

Student Motivation and Satisfaction with Their Studies

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Abstract

In this paper, we focus on students' satisfaction with their studies and their motivation to complete their studies. We identified six categories of study satisfaction factors (study content, study organisation and independence during studies, relationships during study, study bonuses and benefits, study environment and completion of study and career opportunities), to which we attributed several motivational factors. We conducted an on-line survey, sending questionnaires to students from all over Slovenia, and received 111 responses. The results show that students are satisfied with their chosen course and that the key motivators are not economic, as we initially assumed, but relate to elements such as the quality of staff at higher education institutions, the possibility of international exchanges, the interest in the course enrolled and their own personal progress during studies.

Keywords: satisfaction, motivation, higher educational institutions, Slovenia

INTRODUCTION

We live in a society of rapid change, continuous improvement and a constant search for solutions. Higher education has become a necessity in developed societies. The demand for continuous learning is reflected at all levels of society, as new knowledge and new ways of acquiring it are always within reach. Students face various challenges in their education, such as the current economic development, with several uncertainties (covid-19 pandemic, war in Ukraine), the complexity of their chosen study programme, lack of time, balancing study, work and family and personal problems, which are easier to cope with if they are sufficiently motivated and as a result, satisfied with their studies.

These factors can contribute to a potential decrease in motivation levels during studies, difficulties in keeping up with the study process and a greater focus on the difficulty and problems of not understanding the study materials, thus leading to dissatisfaction and a greater likelihood of changing

studies or dropping out. As satisfaction within the study process is connected to effectiveness and efficiency of the study process, the aim of any higher education institution is to eliminate negative motivators and maintain a high level of student satisfaction. Higher levels of student satisfaction in turn eliminate negative motivators, or direct the individual's thinking towards eliminating them or changing the focus to more positive motivating factors.

Motivation can be described as a desire to learn, try, work and persevere, therefore there is a massive important in students intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is activated by a brain chemical (dopamine), that gives students a rush of satisfaction upon achieving a chosen goal. The higher the dopamine level is, the higher sense of satisfaction students achieve and the stronger is the desire to continue pushing and making an effort. Dopamine is important also, because when increased it improves mental processes like, memory, attention, perseverance and creative problem solving, (Willis, 2019).

In this paper, we focus on students' satisfaction with their studies and their motivation to complete their studies. We identified six categories of study satisfaction factors (1. study content, 2. study organisation and independence during studies, 3. relationships during study, 4. study bonuses and benefits 5. study environment and 6. completion of study and career opportunities), to which we attributed several motivational factors. We used a quantitative methodology to examine student satisfaction and key motivators. An on-line survey was sent to students from all over Slovenia. We received 111 relevant responses out of 150 questionnaires sent, demonstrating a 74 % response rate. The sampling was not representative. In our research, we set two hypotheses:

H1: More than half of the respondents are satisfied with their studies.

H2: The key motivators for students to complete their studies are economic, such as: increased likelihood of employment, increased earning potential and success and career advancement.

Student motivation and satisfaction

The student is the central actor in the higher education system. It is important for higher education institutions to maintain high student motivation, which is reflected in motivation to work and study, a sense of challenge in activities, a sense of worth in doing activities and ultimately, satisfaction during and after studies. Student satisfaction is crucial, firstly because it contributes to a positive perception of the higher educational institution, which encourages further enrolments and secondly because it motivates students to continue their academic careers or to help implement existing knowledge for new students or to develop new skills. Dissatisfied students are much likely to drop out or change their course of study, while spreading negative criticism of the educational institution and the study course (Alves and Raposo, 2006, pp.1-2). If students feel dissatisfied, this would in turn lower their motivation levels. Motivation is defined as »a psychological process that relates to behaviour and its associated emotions, thoughts, attitudes, perceptions, beliefs and other psychological contents. Here, we are primarily interested in the causes and intentions of our behaviour. Motivation is therefore a psychological process that motivates and directs our behaviour.« (Kobal Grum and Musek, 2009, p.15). Higher motivated students are self-motivated, which leads to better subjective performance, and is self-determined. Firth (n. p., p.13), for example, considers that grades as motivators can be positive-negative. On one hand, higher grades allow easier access to the desired educational institution, leading to a higher-ranking job, but on the other hand, they put too much focus on grades and not enough on the knowledge application.

