prevalent. The lack of trust might in some way follow from the fact that “a human being exists in a situation of continuous change and interacts with a number of mobile barriers of changeable height, as well as new, or potentially arising, circumstances that may be conducive to intentions but may also trigger some other, previously non-existent, difficulties. That may create the so frequently observed at present feelings of anxiety and uncertainty” (Szymański, 2016, p. 170), thus, the more and more often experienced by individuals atrophy or trust deficit. What is particularly disturbing is the growing distrust in public institutions, courts of justice and the police, mass media or, last but not least, the school system, and consequently, also in people representing these institutions. Referring to the role of trust, one may conclude that benefits from its presence in the social life could considerably outweigh the failed attempts at cooperation or evasion tactics employed to avoid possible trust-related disfunctions. Therefore, the prevailing trends should not be just passively followed. One should not renounce the possibility of shaping and multiplying the abilities to increase the extensive individual and social welfare that may result from spreading the values of trust (Prüfer, 2016, p. 81). Narrowing the focus down to the academic

community, the problem of trust in relations between participants of the educational process seems to be vital for further considerations. However, before delving into that matter, we should first attempt to answer the question: What is trust?

The literature provides us with a multitude of various descriptions. Originally, trust was associated with religion. It concerned the matter of believing in God or Gods, relying on God and having trust in him. In the Middle Ages the meaning of trust as term was similar. It was derived from the word *pwa*, which can be translated as *trust*, *hope*. The roots of the word *pwa* are connected with Old Church Slavonic language words *pŭwati*, *upŭwati* which meant *trust* as well as *certain*. The changes in terminology were connected with the changes in meanings and functions of some notions. Following the shift of trust from the sphere of soul to the sphere of the body, that is the shift of trust from God to other people, the meaning of trust changed, as it no longer included the sacred meaning which in turn meant the loss of its significance (Wydra, Rzepka, 2004, pp. 68-75).

As Russell Hardin (2009, p. 51) stated “in the majority of academic publication the term *trust* is freely used in the same way as it is used in colloquial speech where the word has many different and often inaccurate (wrong) meanings. Trust is often approached as a term impossible to be defined, it is everything it seems to be to anybody”. Considering the sole origin of the word *trust* in English, one discovers that in the Middle Ages it functioned as a noun in the form *tryst*. Its simple meaning referred to the activity associated with waiting for game (hunted animals) at an agreed on spot (Hardin, 2009, pp. 9-10). Another term in English referring to that notion was *confidence*, meaning both *belief* and *assurance*. Both terms, *trust* and *confidence*, were theoretically differentiated by Niklas Luhmann in his article “Familiarity, confidence, trust: problems and alternatives” (Luhmann, 1988, pp. 94-105) and the word *trust* has been consistently used in literature since then.

Saint Augustine of Hippo and Saint Thomas Aquinas, representatives of Catholic personalism, were among the first scholars trying to define trust. According to them "trust is a rational attitude of a man, an act of a personal and free choice." (Kowalczyk, 2016, p. 43). Trust is also defined as "a certain kind of stronger or weaker conviction or belief of individuals in good intentions of others, the belief that they are not going to hurt or cheat by their decisions or actions (...)" (Szymczyk, 2016, p. 9).

Thus, trust is connected with sole anticipation, prediction of other people's behaviour. Francis Fukuyama (1997, p. 70) defines trust in a similar way describing it as a certain mechanism basing on the assumption that members of the society individuals interact with are characterised by their honest and cooperative actions based on shared norms.

The Catholic Encyclopaedia defines trust as "an attitude manifested in the belief that individuals, groups, institutions will fulfil expectations of the trusting subject, an attitude of undertaken actions, especially in a situation of uncertainty, lack of control and risk" (Celińska-Miszczyk, 2014, pp. 1271-1272). In reference to a study by Krystyna Skarżyńska trust may be defined within three psychological areas. In the theoretical and practical approach trust is a generalised attitude towards other people. Trust as a variable disposition is studied within the paradigm of variable individual differences. Another approach links trust to the estimation of uncertainty in definite social relations. The former approach describes trust in a dispositional way, the latter – in a situational one. Yet another perspective describes trust as depending on macro-system and cultural circumstances (as cited in Budzyńska, 2016, pp. 128-131). Piotr Sztompka defines trust as "a bet placed on uncertain, future actions of other people" (Sztompka, 2007, p. 70).

