
Students' Expectations Regarding the Educational Offer in Light of Personal Research

Submitted 18/07/23, 1st revision 11/08/23, 2nd revision 29/08/23, accepted 10/09/23

Artur Kwasek¹, Maria Kocot², Krzysztof Kandeferski³, Artur Fiks⁴,
Magdalena Kaczkowska-Serafińska⁵

Abstract:

Purpose: The aim of the research was to analyze the primary motivations of students for undertaking higher education and to identify the key factors influencing their choice of a specific educational offer.

Design/Methodology/Approach: A quantitative research methodology was employed, based on the analysis of questionnaires directed at students. Students' expectations regarding the educational offer and their motivations for studying were assessed. Data analysis was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient.

Findings: It was determined that the main motivations for students to undertake studies are acquiring knowledge and professional qualifications, prospects for development, and career advancement. Building relationships and meeting new people is a significant, though not dominant, aspect of student life. Parental expectations are not the main motivation for undertaking studies. Pearson's correlation coefficient of 0.308 indicates a weak positive linear relationship between students' expectations and their evaluations of the educational offer.

Practical Implications: The research findings suggest that higher education institutions should focus on the practical aspects of education, offering curricula that reflect the needs of the job market. It is also essential to facilitate relationship-building among students and promote student mobility. However, students' educational decisions are complex and can be shaped by various factors, not just expectations regarding the educational offer.

Originality/Value: While many studies have focused on students' expectations in the context of higher education, this research provides a unique perspective on the relationship between students' expectations and their evaluations of the educational offer, using Pearson's correlation coefficient analysis.

¹Ph.D., University of Technology and Economics, Warsaw, ORCID: 0000-0003-4386-1444, artur.kwasek@uth.edu.pl;

²Ph.D., University of Economics in Katowice, Katowice, ORCID: 0000-0001-5150-3765, maria.kocot@ue.katowice.pl;

³Ph.D., Social Academy of Sciences, Łódź, ORCID: 0000-0002-2532-2060, kkandeferski@san.edu.pl;

⁴Ph.D., WSB Merito University Warsaw, Warsaw, ORCID: 0009-0000-4107-4506, artur.fiks@wsb.warszawa.pl;

⁵Ph.D., Vistula University in Warsaw, Warsaw, ORCID: 0000-0003-3206-2233, m.kaczkowska-serafinska@vistula.edu.pl;

Keywords: *Students' expectations, educational offer, motivations for studying, Pearson's correlation coefficient, job market, student mobility.*

JEL Classification: *I21, I23.*

Paper Type: *Research article.*

1. Introduction

Contemporary higher education institutions operate in a dynamic environment that is shaped by various factors such as technological advancement, globalization, changing job market needs, and the evolution of expectations and aspirations of the younger generation. In this context, adapting the educational offer to the current needs and expectations of students becomes not only a challenge but also a necessity.

The changing nature of work, the growing need for soft and interdisciplinary skills, and the development of educational technologies require higher education institutions to redefine traditional teaching methods and approaches to education. Many education experts emphasize that the key to success in the 21st century is the ability to continuously learn and adapt to rapidly changing conditions.

Understanding students' expectations regarding the educational offer is crucial for effective education. It's not just about delivering the right knowledge, but also enabling students to develop skills essential in the modern world, such as critical thinking, teamwork ability, and intercultural communication.

Contemporary educational systems pose many challenges to students but also offer diverse opportunities. Understanding the motivations that drive young people to undertake higher education is key to tailoring the educational offer to their needs and expectations.

Many students aim to acquire knowledge and qualifications that will allow them personal and professional development. For others, it's important to combine studies with work, mobility during studies, or the opportunity to meet new people and build relationships. However, some may be motivated by external factors, such as parental expectations.

Based on these observations, the hypothesis was formulated that for most students, the primary motivation for undertaking studies is to acquire knowledge and qualifications that will allow them personal and professional growth, rather than external factors. This article will present research questions regarding the main motivations of students, the influence of parental expectations on their decisions, and the importance of opportunities to combine studies with work and mobility during studies.