As such, grade can be used as a central driver of motivation and satisfaction. High grades increase intergenerational competitiveness, passion for learning, and the knowledge implementation can increase labour market competitiveness. Labour market needs are changing rapidly, so higher educated staff are expected to adapt to change and make a personal contribution to the skills they have already acquired. The desire for knowledge is transferred to the workplace and enables quick solutions (Firth, p 13). Another research shows that the most important motivational predictor of student grades is the student's ability self-concept. It has proven to have a higher impact than differences in students intelligence or prior grades. Set as an example, out of two students with similar intelligence scores, prior achievements and similar task values, goals and achievement motives, the student with a higher domain-specific ability self-concept will receive better grades. (Steinmayr and others, 2019)

Satisfaction, on the other hand, can be defined as the user's emotional response to a particular experience. It is a mental process of perception that develops as a result of a comparison of expectations and prior experience. It can also arise without comparison with expectations. The feeling of satisfaction is also an emotional response, but it has a cognitive nature alongside its emotional causes. Cognitive in this case refers to the processes by which individuals are able to create and acquire knowledge (Musek Lešnik, 2007, p.21). An important part of student satisfaction is also their sense of belonging, which has an impact on their academic success. Studies shown that student from underrepresented groups (i.e. non-white, non-heterosexual, non-christian) reported less satisfaction and a weaker sense of belonging than those of majority groups. (Fan and others, 2020). With the possibility of students' exchange programs those can be problems that universities can face in a short period of time, even in smaller countries with less population and smaller underrepresented groups.

Satisfaction is mostly associated with a specific experience and reactions to successive experiences that can be combined into a perception of overall satisfaction. Overall satisfaction is the result of several individual positive experiences and is the result of an overall positive perception of the user. Overall satisfaction is positive because it also allows the user to have a negative experience, which they generally ignore or do not react to as negatively as they would if they did not feel a certain satisfaction (Musek Lešnik, 2007, p.21).

Categories of student satisfaction factors and motivation factors

We identified six categories of satisfaction factors in relation to motivation factors:

1. *Study content:* depending on the content, students decide which course to choose. Each study is unique and requires special treatment and specific skills. Personal preferences in a specific field are the first to come to the front when deciding on this, but once we are involved in the study, other criteria or motivator also come into play. Motivational factors that maintain the level of satisfaction with the study content are *desire for knowledge, quality of study, study interest and the ability of knowledge application.*
2. *Study organisation and independence during studies:* The higher education system is the highest level of education and as such differs in the way knowledge is transferred to students. More literature is absorbed and new knowledge is perceived differently. This is why freedom and autonomy are identified as satisfaction factors. The motivating factors for this category are *self-initiated learning, distance learning* (which is particularly relevant in the current corona virus pandemic situation), *personal development and skills testing, additional and optional activities and lecturer support in drawing your own conclusions/concepts.*

3. *Relationships during study*: Positive relationships need to be maintained to ensure the student satisfaction level. Positive relationships are important from both a personal and a business (study) point of view. The more at home we feel in the bonds that build our relationships, the greater the level of satisfaction we can achieve. As a result, we also achieve higher efficiency. Motivation factors related to relationships are *student-lecturer relationship, student-student relationship, family incentives, quality of lecturers, quality of professional staff and (in working place) employer and colleague incentives*.
4. *Study bonuses and benefits*: For students, it is essential that, in addition to the fundamental education they receive, they are offered benefits and bonuses as an added value of their studies and of the higher education institution. The benefits also have a massive impact on the competitiveness of the institution and the studies, as there is an increasingly diverse choice of the same course of study. We link bonuses and benefits to motivational factors such as: *job prospects, free of charge studies, reimbursement of education costs and networking opportunities*.
5. *Study environment*: The study environment provides the framework for the studies and represents the support activity of the higher education institution, i.e. how well it supports students during their studies. Motivation factors include: *infrastructure and facilities (including IT accessibility), study material (especially accessibility), the possibility of networking with other higher education institutions (study exchanges) and student internships*.
6. *Completion of study and career opportunities*: The higher the level of satisfaction with studies, the higher the chance of completing them on time. Completion of a study further increases chances of getting a new job or retraining a higher, more demanding job. *Completing a certain level of education* is a motivating factor that comes from the individual. Other factors include *the possibility of increasing earnings, achieving success and career advancement, competitiveness and fear of failure*.

Methodology

First, we used descriptive and comparative methods to review the available literature on student satisfaction and motivation, and in the empirical part we used a quantitative methodology, collecting responses through a survey. Questionnaires were sent out via social media and email to get responses from respondents of different age groups and from different higher education institutions. We received 111 valid and completed questionnaires out of 150 sent out, demonstrating a response rate of 74 %. The data was analysed using descriptive statistics.