Trust might be understood as a mutual benefit in social relations. Considering the teacher-student relation we may recognize that students' trust should not concern the teacher's benefits but only the fact whether the teacher's benefits are included in the

common and shared ones, or whether the teacher identifies his/her benefits partly as his/her own only because of the fact that they actually are student's benefits. Such an approach is based on the assumption that a person we trust will not fail us and that both, a student and a teacher, want to maintain a long-term relation (a student's time at the university). In R. Hardin's cost-benefit analysis the subject's benefit is prevailing, and the partner's task is to identify with the benefits, which often means they have to resign from their own benefits to substantiate their credibility what seems to be the teacher's task. According to Putnam, it is the social trust that facilitates functioning of a social group's members and therefore, it is worth being sought for. (Szymczak, 2016, p. 253).

While analysing the above definitions one may observe some differences relating to the type of the presented idea. The contemporary literature presents three ideas of trust formulated by R. Hardin. However, the author stresses that they in fact refer to the idea of *credibility*, and only indirectly to *trust* itself.

The first idea describes a model of mutually inclusive benefits. It is beneficial for a person whom one trusts to maintain the relation with the person who trusts what in turn is a motivation to be credible for the trusted person. Such a situation may occur when, e.g. the people wish for enduring cooperation, when they appreciate and respect each other, when they care about good reputation, when there is some moral obligation or personal benefit, or when the person values his/her reputation but can lose it if she/he does not prove credible for other people. Thus, "(...) trust arises only when the trustee (the person who is trusted) for some reasons takes into account benefits of the person who can trust" (Hardin, 2009, p. 27).

The second concept of trust emphasises the importance of credibility of the trusted individual in the context of moral obligations. P. Sztompka (2007, p. 124) writes about the moral credibility based on axiological expectations. That concept comprises showing moral responsibility, i.e. honourable, honest and noble behav-

iour, being guided by moral norms and rules of integrity. Another group of moral credibility expectations includes: kindness, sensitivity, respect, tact, respect for human dignity, humane treatment, and then truthfulness, sincerity, and loyalty. Last but not least, the author refers to universal criteria and standards, appropriate procedures and the rule of law and includes the third group of expectations: justice, impartiality and law-abidingness.

The third idea considers inclinations resulting from features of character, partner's characteristics that can be directly observed and perceived. They constitute external manifestations of traits that are significant from the point of view of expectations that are the content of the "bet of trust". As all manifestations however some of them are closely related to the underlying concepts, while other ones are indirectly related and require a certain dose of interpretation. The three things that can be directly observed are: appearance, behaviour, and surroundings in which the behaviour occurs (the material one – objects and the social one – other people) (Sztompka, 2007, p. 181).

In his idea of trust Piotr Sztompka included a summary and compilation of the existing approaches arisen within different theoretical fields. In his theoretical model of trust he pointed to different basis for trust constituting criteria in accordance with which people are prone to place trust in others or not. He tried to determine the foundations for trust in relation to three bases he had identified: reflected credibility, personal reliance and cultural trust. In the present article the author concentrates particularly on using trust as a relation. In this approach trust is based on assessment of credibility, assuming that it is an interpersonal relation. Thus, trust becomes a reflected credibility of the people wishing to place trust in somebody. As P. Sztompka writes, in this case the basis for trust will be of "epistemological nature; reduced to specific knowledge, information acquired about the other party" (Sztompka, 2007, p. 152). Therefore, the most significant basis for trust will be credibility assessment based on a variety of "trust

indices” (Coleman, 1994, p. 185). Evaluation of credibility of a person we wish to place trust in, while being in a relation with this person, is the most complex task because of the multitude of information that could potentially be significant. Perception of some situations is undeniably of considerable importance as it determines to a large extent the expectations which are in turn the motivation for needs, wishes, functions and social norms of the person in question. Dean G. Pruitt writes about expectation in relation to the individuals’ positions, capabilities or potential for action, and, consequently, the type of benefits they can offer to the other party. If students assume that what they get from the teacher is not all he/she could offer and give, the situation may result in a hindrance for building mutual relations (Cywińska, 2004, p. 18). According to Piotr Sztompka credibility occurs when the expectations are met or the university teacher fulfils his/her obligations for students who have placed their trust in them (Sztompka, 2007, p. 99). It depends on anticipated and expected behaviour occurring in the course of relation. As Jacek Piekarski writes (Piekarski, Urbaniak, 2016, p. 13) ‘beyond all doubt such qualities as integrity, equality, justice, honesty and mutual trust must form the base for enduring positive relationships (...) credibility is much more than the internal coherence, acknowledgment of other people’s competences, rationale and rules of behaviour. One may be a good professional, but to earn trust among other professionals that person must prove to be credible as well. Even honest people do not always win trust of their community’. Following the above considerations we may conclude that “the category of credibility can be determined to have *at least three alternative meanings*. It can be considered *as an idea*, i.e. the way in which a given object is presented within a certain concept, ‘something worth believing in’. Another meaning refers to credibility as a universal rule” in accordance with which every act of ‘entrusting’ – as seen from cognitive, practical and ethical perspectives – includes the pretension considering its validity. The third way of approaching

