

An Analysis of Students' Motivation and Satisfaction in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

In the modern educational environment, the quality of higher education is increasingly viewed not only through the prism of academic achievements but also through students' personal experience and satisfaction. At the same time, the level of satisfaction with education is an indicator of the effectiveness of the educational services provided and the ability of the institution to meet the needs and expectations of students. This article analyses the interrelationships between motivation and student satisfaction with higher education, focusing on factors such as teaching approaches, learning environments, opportunities for personal development, and professional development.

Keywords: Higher education, Students, Motive, Satisfaction, Motivation

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INTRODUCTION

Living in an era of dynamic changes, intensive improvement and constant search for effective solutions leads to an overall improvement in quality of life. In this context, higher education is established as a fundamental element in the development of modern societies. However, students face a number of challenges that affect their motivation and satisfaction. Among them are the economic uncertainty caused by global events such as the Covid-19 pandemic, the high degree of complexity of curricula, the lack of time, as well as the need to balance education, employment and personal commitments. Effectively dealing with these difficulties largely depends on the level of internal motivation and the degree of satisfaction with the educational process, which are crucial for the academic and personal success of students.

The analysis of student motivation and satisfaction with higher education at the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" is carried out with several key goals and reasons. The first, more important, is to identify the need to improve the quality of education through

the analysis of student motivation and satisfaction. By studying the level of student motivation and satisfaction, the faculty can identify the strengths and weaknesses in the learning process and the organization of training. This provides a basis for introducing targeted improvements in curricula, teaching methods and student support. This will affect the increase in academic engagement, as motivated students are more likely to participate actively in the learning process, achieve better results and be successful in their professional lives.

The analysis helps to understand the factors that stimulate or hinder this engagement. Secondly, the study can also identify ways to adapt to the needs of students. In the modern competitive education market, universities must offer education that meets the real expectations and needs of students. This has changed mainly due to the epidemiological situation surrounding Covid-19, through the introduction of online learning, the digitalization of the educational process and part of the administrative requirements, as well as the introduction of artificial intelligence, etc. The analysis provides information on the extent to which students are satisfied with the chosen specialty, the conditions of study and future opportunities for realization.

Establishing the motivation and satisfaction of students will help to strengthen the reputation of the faculty. High satisfaction and motivation of students are also directly related to the good image of the institution. This is an important factor for attracting new students and increasing public trust in the Faculty of Economics and South-West University "Neofit Rilski" as a whole. The results of the analysis and the data from the conducted survey can lead to the formation of management decisions aimed at sustainable development and innovation in educational activities. Also, the analysis is an important tool for understanding and optimizing the student experience and engagement, with the long-term goal being to increase the efficiency and competitiveness of higher education at the Faculty of Economics.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The level of motivation and satisfaction with the academic life of students influences the development of potential, achievement of success and increase of the intelligence of the personality. This fact not only leads to a calmer and more positive behavior among students, but also contributes to an increased sense of belonging and well-being.

The idea of increasing motivation and satisfaction among students has always been and will be an emphasis, as this will improve universities as a whole and the desire of young people to develop their abilities. (Jedvaj & Skrbinjek, 2022) describe that the central figure in the higher education system is the student, therefore it is extremely important for higher education institutions to maintain high motivation, which consists of "motivation for work and learning, a sense of challenge in activities, a sense of value from performing activities and ultimately satisfaction during and after training." Their concept is a continuation of the scientific researches of (Alves & Raposo, 2006), who mention that student satisfaction plays an important role for two main reasons. Firstly, is by contributing to a positive perception of the university, which encourages future student enrollment or re-enrollment. Secondly, is by motivating students to "continue their academic career or help apply existing knowledge to new students or develop new skills."

Dissatisfied students, according to the authors, are much more likely to drop out or change their "course" of study, while also spreading negative criticism of the educational institution and the course of study. (Alves and Raposo, 2006, pp.1-2). In other words, if students feel dissatisfied, this would lead to a decrease in their motivation and turn into "demotivation". Motivation is defined as a "psychological process", as described in the work of (Kobal & Musek, 2009) indicating that this process refers to students' behavior and emotions, their thoughts, attitudes and perceptions, beliefs and other psychological contents. "Here, educators are primarily interested in the causes and intentions of student behavior. Therefore, motivation is a psychological process that motivates and directs student behavior." (Kobal & Musek, 2009, p. 15). An important part of student satisfaction is their sense of belonging, which influences their academic success.



In his scientific researches (Dimitrov, 2025) concludes that the factors in the university environment that most strongly motivate students and would attract young people are the opportunities for development and growth, an interesting and meaningful learning environment. Accordingly, this also has an impact on their future professional realization. For the purposes of the study, it is also necessary to pay attention to (Semerdzhieva & Naydenova, 2019), who examine academic motivation as a criterion for the quality of the educational product. As competition between higher education institutions becomes greater, the practical implementation of a marketing concept in the Bulgarian higher education system is increasingly urgent.

