

THE MOTIVATION OF STUDENTS TO CHOOSE TERTIARY EDUCATION IN HUNGARY AND SERBIAN VOJVODINA

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Abstract

The students motives of enrolment to tertiary educational institutions crucially influence their academic achievement and behaviour during studies. This research focuses on the Hungarian students' reasons for choosing university in Hungary and in Serbian Vojvodina: whether they decide on their own or are influenced by other factors. The quantitative research also examines whether there is valid similarity or difference between the tertiary educational decisions of Hungarian people and those living in a neighboring country as the latter share a lot of common roots with their mother country.

The results show that there are similarities between the choices of young people from both areas, regardless of their mother country. Young people typically seem to choose further education on their own, and their surroundings or material considerations are only secondary motivational factors in their decision. However, it is also true that direct social factors and financial conditions have a considerable impact on whether they can actually acquire their diplomas.

Key words: *career choice, motivation, tertiary education, tuition fee.*

Introduction

There is an increased social demand for education today as the expectations of the economy and the employers are also changing. Education itself has to answer the challenges of the 21st century; however, this requires well-established practical and theoretical knowledge as well as key competences like entrepreneurial abilities, language knowledge and computer skills (Csehné, 2013). In today's rapidly changing economic environment, up-to-date practical knowledge has become even more valuable than before (Oláh, Hutóczki, 2012). Ulrich Beck has identified tertiary educational institutions as shelters against unemployment (2003). He compares them, very visually, to "ghost railway stations where the trains do not travel by schedules." Even people who have no set destination ahead want to buy a ticket, which is why the trains are crammed. People currently studying at these places do not know where the labor market will need them or if it will need them at all. This also contributed to the general tendencies of post-industrial societies.

A lot of factors influence young people in their decision of where and what they would

like to study during their tertiary education. The paper examines the motivational factors of students of Hungarian ethnicity living in Hungary and the northern province of Serbia, Vojvodina. Although these people live in different macro-economic environments, they share a common language as well as common cultural and historical roots. Do they make similar or different decisions regarding their tertiary institution choices? The current research attempted to answer this question.

Problem of Research

Several Hungarian researches have already dealt with students' motivations in choosing tertiary institutions. The researches made in Hungary in the 1970s examined the effects of family background on higher education studies (Csákó-Liskó, 1978, Ferge, 1972, Gázsó, 2000). Ferge (1972) claimed that the children of parents with tertiary degrees are more likely to get to tertiary education themselves.

The research of Kappe and van der Flier (2012) shows the importance of students' motivation in their academic success as well. The cited authors claim that "more important than what a student can do is what a student is willing to do."

In their research, Müller and Palekčić (2005) proved that that at university or for further education the stabilization of students' intrinsic motivation for specific subjects can be found. One reason for this is that high school students – compared to primary and secondary education – are granted more autonomous options concerning the choice of their subjects or what they want to study in the first place. This enhances the congruence between personal interest and learning contents. Furthermore, increasingly as one ages, the development of one's identity strengthens personal dispositions, talents and interests, and people generally feel more certain about their actual goals and abilities.

The comparative research on the motivation to study in higher education in Germany and Great Britain (Loeber-Higson, 2009) found that social class affiliation did not influence significantly the secondary school pupils' motivation to continue their studies at higher level. The most important motivators are personal reasons. Job related reasons and continuative education or the insecurity about job are only of secondary importance when making a decision about choosing tertiary education in Germany and Great Britain.

Other studies examined the effects of residence, the settlement and the school. The school may have direct influence (resulting in changed performance) or indirect, which is the result of an effective school environment (Philips, 2000, Lannert, 2003).

In the 90s, the attention shifted to the individual and the individual abilities. Csehné (2012) pointed out that studies and work are also extremely important values for students arriving from abroad: they want to "make it," they feel safe in Hungary as most of them (66%) apply for tertiary education after finishing secondary grammar school and their parents mostly have tertiary degrees themselves.

In most cases, students at Hungarian tertiary educational institutions are not forced to choose their courses, which is also shown in the research data collected about their motivations to choose their institution and course¹. As a result of tertiary expansion, several researches have been conducted in the past few years which were dealing with student motivation in choosing institution and course². It can be seen that professional interest was almost always the reason for their choice, and other factors like the distance from home were only considered while choosing the institution.