credibility is understanding it as “an attribute of different aspects of the academic activity” and within this category the question of the cultural basis of credibility can be referred to the scholarly community with its own type of practice (Piekarski, Urbaniak, 2016, pp. 10-11).

The credibility attribute is also referred to some selected, unique for the community subject areas including a curriculum, a field of study, knowledge, methods, and last but not least an academic. As J. Piekarski rightly emphasises, in every aspect credibility proves to be not only an attribute, but primarily a desired characteristic of a university teacher’s work (Piekarski, Urbaniak, 2016, p. 11). Therefore, it is surprising that “correctness is preferred over credibility, and familiarised distrust over trust (Piekarski, 2016, p. 42).

Referring once again to the definition of credibility as fulfilment of certain expectations by one party in a mutual relation, we would consider the classification of expectations put forward by P. Sztompka. The proposed by him expectation types include: instrumental, moral and care-taking ones.

Instrumental expectations refer to characteristics of actions. They include: (a) regularity (organising, consequence, consistency, continuity, durability), (b) attention and concentration on the partner’s activity, (c) legitimacy (providing the basis or justification for actions, recalling reasonable arguments, (d) efficiency (competence, consistency, discipline, proper execution, efficiency) (Sztompka, 2007, pp. 122-123). In academic relations between a lecturer and students those expectations are connected with starting classes on time and keeping to the schedule, the time the teacher devotes to students during duty hours; keeping to deadlines for homework or test checking. In accordance with students’ expectations a trustworthy university teacher should approach every student individually, without any discrimination or favouritism, should be aware of nonverbal communication, e.g. by maintaining eye contact thus showing partners in this particular relation they are the focus of attention. As far as classes

are concerned, the validity of instrumental expectations is shown by announcing criteria for assessment, substantiating one's statements and opinions by referring to books and other scholars' works, discussing processes referring to theories as well as own practical experience. Typical characteristics of a teacher credible with respect to that expectation type include, e.g. consistency in keeping to previously established assessment rules and marking criteria, expertise, using professional jargon, ability to address students' questions, knowledge within other areas, being up-to-date with professional literature and latest research, reliability in carrying out classes, being well-prepared for classes, maintaining discipline in the classroom. If a teachers meet the above instrumental expectations, in students' opinion they are said to possess the instrumental credibility.

Another group within the credibility scale comprises moral expectations associated with characteristics of moral behaviour of other people, i.e.: (a) demonstrating moral responsibility (that is an honourable, sincere and worthy behaviour, using moral standards and rules of righteousness), (b) friendliness, sensitivity, respect, discretion, respect for human dignity, humanity, (c) truthfulness and honesty, (d) loyalty, (c) fairness, impartiality and observance of the rules (Sztompka, 2007, p. 124).

Students seeking credibility of the teacher in mutual relations often bring up the questions of breaking moral norms, as indeed it seems to be immoral to fail to admit a mistake, to lie, dictate notes copied from a book, leave the room during a class to have a cigarette, include questions not covered during classes in the exams, use presentations copied from the Internet or just read out contents later incorporated in the exam.

Saint Augustine of Hippo writing about sincerity and respect for students emphasized such values as modesty, truthfulness and lack of shame to admit that certain issues may be for the teacher at the time difficult or complicated. The most important is, having an obligation to admit that one is not perfect, to gain students'

respect due to treating them in an honest way. In his work *Confessions* he shared his opinion about a monk named Faustus writing: "He knew that he did not understand those issues but he was not ashamed to admit it openly. He was not like other people whose talkativeness I had to tolerate when they wanted to teach me about issues they had no idea about (...). He understood his restrictions and never got involved in discussions in which he could not find a proper solution, or he could not withdraw from. I liked this thing about him. Modesty and sincerity are greater ornaments of the soul than such knowledge (...)" (Św. Augustyn, 2009, pp. 130-131). Students have more respect for teachers who are able to admit their mistake or lack of knowledge within some area.