The quality of higher education is very important for the motivation of students and their choice of a higher education institution. It directly affects the success of industry and business, and is of key importance for the prosperity of a nation. According to (Georgiev et al., 2015), the quality of higher education in Bulgaria can be improved by adopting globally recognized excellence models and quality management standards and by strengthening student motivation.

Motivation is the basis of the academic process and a factor significantly influencing the academic success, personal self-improvement and professional realization of students. It can be considered as internal (related to personal interest, curiosity and the pursuit of knowledge) and external (related to grades, scholarships and future career).

The COVID-19 pandemic has profoundly changed the educational environment and put student motivation in a new context, subjecting it to serious tests. Before 2020, student motivation was mainly related to academic traditions and personal goals. Internal motivation was expressed through a desire for self-improvement, learning new knowledge and building a professional identity. External motivation was related to the expectation of better realization in the labor market, as well as academic awards (scholarships, plaques of distinction, diplomas and certificates, etc.). Face-to-face learning facilitates the building of social connections and creates a sense of belonging, which also helps maintain high motivation.

During the Covid-19 pandemic, with the transition to a distance learning form, a serious change occurred in the conditions that shape student motivation. For some students, this period was associated with increased independence, development of digital skills and the opportunity for flexible time management, which maintains or even strengthens their intrinsic motivation. For others, however, the lack of social interaction, uncertainty about the future and difficulties in adapting to the online environment cause a decline in motivation. In the context of distance learning, extrinsic motivation turns out to be particularly vulnerable, as students sometimes encounter difficulties in understanding the interrelationship of the educational process and future career realization.

In the post-pandemic period, an interesting double effect is observed. On the one hand, the return to face-to-face learning has restored some aspects of the social support and academic engagement, despite the initial challenges and adjustment back to lecture halls. On the other hand, the new hybrid educational environment offers opportunities for more individualized approaches to learning, which stimulates intrinsic motivation in many students. Extrinsic motivation has also been strengthened through the resumption of career initiatives, internships and practical activities, improved digital skills in lecturers and lecture halls, improved university applications and new methods of working and communicating between students and lecturers.

The three periods “before – during – after” the Covid-19 pandemic can be compared, which shows that student motivation is strongly dependent on the social and institutional context. Before the pandemic, it was mainly supported by traditional academic and professional factors. During the pandemic, the intrinsic motivation of some students was reduced by social isolation and digital challenges. After the pandemic, motivation is developing in a new direction – hybrid, flexible and more closely linked to the digital environment, which suggests a need to adapt university strategies for supporting and stimulating students.

The reviewed literature provides a clear and accurate picture of the way to motivate students and the motivation factors that universities can maintain in order to have the necessary number of students. Since the university system in Bulgaria is highly fragmented, i.e. the country has a large



number of universities, colleges and specialized higher education institutions, relative to the population (European Commission, 2018, p.8), universities need to "fight" for students due to the decline in the population.

Table 1. Comparison of enrolled students and higher education institutions by region in Bulgaria for 2019 and 2025 (in numbers). *Source: Adapted by the authors, based on National Statistical Institute data. Available at: <https://www.nsi.bg/statistical-data/188/587>*

Region	2019			2025		
	Number of students / bachelor and master/	Number of universities	Average number of students per University	Number of students /bachelor and master/	Number of universities	Average number of students per University
Northwest	5339	1	5,339.0	5471	2	2,735.5
North central	26,925	5	5,385.0	23,238	5	4,647.6
Northeastern	31,193	7	4,456.1	28,907	7	4,129.6
Southeast	13 133	3	4,377.7	14,633	3	4,877.7
Southwestern	105,845	29	3,649.8	95,279	27	3,528.9
South Central	37,733	9	4,192.6	35,989	7	5,141.3
Total	220 168	51	4,317.0	203,517	51	3,990.5

The total number of enrolled students in Bulgaria in 2025 shows a decrease of about 7.6% compared to the data in 2019. During this period, a relatively constant number of higher education institutions was observed, which does not apply to the average number of students per institution. The decrease from 4317.0 in 2019 to 3990.5 in 2025 can be explained by the concentration of students in a smaller number of universities or by the optimization of the educational infrastructure.

On the other hand, the overall decrease in students (by about 7.6%) reflects the challenges facing student motivation in Bulgaria as a whole. Some young people are demotivated by the limited career prospects in the country and prefer to study abroad.

At the same time, the importance of internal motivation is growing - students who remain in Bulgarian universities increasingly choose programs that match their personal interests and desires for development.

Regional differences in the number of students in 2019 and 2025 can be seen not only as demographic and institutional trends, but also as a reflection of the level of motivation of young people for higher education. Universities that manage to adapt their programs, ensure a connection with the labor market and create a socially supportive environment show growth or stability in enrolment. At the same time, where such incentives are lacking, motivation weakens and the number of students decreases.