1 When deciding to go on tertiary education, professional interest was almost always the defining factor. Regarding the institution itself, the most important decision factors were the chances of admission and the distance from home. See György Fábri & Roberts Eva (Eds) (2004) *Universities on Balance (Egyetemek mérlegen)*. Budapest, Educatio Társadalmi Szolgáltató Ltd. – National Tertiary Admission Office, pp. 40–51.

2 See the relevant works of Péter Róbert and Kálmán Gábor, the researches concerning the 2010 tertiary admission studies and factors and the surveys of Educatio Social Service Ltd.

As for the educational preferences of Hungarian students living in Vojvodina, their decisions were heavily influenced by the social, economic and political situation of Serbia. Ever since the economic hardships of the 90s and the dragged-out Yugoslavian Wars, this country has had difficulties in creating democratic and economic reforms, even after the political revolution of 2000. Serbia's admission to the European Union is hindered by the country's national and cultural characteristics. According to the Hofstede-dimensions, Serbia is characterized by great power distance, high intolerance towards insecurity as well as pointedly individualistic features and the dominance of female values.

Vojvodina is an autonomous northern province of Serbia with a population of 1 916 889 according to the 2011 census. The province has more than 20 nationalities and is struggling with an ageing society and a reduction of inhabitants. The number of Hungarian residents is also decreasing as their number fell from 15% to 13% of the total population between 2001 and 2011. The multi-ethnic Vojvodina, which is famous for its agriculture, is having similar economic difficulties than Serbia.

The education of Vojvodinan Hungarians is mainly influenced by the general educational situation and the fact that Vojvodina has no independent Hungarian tertiary educational system. (Gábrity Molnár, 2008). There is only partial Hungarian education at the only Vojvodina state university – Novi Sad University – and that education mostly depends on the helpfulness and language knowledge of the lecturers as well as on the willingness of the faculty management to organize it. The only exception is the Hungarian Teacher Training Faculty in Subotica, where the entire training has been done in Hungarian since 2006. The Vojvodinan Hungarians are characterized by “failure evasion” and economical considerations: most of them choose a faculty in a nearby city where they may study in Hungarian – even if not completely in that one language. Approximately half of the Hungarian students decide to study in Hungary, although only about 30% of them return home after graduation. The Hungarians are under-represented in the Vojvodina educational system as while they comprise 15% of the total population, only 6% of the students in tertiary education are Hungarian.

According to a 2005 questionnaire research conducted among young Vojvodinan Hungarians, the following factors were considered when choosing tertiary education: they wanted to study in Hungarian, and the institution had to be in Vojvodina, Novi Sad (or perhaps Hungary). The majority of the respondents were interested in engineering, pedagogical and economic fields, and they wanted to study at a college (34%) or university (64%) where they could at least partially study and take exams in Hungarian (Szlávicz, 2005). Gábrity Molnár's researches (2008) yielded similar results, and she also points out that most Hungarian students study in the nearest city, deciding – on their own or on their parents' advice – to save money and do often tiring commuting. As a lot of them lack Serbian language skills, they are also motivated to study partly or completely in Hungarian, although this also lowers their labor market chances. There is over-training in engineering, pedagogy and economics in Serbia, and those Hungarians who acquire their diplomas in these fields and do not know the proper state language and the professional Serbian terminology have great difficulties finding a job. Unfortunately for a great percentage of the young Vojvodinan Hungarian intellectuals, their long search for a job often forces them to choose other occupations, often with lower requirements or to migrate.

Research Focus

Based on the professional literature, it can be seen that knowledge and training is quickly becoming the basis of labor market competitiveness. If one wants to make well-established education policy and youth strategy decisions, it is needed to learn about young people's motivational factors in choosing higher educational courses and schools.

A quantitative research in Hungary and Serbian province Vojvodina was conducted in order to examine the motivations of tertiary education students when they had previously decided on their institution. The research was conducted among students who were still active,

which means all subjects were still studying at tertiary education. The idea was that there would be no significant difference between Hungarian students who live in different macro-economic environments but share common cultural roots. The aim of the research is to prove the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis

Regarding the tertiary education motivations of Hungarian students living in different macro-environment, but sharing cultural roots, the reasons for their choices are basically similar.