Typical examples of expected moral behaviour are: mastering negative emotions or offensive, brutal, cruel behaviour of the teacher treating students worse because of their looks (strong makeup, dreadlocks, clothing not accepted by the lecturer). Good manners, restraining from jeering or humiliating students getting worse results, showing respect by starting classes punctually, treating students like adult and responsible people.

Students expect that a teacher will not get into peer-like relations with them thanks to which she/he could acquire information and later use it to their (students') disadvantage. In their opinion the teacher should not gossip about them with other teachers, and their tutor should take their side defending them in difficult situations. Within the scope of moral expectations the teacher, guided by universally accepted criteria, is expected to guarantee fair and impartial assessment, to refrain from favouring "teachers' pets" or giving unfair and groundless examination grades to people preferred by the teacher. Students expect to have access to their marked works, tests, projects, to be granted the possibility of asking questions about the criteria used to award points for answers in tests in case any ambiguity arises. A teacher cannot be credible if she/he uses students' work in research, writes articles on its basis without mentioning the students' contribution.

As a person who carries certain values or a so called personal symbol of values he should help students acquire and assimilate moral values. "That happens not only through some cognitive processes or presentation of values, but by showing life in accordance with the declared values", as states Marian Nowak (1999, p. 424). Credibility, trust "might have some enduring sense only assuming that there is some lasting, persistent and present in people collection of moral beliefs sometimes referred to as conscience, deep conscience or differentiating reason. (...) As far as the strength of trust is concerned, one may state that, on the one hand, it depends on the moral attitude of the teacher, knowledge or achievements in a certain area, on the other, the attitude of the beneficiaries themselves" (Murawski, 1997, p. 136).

Last but not least group of expectations according to P. Sztompka includes care-taking ones: (a) selflessness, (b) sympathy and understanding other people's worries, (c) acting as representatives (acting on behalf of others, showing concern for the welfare of others, serving their interests), (d) friendliness and generosity (care, assistance, protection, expressing sympathy, sensitivity to the suffering of others), (e) love (Sztompka, 2007, p. 125). Those expectations are all connected with putting someone else's interest over their own. Students expect that towards the end of the semester a teacher can stay longer, past the duty hours, even though they did not attend the teacher's office hours earlier to catch up with the material. They expect the teacher to act in an empathic way, to be able to understand them because "everyone was young once". They want teachers to understand students forced to take up employment at the expense of attending their university courses or students who become parents and have problems reconciling all their duties and responsibilities. Students who place trust in their teachers expect that they would speak for them with other teachers in conflict situations; they expect their thesis advisors to devote their private time for additional consultations even though they failed to attend seminars before

and started writing the thesis very late. Another example of “extreme expectations” is sending a semester assignment or an essay via email late night just before the deadline and expecting it is marked next day.

Should meeting expectations like these determine credibility of a university teacher? I leave the answer to my readers, providing no comment on the opinions cited above.

The discussion in the present article is based on my research in credibility of university teachers findings of which were used as examples of possible disappointments and disillusion of students. The aim was to analyse and determine the indicators of teachers’ credibility pointed out by respondents and to attempt to include them within the credibility scale by P. Sztompka. The research used the diagnostic poll method and the random survey technique. The survey questionnaire form comprised open-ended, half-open and closed-ended questions. An additional object of analysis was the empirical material collected in the form of students’ essays on the topic of “University teachers’ credibility (the basis for assessing whether the teacher is credible or not)”. The research was performed in the academic year 2014/2015 at Kazimierz Wielki University among full-time students of the first and second year at faculties of Technological and IT Education, Occupational Safety and Health, and of Preschool Pedagogy who had been chosen because of their much more frequent contact with lecturers than in the case of extramural students. The total number of respondents was 132, including 87 women. The research results have shown that differences in expectations determine the fact whether the teacher is credible for some students and not trustworthy for others. A teacher may also fulfil so called negative expectations of students that, on one hand would not be surprising for them and will not result in cognitive and emotional tension, on the other hand however, may be perceived as a form of punishment.

Finding objective answers to the questions about the way university teachers show their credibility to students and the kinds of means they employ to be credible for them is not an easy task.