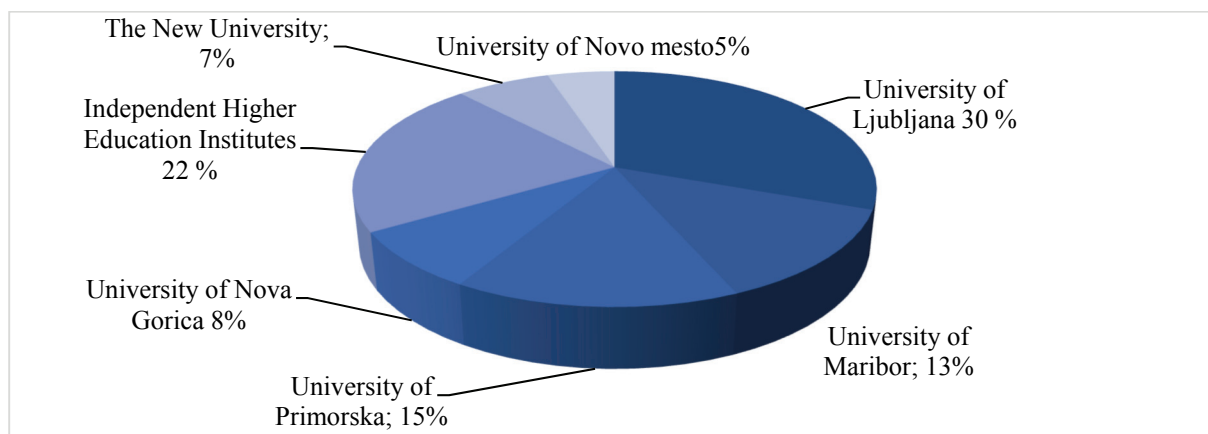
Survey limitations

Due to the declaration of the covid-19 pandemic we were faced with a unique situation, which influenced our research. Data collection was only possible via electronic media (email, social media), with less control over the number of surveys accurately completed.

Results

The survey results shown that women dominated the sample, accounting for 69 in total or 62 % of all participants. 55 % of all responses came from the 26-25 age groups, which is also statistically the group most represented in the use of social media and online surveys. The distribution of respondents according to the higher education institutions can be seen in Picture 1. Most of the respondent's study at

the University of Ljubljana (30 %), followed by Independent Higher Education Institutions (22 %), University of Primorska (15 %), University of Maribor (13 %), University of Nova Gorica (8 %), the New University (7 %) and the University of Novo mesto (5 %). More respondents chose social sciences (65 %) over natural sciences, as higher educational institutions offer more social sciences courses than natural sciences. The disparity between natural and social science studies is a problem in Slovenian higher education that has been debated for many years.



Picture 1: Respondents by university or higher education institution (current or last attended)

The first hypothesis (H1) states that: More than half of the respondents are satisfied with the study process. The hypothesis was tested by means and measures of dispersion (mean, median, mode, standard deviation and sum of responses) of the variable »overall satisfaction with study« (see Table 1).

Table 1: Means of overall satisfaction with study responses

Mean	4,03
Median	4,00
Mode	4
Standard deviation	0,961
Sum	435
N	108

Table 2 shows that 37 % of respondents are completely satisfied and 38 % partially satisfied with their studies, which together accounts for two thirds of all responses. A similar conclusion can be drawn from the mean (4.03) and median result (Table 1), which is in this case 4 (partially satisfied). A median of 4 means that, on a scale of 1 to 5, half of the respondents chose the answers partially satisfied and completely satisfied with their studies. The most frequent answer (modus) was also partly satisfied, indicating a high overall level of satisfaction.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics on »overall satisfaction with study«

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
Completely dissatisfied	1	0,9
Partially dissatisfied	8	7,4
Neutral	18	16,7
Completely satisfied	41	38,0
Partially satisfied	40	37,0
N	108	100,0

We further tested the hypothesis (H1) by asking respondents whether they would choose to study again (Table 3), and 76 % of all respondents answered yes. Based on this, we conclude that they are satisfied with their chosen course of study. Hypothesis H1 is confirmed according to the survey results.

Table 3: Descriptive statistics on whether students would study again

Answer	Frequency	Percentage
YES	84	76,4
NO	26	23,6
N	110	100,0

The second hypothesis (H2) states: The key motivators for students to complete their studies are economic, such as: increased likelihood of employment, increased earning potential and achievement and career advancement. The hypothesis was tested by looking at the frequencies of the responses (Table 4).