The aim is to understand whether students view their studies as an opportunity for fun and leisure or rather as a tool to achieve specific professional and educational goals.

2. Literature Review

2.1 The Essence of Educational Quality - Concepts and Components

The quality of education in higher education is a multifaceted concept that has been the subject of numerous studies and discussions for years. In the academic literature, various concepts and components of education quality have been presented (Harvey and Green, 1993). These concepts can be broadly divided into five main approaches.

Firstly, quality can be understood as excellence, where the aim is to achieve the highest standard in the field (Tam, 2001). In this perspective, the priority is to achieve world-class standards in teaching and research. Secondly, quality means compliance with a specification or standard. Here, quality is measured by the degree to which institutions meet specific criteria or standards (Srikanthan and Dalrymple, 2003).

The third approach is quality as value for money. In this context, the quality of education is assessed in terms of cost-effectiveness (Vlăsceanu, Grünberg and Pârlea, 2007). The fourth perspective is quality as transformation. In this case, the emphasis is on the learning process and the extent to which students transform their knowledge, skills, and attitudes (Barnett, 1992). Lastly, quality can be perceived as user satisfaction, where the emphasis is on student satisfaction with the educational experience (Aldridge and Rowley, 1998).

The components of education quality in higher education can be divided into three main categories structural, process, and outcome. Structural components refer to resources such as faculty, infrastructure, curricula, and technology. Process components relate to teaching methods, interactions between students and teachers, and assessment methods. Outcome components refer to learning outcomes, such as students' knowledge, skills, and competencies, their satisfaction, and their successes after graduation (Parri, 2006).

In conclusion, the quality of education in higher education is a complex concept that encompasses many components and concepts. However, regardless of the approach taken, understanding the needs and expectations of students and adapting to them to ensure the highest level of teaching is crucial.

2.2 Education Quality and the Job Market

The quality of education is crucial for preparing graduates to enter the job market. The contemporary job market requires employees to have not only substantive

knowledge but also soft skills, adaptive abilities, and critical thinking (Robles, 2012). Therefore, higher education institutions are increasingly being evaluated for their ability to provide students with the skills necessary for professional success.

In studies on graduate employability, it is often emphasized that employers expect candidates to have communication skills, teamwork abilities, problem-solving, and critical thinking, rather than just specialized knowledge (Hart Research Associates, 2015). These competencies are considered key in the context of a dynamically changing work environment, where technological innovations and globalization lead to the continuous transformation of professional roles.

However, many higher education graduates still face challenges transitioning from education to employment. An indicator of this is the high percentage of graduates who remain unemployed or are employed below their qualifications (OECD, 2019). There is often a discrepancy between what educational institutions teach and what employers expect.

To address these challenges, many institutions strive to strengthen collaboration with the private sector and other stakeholders. For example, internship programs, apprenticeships, or co-creating curricula with employer participation can help tailor the educational offer to job market needs (Bridgstock, 2009). Moreover, modern teaching methods, such as project-based or problem-based learning, can be effective in developing practical skills and preparing students for real professional challenges (Wagner, 2010).

In conclusion, the quality of education has a direct impact on graduates' ability to integrate into the job market. To enhance employability, educational institutions must not only impart knowledge but also develop key skills that are valued by employers.

2.3 Students' Expectations Towards Educational Offerings

Students' expectations regarding the educational offer have long been of interest to researchers and educational institutions. Among these expectations, obtaining a diploma seems to be one of the most important priorities for most students, as reflected in the literature on educational motivation (Deci and Ryan, 2000). On the other hand, in today's globalized world, the opportunity to combine studies with work is becoming increasingly valued, both for gaining professional experience and for financial support during studies (Schwartzman, 2016).