METHODS OF RESEARCH

In the following sections, we will present a detailed overview of the context and theoretical framework of the study, describe in detail the research design and methodological approaches used, outline the procedures for collecting and processing the empirical data, and explain the analytical strategies through which the obtained results are interpreted.



The main research methods used in the article are content analysis, analysis and synthesis method, an intuitive and systematic approach, and a questionnaire survey.

RESULTS

Study of student motivation and satisfaction.

In the period March - April 2025, an anonymous survey was conducted within the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski". The participating students are distributed by number in three main professional fields – Professional Field 3.7. Administration and Management are attended by 72 respondents, Professional Field 3.8. Economics are 159 participants and Professional Field 3.9. Tourism has 79 surveyed students. The total number of surveyed students is 310.

The student motivation and satisfaction survey was carried out with several main objectives. The first and perhaps most important is to improve the quality of education by identifying the factors that influence their motivation and satisfaction. The second objective is to assess the learning environment by identifying the relationships between teachers and students, administrative support, access to resources, etc.

The third objective is to identify students' desire for the so-called "student participation", by including students in the evaluation of their education, thus strengthening their sense of belonging and commitment to the institution.

Another important objective is to track changes in students' attitudes and satisfaction over time, as regular surveys allow for the analysis of trends and the effectiveness of the measures taken in the long term. Such surveys are a feedback tool that help higher education institutions to be more efficient, responsible and student-oriented.

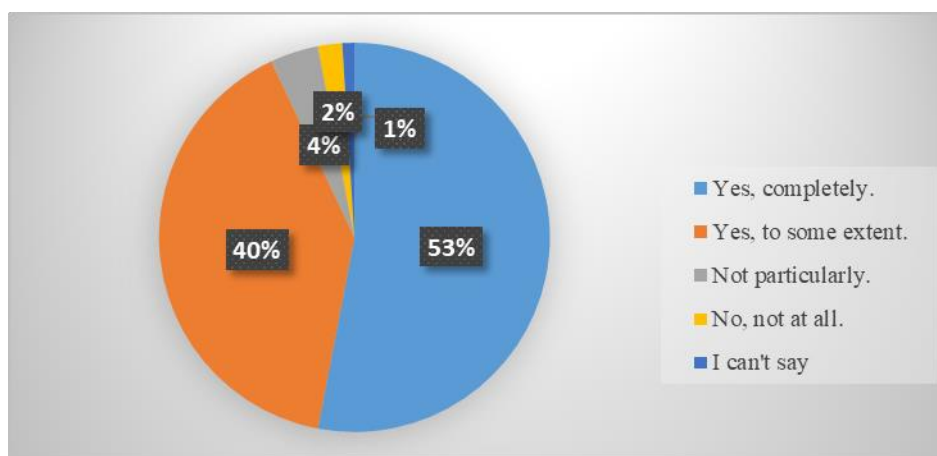


Figure 1. Degree of satisfaction with the studied specialty among the surveyed students (in %).

Source: Authors' study based on the results of project RP-B1/25 on the topic "Research on the professional opportunities for students graduating from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski""

The data recorded in Figure 1 shows that the satisfaction of students with the major they are studying is very high. In a correlation relationship, the high values of their willingness to recommend their major should also be added. If 93% are the positive results of the satisfaction survey with the major they are studying, then 90% of the students participating in the survey would recommend the major they are studying to other prospective students (Table 2).

The values presented in Figure 1 and Table 2 indicate a high degree of satisfaction and confidence among students that the specialty they are studying has value that they would recommend to others.

Table 2. Share of students willing to recommend their major (%). *Source: Authors' study based on the results of project RP-B1/25 on the topic "Research on the professional opportunities for students graduating from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski""*

Degree	%
Yes, completely.	57.10%
Yes, to some extent.	32.90%
Not particularly.	5.81%
No, not at all.	1.94%
I can't say.	2.26%

These results not only confirm the quality of the educational process in the programs under consideration, but also serve as an important indicator of the positive image of the specialties among current students, which is essential for future admission and the development of the academic environment. We can assume that in this way, students will be able to more easily establish themselves in the labor market and their knowledge will be evaluated.