Methodology of Research

General Background of Research

In 2012, a quantitative research was conducted by us in Hungary as well as in Vojvodina, Serbia, in order to examine the motivations of tertiary education students when they had previously decided on their institution. During the research, the respondents had to fill in the same questionnaire, which was forwarded to them and to their institution through the Internet.

The sampling procedure was the snowball method, and so, the research cannot be considered representative. The limitations of the research are based on its low scale and not covering equally all scientific fields of university education in Hungary and Serbian province Vojvodina.

The questionnaires mostly contained closed questions, with only 5 open-ended questions all together. In general, the questions themselves were built on nominal and interval (Likert) scales. In the research, the respondents had to grade on a 5 point Likert scale based on how much they agreed with the statements. 5 meant complete agreement, while 1 meant complete disagreement.

Sample of Research

The complete sample contained 566 people. 1 Vojvodinan and 7 Hungarian questionnaires were not assessed as they were filled in by students who had already finished their courses, even though we wanted to focus on students still active in the tertiary education. These questionnaires were left out altogether, which left the sample with 476 Hungarian and 82 Vojvodinan questionnaires. The majority of the students were studying social sciences (30.5%) or engineering (22.6%). On examining the study fields based on countries, the most of the Vojvodina Hungarians were studying engineering (68.3%), while in Hungary, most students came from social sciences (32.8%).

22.8% of the respondents were freshmen, 41.4% were sophomores while 24% were in their third, 8.2% in their fourth and 3.6% in their final year. Regarding the school year, in Vojvodina, mostly freshmen answered the questionnaire (39%), while in Hungary, the respondents were mostly sophomores (44.5%).

Instrument and Procedures

The questionnaire contained several question groups. The first group of questions typically concentrated on the reasons for choosing school, that is, on the factors which motivated the students to decide on a given educational institution. The next part of the questionnaire was concerned with the career plans of the students, and, among other things, wanted to know what roles tertiary education play in career and how it enables life-long learning. The last part of the research was about family plans and the problem of reconciling work and private life from the

point of view of the students (as not yet active job-seekers). The validity of the hypothesis is examined within the first group of questions.

Data Analysis

The respondents could access and fill in the questionnaires through the Internet; the collected samples were assessed with the SPSS statistical program. As we have already mentioned, 8 samples were left out during the examination, but the others were all processed. On assessing the results multiple and one-variable methods including frequency, average and deviation studies, along with cross-table analysis and non parametric examinations (Mann-Whitney-test) were used.

Results of Research

The respondents had to answer the question of why they chose their course. The question was in closed format, that is, the students had to choose the most correct answer from a pre-determined set. The students were allowed to mark more than one answer. The results are summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Motives for Choosing Courses.

Motives	N	%
I wanted to study in this field because I am interested in it.	416	45
I believe it is easy to find a job in this field.	120	13
I believe I can make good money in this field.	112	12
I have professional connections in this field.	71	8
My parents decided that I should study in this course.	71	8
I had no other idea what to study.	41	4
I had no particular reasons.	31	3
This was the course I could afford financially.	28	3
This was the only available course nearby.	20	2
Other	19	2
Total	929	100

It can be seen from the table that students were mostly self-motivated when deciding their course. They also often decided on the course to improve their future chances in the labor market, which means they were also motivated by their career and other financial considerations. At the same time, direct parental decision did not play such a big role in their decision. It was also analyzed whether there was any significant difference between the students coming from the two countries; we used the Chi-square test in every question. The test showed that there was one significant difference in one area between the students. When they reacted to the "I believe it is easy to find a job in this field" claim, the Pearson Chi-square test yielded the following result: ($\chi^2 = 12.95$, $df=1$, $p=0.000$), with 36.6% of the Vojvodina and 18.9% of the Hungarian students choosing this sentence as a possible reason. This means that this factor was more important for students from Vojvodina than for their Hungarian counterpart.