Acquiring specific knowledge and professional qualifications is another key expectation. As suggested by Pascarella and Terenzini (2005), higher education brings benefits not only in terms of professional skills but also aids in the development of critical thinking and the ability for independent learning. However, the quality of this education is equally important.

As noted by Arum and Roksa (2011), high-quality education is directly linked to the level of student satisfaction and their subsequent professional success.

In many disciplines, practical experience in the chosen direction is an integral part of education (Baxter Magolda, 2004). Therefore, students expect opportunities to gain practical knowledge alongside theoretical knowledge. Expanding their knowledge and competencies is equally important to them, related to the pursuit of continuous development and adaptation in a dynamically changing environment (Dweck, 2006).

The social aspects of student life cannot be overlooked either. Meeting new people and building lasting relationships is an important element of the academic experience (Astin, 1993). Modern educational institutions also offer extensive mobility opportunities, allowing for studying or internships abroad, which is attractive to many young people (Teichler, 2009).

Equally important is the pursuit to satisfy other needs, such as having fun or spending leisure time, which play a significant role in student life (Kuh, 2009). In some cases, the motivation to undertake studies may also be the desire to meet parental ambitions (Lareau, 2003).

Therefore, students' expectations regarding the educational offer are diverse and multifaceted. Hence, educational institutions should tailor their offer, taking into account these varied needs.

3. Methods and Materials

3.1 Methods

The aim of the research was to understand the primary motivations of students for undertaking higher education and to identify the factors that are most important to them in the context of the educational offer. The hypothesis was formulated that most students decide to pursue higher education in order to acquire knowledge and professional qualifications that will allow them personal and professional development, rather than due to external factors, such as parental expectations.

Research questions were also formulated: What are the main motivations of students for undertaking higher education in the context of acquiring knowledge and professional qualifications? To what extent do the opportunity to combine studies with work and the prospects for development and career advancement influence the decision to pursue studies?

Are the opportunities to meet new people, build relationships, and student mobility significant motivating factors for undertaking studies? To what extent do parental expectations influence students' decisions to pursue higher education?

In this article, the authors present the results of research conducted between May and July 2023. The research sample consisted of 510 respondents. During the research process, the authors collected socio-demographic data (Table 1).

Table 1. *Sociodemographic data of the respondents*

1. University:	Frequency	Percent, N=510
WSB	124	24.31%
UTH	170	33.33%
VISTULA	216	42,35%
Total	510	100.00%
2. Gender:		
Female	290	56.86%
Male	220	43.14%
Total	510	100.00%
3. Age:		
Under 21	161	31.57%
21 -25	261	51.18%
26 – 30	37	7.25%
31-35	19	3.73%
Over 35	32	6.27%
Total	510	100.00%
4. Place of residence:		
Rural area	81	15.88%
Small town (up to 20,000 inhabitants)	35	6.86%
Medium-sized town (20,000-50,000 inhabitants)	48	9.41%
Medium-sized city (50,000-200,000 inhabitants)	43	8.43%
Large city (over 200,000 inhabitants)	303	59.41%
Total	510	100.00%
5. Type of studies:		
Full-time (daytime)	192	37.65%
Part-time (evening/weekend)	318	62.35%
Total	510	100.00%
6. Employment status:		
Unemployed	57	11.18%
Employed full-time	210	41.18%
Employed on a contract or freelance basis	189	37.06%
Self-employed	35	6.86%
Engaged in agricultural activities	3	0.59%
Employed full-time and self-employed	16	3.14%
Total	510	100.00%
7. Year of study:		
Bachelor's 1st year	163	31.96%
Bachelor's 2nd year	96	18.82%
Bachelor's 3rd year	99	19.41%

Master's 1st year	66	12.94%
Master's 2nd year	86	16.86%
Total	510	100.00%

Source: Own study.

Table 1 presents the sociodemographic data of the respondents. Among the universities where the respondents studied, the majority attended VISTULA (42.35%), followed by UTH (33.33%) and WSB (24.31%). In terms of gender, the majority of respondents were women (56.86%), while men constituted 43.14%.