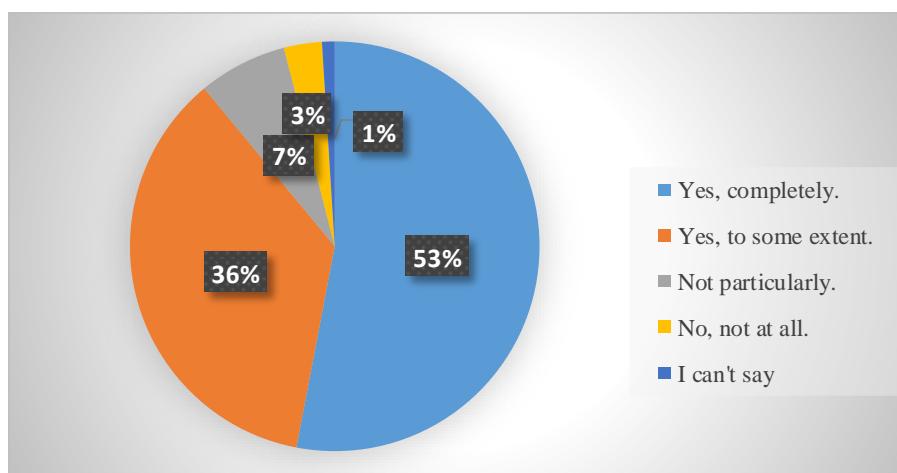


Figure 2. Degree of satisfaction with the organization of the learning process (in %). *Source: Authors' study based on the results of project RP-B1/25 on the topic "Research on the professional opportunities for students graduating from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski""*

The data recorded in Figure 2 shows that the surveyed students have a very high level of satisfaction with the organization of the educational process in the three professional fields. Accordingly, 163 answers were registered for the answer "Yes, completely", which is 52.58%. The answer "Yes, to some extent" was given by 111 respondents (35.81%). The answer "Not particularly" was indicated by 7.42 % of the respondents (23 respondents).

Only 9 (2.9%) of the surveyed students responded that they were not at all satisfied with the organization of the educational process in the faculty and only 4 respondents indicated the answer "I can't say" (1.29%).

The conclusion is that satisfaction with the organization of the educational process is high. This may include factors such as clarity of the curriculum, access to teachers, teaching materials,

administrative support and effectiveness of communication with teachers and administrative staff. The data speak of a stable and well-structured educational environment that meets students' expectations. The responses recorded to this question confirm the overall positive perception of the learning process by students in all areas.

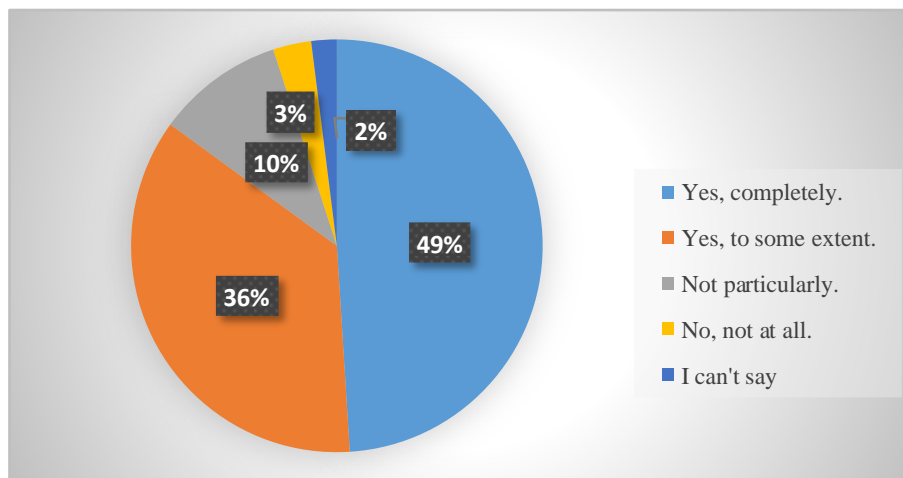


Figure 3. Degree of satisfaction with the available material and technical base and the materials provided for preparation in the disciplines in the studied specialty. (in %). *Source: Authors' study based on the results of project RP-B1/25 on the topic "Research on the professional opportunities for students graduating from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski"*

The data in Figure 3 are again positive, with few negative responses. 153 respondents (49.35%) were completely satisfied with the material and technical base provided to them and materials for preparation in the disciplines in their major. In second place were students who indicated that they were satisfied to some extent – 35.48% (110 respondents).

The answer “No, particularly” was given by 30 respondents (9.68%). In penultimate place was the answer “No, not at all” with 3.23% (10 respondents). In last place was the answer “I cannot judge” indicated by 7 students (2.26%).