One question group of our questionnaire focused on how the students' family reacted to their decision, the aim was to find out the degree of influence of the family on choosing tertiary

education. To do so, statements were made, which the respondents had to assess on a 5-point Likert-scale, depending on how much they agreed with the statement. The following table is showing the results of some of the statements:

Table 2. The Role of the Family in Decision-Making.

Statement	Agrees	N	%	M	SD
My family agreed with me to study in this tertiary institution.	Completely agrees	388	69.5	4.59	0.725
	Mostly agrees	129	23.1		
	More or less agrees	31	5.6		
	Mostly disagrees	4	0.7		
	Completely disagrees	6	1.1		
Statement	Agrees	N	%	M	SD
My family agreed with me to study in this course.	Completely agrees	374	67.0	4.54	0.751
	Mostly agrees	128	22.9		
	More or less agrees	43	7.7		
	Mostly disagrees	11	2.0		
	Completely disagrees	2	0.4		
Statement	Agrees	N	%	M	SD
My family supports me financially to have tertiary education.	Completely agrees	339	60.8	4.17	1.234
	Mostly agrees	77	13.8		
	More or less agrees	73	13.1		
	Mostly disagrees	34	6.1		
	Completely disagrees	35	6.3		
Statement	Agrees	N	%	M	SD
I have a family member working in the same field which I m studying.	Completely agrees	76	13.6	2.16	1.510
	Mostly agrees	62	11.1		
	More or less agrees	43	7.7		
	Mostly disagrees	69	12.4		
	Completely disagrees	308	55.2		
Statement	Agrees	N	%	M	SD
My family supports me in all ways to get a diploma.	Completely agrees	419	75.1	4.59	0.842
	Mostly agrees	79	14.2		
	More or less agrees	40	7.2		
	Mostly disagrees	10	1.8		
	Completely disagrees	10	1.8		

It can be seen from the results collected from our respondents that their family background gave them a strong basis and support to start their tertiary education, financially as well as emotionally. There was little connection between a student's decision on a certain course and the fact that a relative had been or was working in the same field at the time.

The research also paid attention to how much difference there was between the answers given by the Hungarian and Vojvodinan Hungarian students. To validate the findings, a non-

parametric Mann-Whitney-test was used as the variables did not disperse normally. During the two independent sample difference tests, significant differences could be validated between the families' agreement regarding the choice of institution, the choice of course and the financial support of the studies (that is, in all three of the first statements in the table). In all cases, the students from Vojvodina agreed more. The results are summarized in the following table:

Table 3. Differences Regarding Family Support among Hungarian and Vojvodinan Students.

	My family agreed with me to study in this tertiary institution.	My family agreed with me to study in this faculty	My family gives me financial support to study in tertiary education
Mann-Whitney U	16939.500	16555.000	15516.000
Wilcoxon W	130465.500	130081.000	129042.000
Z	-2.368	-2.651	-3.380
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	0.018	0.008	0.001
Mean Rank Hungarian	274.09	273.28	271.10
Mean Rank Vojvodinan	310.92	315.61	328.28

The research paid special attention to the family's ability to influence decisions. In the case of most respondents, (57.2%), the profession of the parents did not influence them, while 38.9% and 3.9% felt that their parents' profession had a positive or negative influence on them respectively. The career path of the parents showed similar results, that is, 53.4% of the students did not care about the prospects of their relatives on choosing school, while 41.8% claimed the effect was positive and 4.8% felt it was negative. The Pearson Chi-square tests showed no significant difference in this respect according to the country of the respondents.

Those who filled in the questionnaire also had to rank some factors which may have affected their tertiary education and their success in their chosen field. The most important factors for the Vojvodina students were the family, the previous secondary education, the tuition fee, the schoolmates and the various connections in this particular order, while the order of these ranks for the Hungarian students were the family, the previous secondary education, the schoolmates, the connections and the tuition fee. It is clearly visible from these lists that the success of the students from both countries is greatly influenced by their immediate social surroundings, that is, the family and the school community.