As Katarzyna Olbrycht writes, the attitude of the person taught not only allows, but also assumes that the other encountered man should be a role model, an honest and reliable guide in the discoveries made in different educational situations. "Minimum confidence is assumed, that the other man in such situations does not cheat and does not use someone else's readiness to learn, does not threaten the individuality of a student. This attitude means the consent to the effort to learn, also to learn from others. This effort represents openness to others, awareness, sensitivity and criticism in dealing with them, determination in the process of learning, elementary trust in the competence and credibility of the other person who could be a role model or authority." (Olbrycht, 2014, p. 52). Every lecturer should be responsible for who she/he is, what she/he says and does.

The present article concentrates only on university teachers fulfilling expectations of students who in turn evaluate the teachers' credibility on that basis. However, the author is aware of the fact that the image of the academic community's credibility could be made complete by further research showing opinions of university teachers on their expectations towards their students. P. Sztompka writes that the person for whom we are trying to be credible, i.e. the addressee of our potential trust is interested in responding to our trust while meeting our expectations. Mutual benefits outweigh the profits following from the lack of trust or credibility of the interacting partners. It is the lecturers' credibility that is helpful in the process of establishing rules for cooperation and collaboration, removing communication barriers. It encourages students and facilitates confrontation of opinions and views. It surely has a positive impact on modelling behaviour, delegating work and, consequently, on assuming responsibility for own actions. Undoubtedly, the unrestrained ability to put forward

propositions in order to seek realistic opportunities of cooperation is substantial to achieve good atmosphere of work between the teacher and students based on respect and freedom of speech and facilitating development of their creativity and innovation, mutual learning and teaching how to deal with problems. Mutual trust helps to find solutions beneficial to both parties in arising conflict situations. However, as Teresa Żółkowska highlights it (Żółkowska, 2014, p. 240), trust is “an important but difficult social problem (...) is and will remain an attractive theoretical and practical issue. In the modern society trust is not exclusively based on close bonds, tradition or similarity. It requires other trust-building strategies. The modern world must find the way to create and support trust by social relations, communication, cooperation, respect for autonomy and diversity, solidarity and rule of law.”

In conclusion, the author would like to emphasise the benefits following from the credibility of a university teacher that may find its reflection in the way students behave during classes, in the atmosphere in the classroom to which both the teacher and the students contribute, in the students’ attitude to the subject on which the teacher lectures, especially when, as P. Sztompka notices, the teacher is aware of the fact that students expect from him some instrumental values, i.e. competence and efficiency, as well as the moral (honesty, perhaps also selflessness) and care-taking ones, i.e. acting on the students’ behalf and assisting them (Sztompka, 2007, p. 236).

Assuming that trust is sometimes approached to as a standard, indicator or an indispensable element of the social capital, teachers’ credibility may also influence the assessment of the overall university capital. An attempt at identifying the source of credibility problems of the academia should be of considerable importance for the mission of acquiring and seeking credibility, and dealing with the difficult task of regaining credibility. Lech Witkowski, referring to a study by Zbigniew Krawczyk and Witold Morawski, describes authority as “the capital of credibility”

(Witkowski, 2011, p. 535). At the time of ongoing discussions concerning authority perhaps the work should be started at the core of the issue by basing the authority's foundations on credibility, the basis for trust.

The sole effort of diagnosing the relations and credibility of a university teacher might not have much in common with metamorphic actions drastically changing the academic community within a short period of time. However, one should hope that the conclusions drawn on the basis of the analysed problem could inspire some attempts at introducing changes into the university practice. "Credibility is a form of interpersonal capital, not really for the person who is credible but for the other people who take advantage of it" (Hardin, 2009, p. 99), and in this case "the other people" are students. The fact of being credible motivates other people to become more trustful and, what follows, to engage in cooperation that might prove beneficial for both parties. Trust – honesty – mutuality are attributes of people who are perceived as culture-bearers; the culture in which trust as a value is decisive for undertaking activity, determines attitudes towards other people, at the same time cherishing and preserving the culture recognised as their own. The described process results in creating the culture of trust manifested as social trust. "In other words, social trust is an implemented in interpersonal relations internalised set of values practised within the framework (context) of the culture of trust" (Romaniszyn, 2016, p. 103). Thus, it may be concluded that a university teacher is responsible to a great extent for building the culture of trust by means of his/her own academic activity.

Questions on the observed reality that we are not always able to address in an explicit way, everything that arises doubts, becomes a sufficient reason for "questioning" (Gadamer, 2004). Therefore, the importance of a university teacher's credibility for students should make us "question", interpret and ponder on possible changes.

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