Regarding age, the largest group of respondents was between 21 to 25 years old (51.18%), and the smallest group was between 31 to 35 years old (3.73%). In terms of place of residence, most respondents lived in large cities (over 200,000 inhabitants) - 59.41%, while the smallest group lived in small towns (up to 20,000 inhabitants) - 6.86%. Concerning the type of studies, the majority of respondents were part-time students (62.35%), compared to 37.65% who were full-time students.

Regarding employment status, the largest group of respondents was employed full-time (41.18%), and the smallest group was engaged in agricultural activities (0.59%). Finally, in terms of the year of study, most respondents were in the 1st year of bachelor's studies (31.96%), and the fewest were in the 1st year of master's studies (12.94%).

4. Results

The research was focused on understanding the key expectations of students regarding the educational offer. To precisely analyze these expectations, a quantitative analysis of the responses was conducted, which allowed for determining the priorities and preferences of students in the context of choosing a university and field of study.

Table 2 presents the detailed results of this research, showing which aspects of the educational offer are most important to students and which factors have less significance in the decision-making process for continuing education.

Table 2. *Students' Expectations Related to Educational Offerings*

	Definitely NOT	Rather NOT	No Opinion	Rather YES	Definitely YES
Obtaining a Diploma	7	9	17	100	377
Combining Education with Work	11	28	45	164	262
Acquiring Knowledge and Professional Qualifications	6	19	23	163	299
High-Quality Education	8	21	50	212	219

Gaining Knowledge and Practice in the Chosen Field	8	17	44	184	257
Expanding One's Knowledge and Skills	10	7	36	149	308
Prospects for Career Development and Advancement	6	22	42	142	298
Meeting New People and Building Relationships	17	41	59	169	224
Opportunity for Mobility	11	37	89	202	171
Having Fun and Spending Free Time	56	94	103	131	126
Meeting Parents' Ambitions	228	79	64	71	68

Source: Own study.

In the category "Obtaining a diploma," a significant majority of students answered "Definitely YES" (377 people), indicating that obtaining a diploma is a key goal for many students. Only a small number of students expressed a lack of interest in this aspect, with 7 people answering "Definitely NO" and 9 people "Rather NO."

Regarding "Combining studies with work," 262 people answered "Definitely YES," suggesting that for many students, it is important to be able to combine academic studies with professional work. On the matter of "Acquiring knowledge and professional qualifications," 299 people answered "Definitely YES," indicating a strong interest in gaining specific skills and professional knowledge.

"Acquiring knowledge and practice in the chosen field" was important for 257 people who answered "Definitely YES," while "High-quality education" was a priority for 219 people.

"Expanding one's knowledge and competencies" and "Prospects for development and professional career" were important for 308 and 298 people, respectively, who answered "Definitely YES." In the category "Meeting new people and building relationships," 224 people answered "Definitely YES," suggesting that the social aspect is important for many students.

"Opportunity for mobility" was important for 171 people who answered "Definitely YES," while "Having fun and spending free time" was important for 126 people. However, "Meeting parents' ambitions" was the least popular expectation among students, with 228 people answering "Definitely NO," indicating that most students are not guided by their parents' ambitions regarding education.

In conclusion, the results indicate that the most important aspects for students are obtaining a diploma, acquiring knowledge and professional qualifications, and prospects for development and professional career. At the same time, meeting parents' ambitions is the least significant. The data comes from our own research.

5. Discussion

Based on the analysis of students' expectations related to the educational offer, it can be concluded that obtaining a diploma and acquiring professional knowledge and qualifications are key for them, indicating a practical approach to education. High-quality education and gaining knowledge and practice in the chosen field are important motivating factors for undertaking studies.

At the same time, they value the opportunity to expand their knowledge and competencies and the prospects for professional development and career. Building relationships and meeting new people is an essential aspect of student life, but it does not dominate over motivations related to professional development.