Finally, the last topic of the research was to find out how much these students believed they could realize their future ambitions without going to university or college. 66.8% of the Hungarian students could not imagine this without tertiary education, while the same figure was 73.2% among the students from Vojvodina, which means that getting a diploma is a crucial question for everyone. It is no wonder, then, that students from both countries typically want to spend 5 years in tertiary education. However, there are several factors which may influence the duration of their education. Based on the frequency of these factors, the students named the following things:

Table 4. Factors Which May Influence the Planned Ending of Studies (%).

Factors	Vojvodinan students	Hungarian students
Good Job Offer	17.22	20.94
Tuition Fee	22.52	16.63
Foreign Scholarship	10.60	14.03
Language Knowledge	7.28	13.63
Thesis	9.27	10.82
Family Support	11.92	10.12
Founding Family	8.61	4.81
Not influenced by Anything	7.95	2.61
Other	4.64	6.41

The results in the table shows that people studying in Vojvodina mostly decide to postpone the end of their studies because of the tuition fee or good job offers, and these are also the two motivating factors for Hungarian students. At the same time, it is clearly visible that while Hungarian students make their language knowledge a key factor in finishing their studies, this is less of an issue for Vojvodina students as language knowledge is not a condition of graduation.

Discussion

As the main result of the research it can be concluded that students in Hungary and Vojvodina have high self motivation. Their decision about tertiary education is mainly influenced by the possibility to improve their choices at the labor market and by their future career plans.

The results of previous researches (Hrubos, 2002, Fehérvári–Kocsis, 2009, Csákó, 2002, Róbert, 2000) show that the institutional and professional structures are both heavily segmented within the tertiary educational system, and the people who have to make a choice of how to continue their studies do so on their own, according to their future plans. This was also reinforced by the results of our research.

The obtained results are similar to international research results on student motivation in the tertiary education, too (Loeber-Higson, 2009; Kappe- van der Flier, 2012; Csehné, 2012).

Matild Sági (2003) identified status reproduction or upwards mobility in her research concerning the Hungarian tertiary education. The research results presented here can give only partial support to her claims. The education or preferences of the parents did not directly influence the Hungarian or Vojvodinan students when they were deciding on their tertiary educational institutions. It is no longer true today that the children of intellectual families apply for tertiary institutions in greater numbers and are more successful in their studies (Ferge, 1972). However, the family has a strong indirect influence in the motivation and progress of these same students. 60-70% of the respondents completely agree that their family gave them serious support while they were deciding on their future studies. 75% of the students feel that their family gives them complete support on their way to obtaining their diplomas. The Hungarian students living in Serbia feel the support of their family more than their peers living in Hungary.

The length of tertiary studies in Hungary is mostly influenced by good job prospects, tuition fee and family support. In Vojvodina, Serbia, the length of tertiary studies mostly depends on tuition fee, job opportunities and family support.

Conclusions

The results of the research conducted last year about the motivations of Hungarian and Vojvodinan Hungarian tertiary education students show that the motivations of tertiary education students are mostly influenced by personal factors. Their decision to choose institution and course are also influenced by labour market chances and career plans.

The tertiary education motivations of young Hungarians and Vojvodinan Hungarians are not directly influenced by the education level or opinion of the parents. However, the support of the parents and the family is considerable in both countries examined: approximately 70% of them feel that their family completely supports them during their studies. This way, the high level of appreciation of the family values is clearly visible in both groups.

The research proved that the students are primarily self-motivated in their decision, and their environment, as well as material considerations, are only of secondary importance when choosing school.

However, it is also a fact that there are serious social and financial factors influencing their successful graduation, which means these factors indeed have a direct effect on the acquisition of their diplomas. The status and income of the father and the mother may directly influence that.

As there are no statistically significant differences between the motivation of students from Hungary and Vojvodina, we may consider our hypothesis valid and proven.

The fact that Hungarian students from Hungary and Vojvodina sharing the same cultural roots but living in different macro-environment have similar motivation regarding tertiary education may be primary considered as generational similarity.

The research is obviously limited by the small number of people involved, especially in Serbia. Another problem is the lack of analysis regarding the personal motivations, social status, financial situation and study progression of tertiary education students. With this data available, a more accurate picture may be drawn of the motivations of Hungarian and Vojvodinan tertiary education students. The inclusion of these variables may form the basis of an international comparative survey later in the future.

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