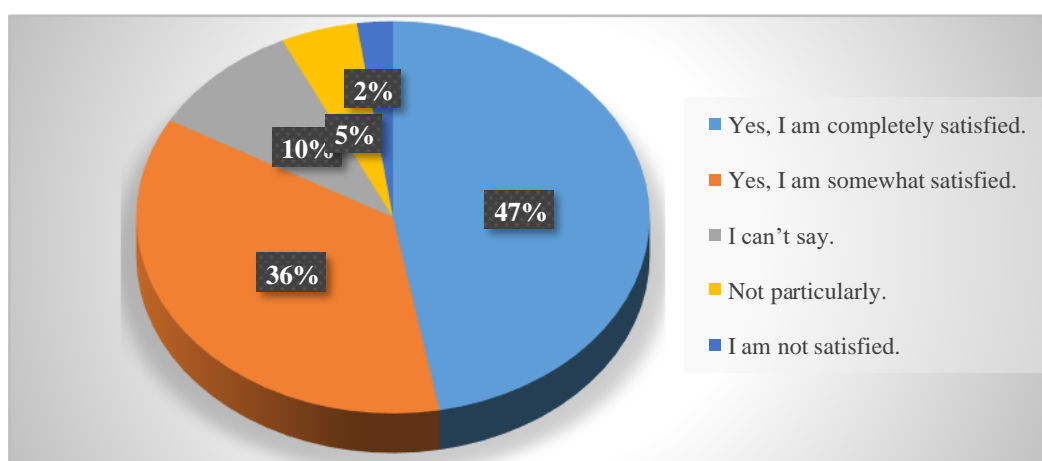


Figure 4. Degree of satisfaction with the acquired knowledge (in %). *Source: Authors' study based on the results of project RP-B1/25 on the topic "Research on the professional opportunities for students graduating from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski"*

From Figure 4 it can be seen that the level of satisfaction with the acquired knowledge among the surveyed students is high - 47.10% of the respondents are completely satisfied with the acquired knowledge (146 students), and 36.13% indicate that they are satisfied to some extent, i.e. 112 of the surveyed students.

If all positive answers are taken - 258 respondents, they amount to 83.23%. The students who indicated the answer "I can't say" are 30, which represents 9.68% of the surveyed.

The students who are not particularly satisfied with the acquired knowledge are 15, i.e. about 4.84%, and the students who are not satisfied at all are 7 - 2.26%. Negative answers are indicated by 22 respondents (7.1%). These results show that the students generally perceive the learning process as effective and useful for their academic and professional development.

The analysis shows a high level of satisfaction among the students with the acquired knowledge. Most of them give a positive assessment, with a significant part being completely satisfied, and another part being partially satisfied. Negative opinions are few in number and do not significantly affect the overall picture. The share of those who hesitate is also low, which further suggests that the educational process meets the expectations of the majority of respondents.

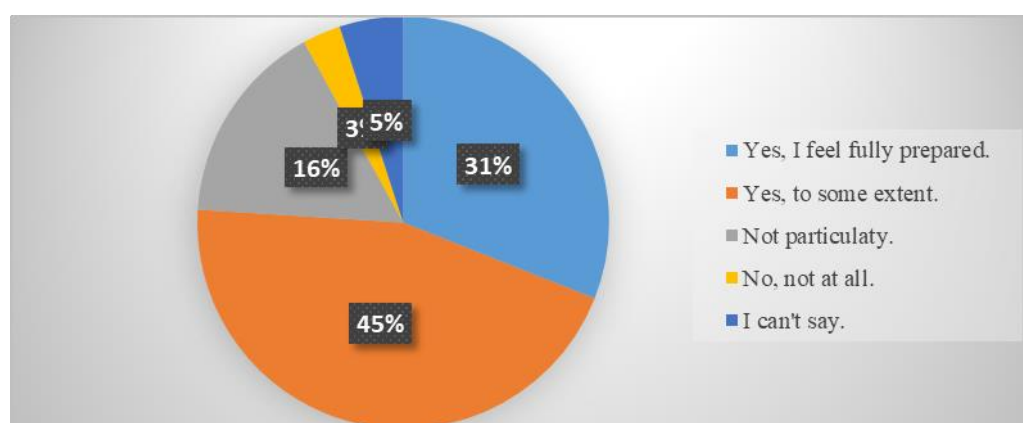


Figure 5. Presence of change in self-confidence and attitudes towards real work in practice among respondents. (in %). *Source: Authors' study based on the results of project RP-B1/25 on the topic "Research on the professional opportunities for students graduating from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski"*

The data in Figure 5 shows a change in self-confidence and attitude towards real work in practice among the surveyed students. The highest results are for the answer "Yes, to some extent" – 45.16% of the respondents (140 answers). The answer "Yes, completely" was registered by 95 respondents (30.65%). These results show that the majority of students feel a positive change in themselves, moving from partial to full confidence in their own abilities.

The answers show that the educational environment successfully stimulates personal and professional development, but also reveal the need for even more widespread practice and contact with a real work environment. The presence of this positive change in attitudes and self-confidence is a valuable indicator of the effectiveness of the curricula and their role in building professional confidence in future specialists.

At the same time, the prevalence of the intermediate answer ("Yes, to some extent") shows that there is potential for even more targeted development of the practical components in training – internships, case studies, simulations and work on real projects.

The answer "Not particularly" was indicated by 48 of the respondents, which represents 15.48%. The number of negative answers is again low, with "No, not at all" indicated by 10 respondents (3.23%). The answer "I can't say" was indicated by 17 respondents, i.e. 5.48%.