The opportunity for mobility and having fun and spending free time are of medium importance in the context of expectations related to the educational offer. It is also worth noting that satisfying parents' ambitions is not the main motivation for undertaking studies, which speaks to the independence of students in making educational decisions.

To determine the degree of correlation between the educational offer and students' expectations, the Pearson correlation coefficient was used. To do this, it was necessary to:

1. Calculate the average value for each variable:

Average Expectations (\bar{x}) = $(1 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 5 + 2 + 4 + 2 + 4 + 1 + 1) / 11 \approx 2.8182$

Average Offer (\bar{y}) = $(2 + 2 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 1 + 3 + 4 + 4 + 1 + 1) / 11 \approx 2.9091$

2. Calculate the standard deviation for each variable

Standard Deviation of Expectations (σ_x) ≈ 1.4117

Standard Deviation of the Offer (σ_y) ≈ 1.3348

3. Calculate the sum of the products of deviations from the means:

$\sum((x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})) = (1 - 2.8182)(2 - 2.9091) + (2 - 2.8182)(2 - 2.9091) + \dots + (1 - 2.8182)(1 - 2.9091)$

4. Calculate the Pearson correlation coefficient:

$$r_{xy} = \frac{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})(y_i - \bar{y})}{\sqrt{\sum_{i=1}^n (x_i - \bar{x})^2 \sum_{i=1}^n (y_i - \bar{y})^2}}$$

The Pearson correlation coefficient was approximately 0.308. The obtained Pearson correlation coefficient of about 0.308 indicates a slight positive linear relationship between students' expectations regarding the educational offer and their evaluations of this offer.

However, this value is small, suggesting that the relationship between these two variables is neither strong nor clear. Values between -0.3 and 0.3 in Pearson correlation analysis are typically interpreted as a weak linear dependency between variables.

The obtained result allows for drawing several conclusions: The first is a weak positive correlation: The value of 0.308 suggests that there is a slight positive relationship between students' expectations and evaluations of the educational offer. This means that as students' expectations of the educational offer increase, the evaluations of these offers also usually rise, although this increase is not very large or unambiguous.

The second conclusion points to the absence of a strong relationship: A correlation coefficient at the level of 0.308 indicates that the relationship between these two variables is neither clear nor strong. This might suggest that students' expectations are just one of many factors influencing their evaluations of the educational offer.

Thirdly, other factors are also important: Since the relationship is weak, it's worth considering the presence of other factors that might influence evaluations of the educational offer. For example, the quality of teaching, the availability of educational resources, or the atmosphere at the institution might have an equally significant impact.

Fourthly, the ordinal context should be taken into account: It's worth noting that transforming ordinal data into numerical data is a simplification. The original ordinal scale means that certain aspects of students' expectations might not be captured in the analysis.

6. Conclusions

The study of students' expectations regarding the educational offer revealed interesting conclusions. Although there is a certain positive relationship between students' expectations and their evaluations of the educational offer, it is relatively weak. This indicates that while expectations play a role in evaluating the educational offer, they are just one of many factors influencing students' decisions and evaluations.

We also cannot forget about the importance of other aspects of the educational experience, such as the quality of teaching, the availability of resources, or the academic atmosphere. It seems that a comprehensive approach to improving the quality of education will be more effective than focusing solely on students' expectations.

Considering these findings, it is recommended to: (1) Adopt a holistic approach to improving the quality of education, taking into account both students' expectations

and other important factors. (2) Regularly survey student satisfaction and evaluate the quality of offered programs to adapt them to dynamically changing needs. (3) Consider introducing more advanced analysis methods that might better capture the subtle relationships between expectations and educational experience.

In conclusion, while students' expectations are important, focusing solely on them might lead to overlooking other key aspects of the quality of education. The final educational offer should be a balanced combination of various factors that together create a comprehensive educational experience.