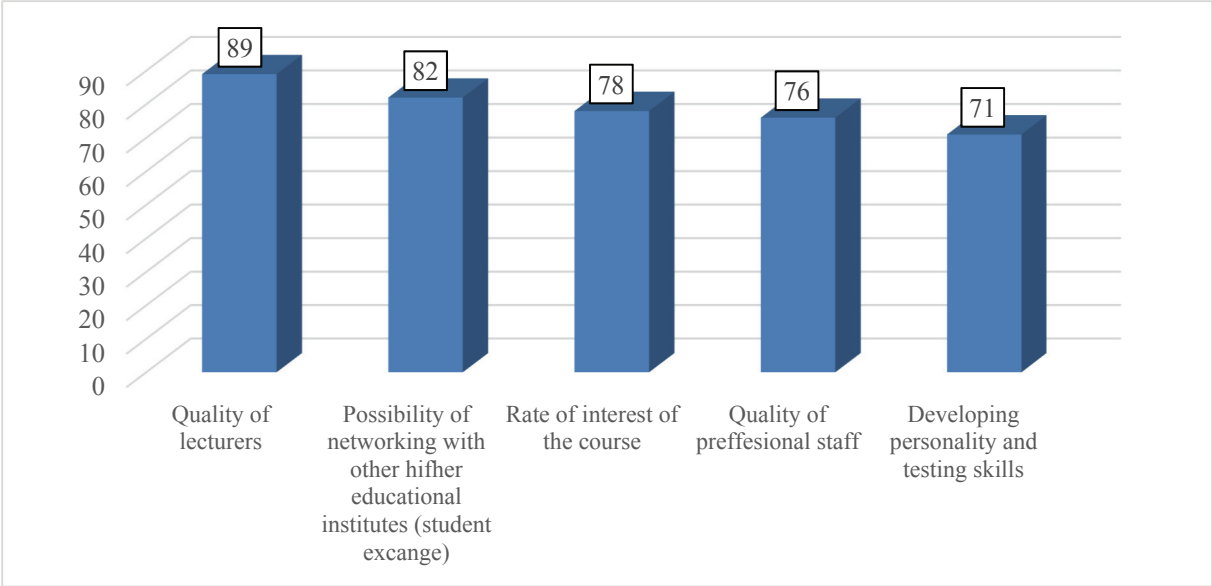
Table 4: Frequencies for satisfaction and motivation factors

Satisfaction factors	Motivation factors	Response frequencies
Study content	Desire for knowledge	47
	Quality of study	68
	Study interest	78
	Knowledge application	63
Study organisation and independence during studies	Additional and optional activities	29
	Self-initiated learning	53
	Distance learning	46
	Personal development and skill testing	71
	Lecturer support in drawing your own conclusions/concepts	55
Relationships during study	Student-lecturer relationship	33
	Student-student relationship	35
	Quality of lecturers	89
	Quality of professional staff	76
	Employer and colleague incentives	60
	Family incentives	35
Study bonuses and benefits	Job prospects	60
	Free of charge studies	47
	Reimbursement of educational costs	54
	Networking opportunities	65
Study environment	Infrastructure and facilities (including IT accessibility)	40
	Study material	40
	The possibility of networking with other higher educational institutions (student exchange)	82
	Student internships	55
Completion of study and career opportunities	Completing a certain level of education	47
	Possibility of increasing earnings	77
	Achieving success and career advancement	55
	Competitiveness	63
	Fear of failure	20

Motivation factors that define an improvement in economic standards are: increased likelihood of employment, the possibility of increasing earnings and achieving success and career advancement. All three motivation factors have been selected several times, but they are not the key motivators according to the results. Seven motivators were selected more times. These seven factors accounts for 25 % of all responses. The key motivational factors can be divided into three groups according to the given answers. Those groups are:

1. Quality (of lecturers, professional staff and studies) and the study interest
2. Study capacity, the possibility of knowledge application and the possibility of networking with other higher education institutions.
3. Students own progress (developing their personality and testing their skills).

Based on the above findings, we rejected hypothesis 2 (H2).



Picture 2: the highest rated motivation factors

Conclusion

Based on the results of the survey and the hypothesis testing, we conclude that our sample suggests that respondents are satisfied with their studies. This can be supported by the fact that 75 % of them are overall satisfied with their studies (37 % of students are completely satisfied and 38 % are partially satisfied). We assumed that economic motivation factors, such as: increased likelihood of getting a job, increased earnings potential and success and career advancement would be the most important, but we found that this was not the case. Although the economic factors listed above are ranked highly, the quality (of lecturers, professional staff and studies) and the rate of interest of the studies, study skills, the possibility of knowledge application and to network with other higher education institutions, and self-development (developing personality and testing skills) are more important to the students surveyed. The analysis surprised us in this part, as we had assumed that economic motivation factors, which are linked to career advancement, would be more important, but the results showed that respondents put more emphasis on the quality of the knowledge offered and acquired. These results

should be read with a critical perspective as the data was not representative, but only reflect the characteristics of the sample taken.

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