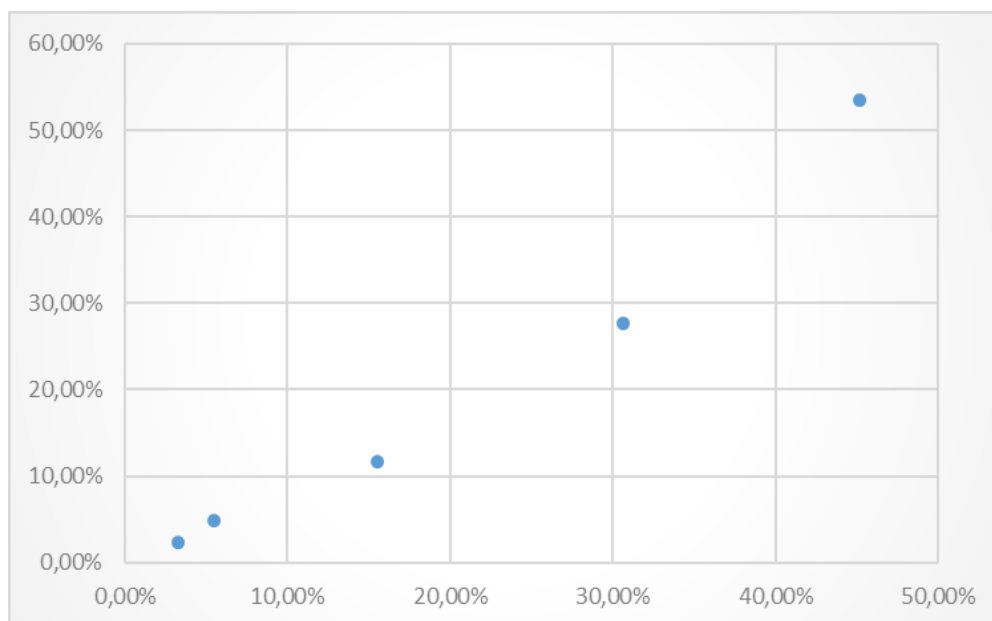


Figure 6. Dot plot of the strength of the correlation between the ability to apply the acquired knowledge and the change in self-esteem and attitudes towards real work in students. *Source: Authors' study based on the results of project RP-B1/25 on the topic "Research on the professional opportunities for students graduating from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" "*

In connection with the analysis of the level of student motivation and satisfaction with higher education, it is essential to present the strength of the correlation relationship and dependence between the ability to apply the acquired knowledge and the change in self-esteem and attitudes towards real work among students. A scatter diagram (Figure 6) displays the results of the calculation of the correlation relationship between the two phenomena. The correlation coefficient is equal to 0.98446, which reveals the strong dependence between the studied quantities.

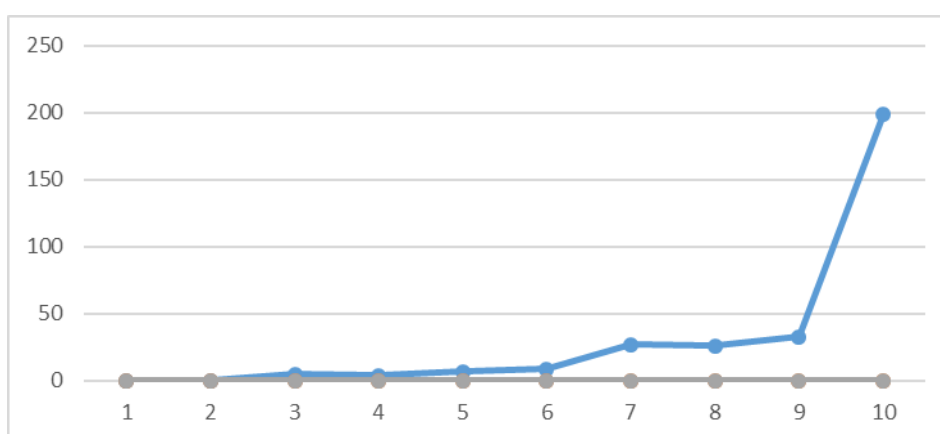


Figure 7. Degree of motivation for successful completion of studies among students (in numbers/scale from 1 – extremely weak to 10 – extremely strong).

Source: Authors' study based on the results of project RP-B1/25 on the topic "Research on the professional opportunities for students graduating from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski" "

The data in Figure 7 shows clearly the presence of high motivation among the surveyed students for successful completion of the studied specialty. Almost all respondents chose values in the upper range of the scale (scores from 7 to 10). The largest number of answers 198 (63.87%) were given for the highest level – 10, which indicates extremely strong motivation, i.e. 63.87%. In addition, a large number of respondents rated their motivation for completing their higher education with 9 on a ten-point scale (33 answers), which is 10.65%. A score of 8 was indicated by 26 respondents, i.e. about 8.39% and a score of 7 was chosen by 27 surveyed students – 8.71%.

The average values of the scale (5 and 6) were chosen by a smaller number of participants, and the number of respondents who indicated values below 5 was negligible, a total of 10 answers (3.22%). This is a clear indicator of extremely high personal commitment and strong internal motivation for successful graduation.