7. Limitations

In the context of the conducted study, several significant limitations should be taken into account. Firstly, although the analysis mainly focused on students' expectations regarding the educational offer, there are other aspects that could have influenced their satisfaction and were not considered. The use of the Pearson correlation coefficient assumes a linear relationship between variables, which may not capture potential nonlinear relationships between the studied aspects.

Additionally, the process of transforming ordinal data into numerical data might have introduced certain simplifications, potentially distorting the subtler differences in students' expectations. It's also important to consider the representativeness of the research sample - if it was limited or specific, the results might not be universal for the entire student population.

There's also a risk of response bias, where study participants might have answered in a way they deemed more socially acceptable, rather than genuinely reflecting their authentic feelings.

Finally, although the study focused on the relationship between expectations and evaluations of the offer, there might have been other unaccounted-for confounding factors, such as individual experiences or cultural context, that influenced the obtained results. These limitations should be considered when interpreting the data and planning further research in this area.

8. Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare that they have no known competing financial interests or personal relationships that could have appeared to influence the work reported in this paper.

References:

- Aldridge, S., Rowley, J. 1998. Measuring customer satisfaction in higher education. *Quality Assurance in Education*, 6(4), 197-204.
- Arum, R., Roksa, J. 2011. *Academically adrift: Limited learning on college campuses*. University of Chicago Press.
- Astin, A.W. 1993. *What matters in college? Four critical years revisited*. Jossey-Bass.
- Barnett, R. 1992. *Improving higher education: Total quality care*. Buckingham: Society for Research into Higher Education & Open University Press.
- Baxter Magolda, M.B. 2004. Evolution of a constructivist conceptualization of epistemological reflection. *Educational Psychologist*, 39(1), 31-42.
- Bridgstock, R. 2009. The graduate attributes we've overlooked: Enhancing graduate employability through career management skills. *Higher Education Research & Development*, 28(1), 31-44.
- Deci, E.L., Ryan, R.M. 2000. The "what" and "why" of goal pursuits: Human needs and the self-determination of behavior. *Psychological Inquiry*, 11(4), 227-268.
- Dweck, C.S. 2006. *Mindset: The new psychology of success*. Random House Incorporated.
- Hart Research Associates. 2015. *Falling short? College learning and career success*. Washington, D.C.: Association of American Colleges and Universities.
- Harvey, L., Green, D. 1993. Defining quality. *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, 18(1), 9-34.
- Kuh, G.D. 2009. What student affairs professionals need to know about student engagement. *Journal of College Student Development*, 50(6), 683-706.
- Lareau, A. 2003. *Unequal childhoods: Class, race, and family life*. University of California Press.
- OECD. 2019. *Employment outlook 2019: The future of work*. Paris, France: OECD Publishing.
- Parri, J. 2006. *Quality in higher education*. Vilnius: Vilnius University Publishing.
- Pascarella, E.T., Terenzini, P.T. 2005. *How college affects students: A third decade of research*. Jossey-Bass.
- Robles, M.M. 2012. Executive Perceptions of the Top 10 Soft Skills Needed in Today's Workplace. *Business Communication Quarterly*, 75(4), 453-465.
- Schwartzman, R. 2016. Learning while earning: The new normal. *Change: The Magazine of Higher Learning*, 48(6), 59-66.
- Srikanthan, G., Dalrymple, J.F. 2003. Developing alternative perspectives for quality in higher education. *International Journal of Educational Management*, 17(3), 126-136.
- Tam, M. 2001. Measuring quality and performance in higher education. *Quality in Higher Education*, 7(1), 47-54.
- Teichler, U. 2009. Internationalisation of higher education: European experiences. *Asia Pacific Education Review*, 10(1), 93-106.
- Vlăsceanu, L., Grünberg, L., Pârlea, D. 2007. *Quality assurance and accreditation: A glossary of basic terms and definitions*. Bucharest: UNESCO-CEPES.
- Wagner, T. 2010. *The global achievement gap: Why even our best schools don't teach the new survival skills our children need—and what we can do about it*. New York, NY: Basic Books.