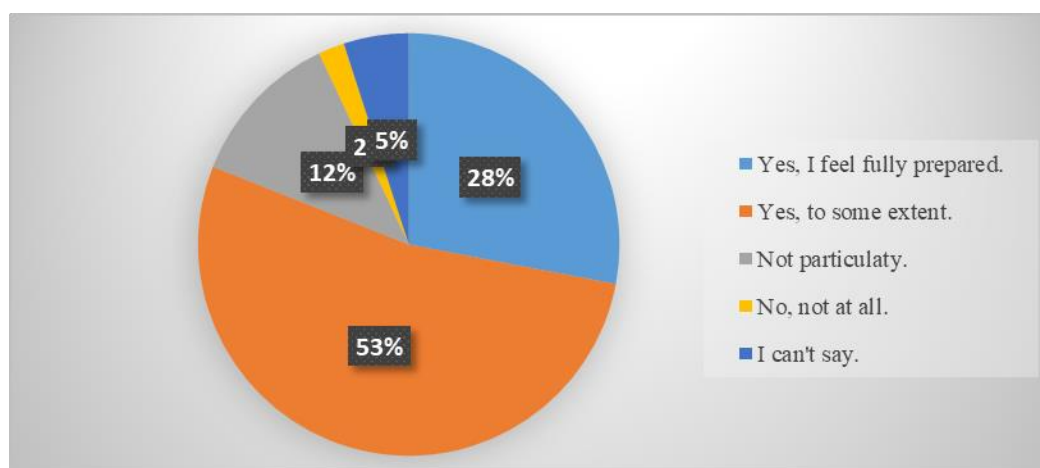


Figure 8. Assessment of the ability to apply the knowledge gained at the university in practice (in %).

Source: Authors' study based on the results of project RP-B1/25 on the topic "Research on the professional opportunities for students graduating from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski""

The results show a positive general attitude among the respondents regarding their ability to apply the acquired academic knowledge in a practical environment. The largest share of students - 53.55% indicated that they feel prepared to some extent, which indicates moderate but realistic confidence (166 respondents).

This can be interpreted as a signal that students appreciate the connection between theory and practice, but are aware of the need for more experience. Additionally, 27.74% (86 respondents) stated that they feel fully prepared. This is an indicator of the effectiveness of the learning process and that a significant part of the students is convinced that they will successfully apply their knowledge in real situations. Negative assessments - "not particularly" by 11.61% (36 respondents) and "No, not at all" by 2.26% (7 respondents) - represent a relatively small part of the respondents.

This indicates that there is a limited but existing group of students who do not feel confident enough to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in practice. The remaining 15 respondents (4.84%) indicated that they could not say, which may indicate a lack of sufficient practical experience or hesitation in self-assessment. Most students feel prepared to apply their knowledge in practice, with over a quarter stating complete confidence.

The data indicate that university education succeeds in creating a solid foundation for professional development, although there remains a small group of students who need additional practical guidance and support.

DISCUSSION

Based on the survey conducted among students from the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski", the following main conclusions can be formulated:

High level of satisfaction with the educational process. Most of the surveyed students express full or partial satisfaction with their studies, the chosen specialty, the organization of the educational process, the resources provided and the material and technical base. This shows that the university environment successfully meets the expectations and needs of students and creates conditions for their development. On the one hand, high satisfaction indicates that the content of the curricula is adequate, practically applicable and up-to-date.

On the other hand, positive assessments of the organization of the learning process indicate the presence of good coordination between teachers, administration and students – including timely information, accessibility of teachers and effective communication. High assessments of the material and technical base complement the positive picture, emphasizing that students have appropriate conditions for learning – libraries, halls, electronic resources and other accompanying tools that facilitate the learning process. The combination of all these factors creates an academic atmosphere that not only supports the acquisition of knowledge, but also motivates students, creates a sense of support and increases their commitment to the learning process. This is of key importance for achieving high academic results and for their future successful professional realization.

Strong internal motivation to complete their studies. The registered results indicate that students are highly motivated to complete their higher education. The majority of respondents chose the highest values on the motivation scale, which reflects commitment, ambition and purposefulness. This strong motivation speaks not only of individual goals and ambitions, but also of a positive image of the university and its role as a driver of personal and professional development.

Motivation is an important indicator of long-term commitment to the specialty and is often directly related to academic success, participation in additional initiatives and willingness to take responsibility in the learning process. In addition, the motivation to complete can be seen as a result of the overall student environment - the support of teachers, access to resources, the clarity of the curricula and the prospects for professional development.

When these factors function effectively, they strengthen students' confidence in the meaning and benefits of education. In this context, strong intrinsic motivation is not just a personal characteristic, but also reflects the quality of the learning and institutional environment. This creates a good foundation for higher academic activity, initiative, and resilience in dealing with difficulties during the course of study.

High trust in the quality of education and willingness to recommend. A large proportion of student's state that they would recommend their major to future prospective students. This is an indicator not only of personal satisfaction, but also of a positive image of the majors, which has the potential to attract new students and strengthen the academic authority of the faculty. Such recommendations play an important role in building a positive reputation for the faculty and the university as a whole. When current students recommend their major to others, it is a form of "organic advertising" that is based on real experience and emotional connection with the environment. This trust contributes to strengthening academic identity and creates a sense of belonging, which is a key factor for the sustainable development of the university community.

In addition, the willingness to recommend can be interpreted as an indirect assessment of the effectiveness of educational programs – the more students see real value and application of the knowledge they receive, the stronger their willingness to engage with the institution and recommend it to others. This is especially important in the context of competition between higher education institutions and their pursuit of greater visibility and attractiveness. The recommendation can also be seen as a manifestation of confidence in future professional development – when a student believes



that the education received will provide him with good opportunities in the labor market, he is more inclined to recommend it as a valuable and reliable choice.

Confidence in the applicability of knowledge with opportunities for upgrading. The survey data show that most students feel prepared to apply the knowledge acquired at the university in a real professional environment. This is a positive sign of the effectiveness of the academic content and its compatibility with the requirements of practice. A significant part of the respondents declares full or partial confidence in their ability to transform theoretical knowledge into practical actions. However, there is also a smaller but significant group of students who express uncertainty or moderate self-confidence regarding the practical application of knowledge.

This suggests that there are areas in which training can be further improved by including more practical elements. Measures that could increase student confidence are the introduction and expansion of internship programs, student participation in real business projects, work on case studies from practice, i.e. on an actual case, organization of simulations and practical seminars, as well as active partnerships with business and the state. Such initiatives will not only improve the preparation of students, but also facilitate their transition to the real work environment by developing practical skills, adaptability and professional self-confidence.

Providing opportunities for practical application of knowledge during training is a key factor for successful professional realization. In this sense, the university has an important role not only to provide knowledge, but also to create conditions for it to be exercised, tested and further developed in a real context. This builds not only confidence in students, but also skills that meet the dynamics and requirements of the labor market.

Based on the analysis and conclusions drawn, the following recommendations can be offered to improve the educational process and strengthen the connection between theory and practice:

Expanding the practical components in training, as the need for stronger confidence in applying knowledge in practice indicates a need to introduce or expand internship programs, work on real business cases, simulations and practical projects within the academic disciplines.

Maintaining and upgrading the already established good practices, because the high levels of satisfaction with the specialty, the organization of the learning process and the acquired knowledge speak of a well-established academic foundation. It is recommended that current practices be established, but also regularly updated in accordance with the dynamics of the labor market and the development of the relevant professional fields.

Strengthening student participation and feedback, as student engagement with institutional life can be improved through more frequent and structured feedback, inclusion in councils, committees or focus groups related to improving the learning process and program content.

Improving awareness of career opportunities through career forums, employer meetings, consultations and mentoring programs. This will give students a clearer picture of the application of knowledge in a real work environment and strengthen their professional orientation.

CONCLUSION

This article analyzes the interrelationships between student motivation and satisfaction with higher education, examining these factors in the context of the modern educational environment, including the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. Both the sources of student motivation and the challenges that lead to a decline in their engagement are studied, in order to establish the need to improve the quality of education. The literature reviewed on the topic and the conducted survey confirm that student motivation and satisfaction are interrelated and determining factors for the effectiveness of higher education. The analysis of the surveys and the recorded data show high levels of satisfaction with the chosen specialty, the organization of the educational process, the material and technical base and the acquired knowledge.



These results testify to a qualitatively structured educational environment that meets the expectations of students and contributes to the formation of a positive academic identity at the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski". The high degree of internal motivation to complete the training is an indicator of commitment and confidence in the benefits of education, which creates prerequisites for successful professional realization.

At the same time, the study also highlights areas for improvement in the faculty, especially in the context of practical training. Although the majority of students feel confident in their ability to apply their knowledge, a portion of them express uncertainty or moderate self-confidence in a real professional environment. This indicates a need to strengthen the practical components through internships, simulations, real-life case studies and closer cooperation with employers at the Faculty of Economics of the South-West University "Neofit Rilski". Such initiatives would allow for a more successful transformation of theoretical knowledge into practical skills, which would strengthen the connection between higher education and the labor market.

In conclusion, the results of the study emphasize the importance of sustainable development of student motivation and satisfaction as a strategic priority of higher education institutions and in particular of South-West University "Neofit Rilski". Maintaining high standards in the organization of the educational process, regular feedback with students and updating the curricula in accordance with the dynamics of modern society and economy are key conditions for improving the quality of education at the Faculty of Economics.

Universities that succeed in combining academic tradition with innovation and practical orientation will strengthen their competitiveness, strengthen public trust and contribute to the more successful realization of young specialists. The article emphasizes that effective higher education not only provides knowledge, but also creates conditions for its exercise, building professional confidence and adaptability in accordance with the dynamics of the labor market.

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