

HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATES AND ACADEMIC EDUCATION: WHAT DO THEY EXPECT?

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Abstract: *This paper treats the problem of personal goals of high schools in Serbia regarding choice of university as a next step in professional life. We have investigated personal traits of respondents, their attitudes towards education as such, their criteria of selecting an university and their expectations of the future. Questionnaire-based survey has been used, data was statistically analysed and then discusses. What we have found is that generation of high-school graduates surveyed expresses goals and attitudes of such a features that could be titled as pseudo-conservative.*

Keywords: *Personal goals, high-school students, universities, survey*

1 INTRODUCTION

This paper presents results of a survey conveyed in 2016 at high school students in Serbia. The sample of 354 students was used (412 questionnaires have been distributed, 354 received)

Main goal of the research was to find out attitudes and goals of high school students regarding education as such, regarding perceived qualities of potential universities and regarding some distinct features that could be helpful in selecting a particular university they would enrol in.

The research was conveyed in a classical paper based manner, during two days period. Paper questionnaires were collected and then coded electronically, using MS Excel. All statistical procedures (descriptive statistics, chi-squared method) were done by IMB SPSS Statistics.

2 GENERAL OVERVIEW

In total 354 students have responded, of which 191 (54.0%) male, 161 (45.5%) female and 2 (0.5%) declined to answer. We have found 160 (45.2%) of student to consider themselves as religious, 124 (35.0%) non-religious, and 69 (19.5%) have no clear point whether being religious or not, while 1 (0.3%) did not answer. Regarding strong determination for leaving the country for business, 183 (51.7%) answered positively, 160 (45.2%) answered negatively while 11(3.1%) left the question unanswered.

Facebook (or similar social network) usage time ranges from less than hour (101 student, 28.5%), two hours (99 students, 28%), four hours (52 students, 14.7%), almost whole day (62 students, 17.5%) and ends up with no usage at all (36 students, 10.2%).

2.1 Professional outlook

We have asked about professional career that could serve the purpose of fulfilling both personal goals and secure the future. Table 1 displays what students see as general attitude of their own generation towards most attractive profession.

Table 1. Professions' attractiveness for the generation

Profession	Students	Percentage
Engineer	148	41.8
Manager	76	21.5
Lawyer	55	15.5
Economist	56	15.8
Other	18	5.1
Total	354	100

When asking the same question in person, i.e. which profession is the most attractive for the particular student, we have no different perspective at all, as in Table 2.

Table 2. Professions' attractiveness, personal

Profession	Students	Percentage
Engineer	126	35.6
Manager	74	20.9
Lawyer	56	15.8
Economist	57	16.1
Other	40	11.3
Total	354	100

In the next step, we have asked which profession can assure the most secure personal future. Answers are given in Table 3

Next step in our analysis was to check for any gender-based differences in the previous answers. What could be vaguely hinted out of the data in table, can be supported by Chi-square test, which gives us a reason to believe that male and female students have different perspective on their (the same!) generation's outlook to professions attractiveness ($p=0.021$; difference in distribution of answers by gender is statistically significant)

Table 3. Professions most promising for personal safety

Profession	Students	Percentage
Engineer	169	47.7
Manager	55	15.5
Lawyer	57	16.1
Economist	41	11.6
Other	32	9
Total	354	100

Table 4. Gender differences in Professions' attractiveness for the generation

		Profession						Total
		N/A	Engineer	Manager	Lawyer	Economist	Other	
Gender	N/A	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
	M	0	97	40	22	24	8	191
	F	1	51	35	32	32	10	161
Total		1	148	76	55	56	18	354

The same process was applied to data presented in Tables 2 and 3 to check for any gender difference.

Table 5. Gender differences in Professions' attractiveness for individuals

		Profession						Total
		N/A	Engineer	Manager	Lawyer	Economist	Other	
Gender	N/A	0	0	1	1	0	0	2
	M	0	96	41	25	22	17	191
	F	1	40	33	30	35	23	161
Total		1	126	74	56	57	40	354

Again, the conclusion of gender difference can be supported by Chi-square test, which gives us a reason to believe that male and female students have different perspective on their (the same!) generation's outlook to professions attractiveness ($p=0.006$; difference in distribution of answers by gender is statistically significant). Very similar result is yielded when

applying Chi-square test to data in Table 3 ($p=0.008$; difference in distribution of answers by gender is statistically significant)

2.2 Value of Education and University Choice

In this part we were investigating perceived value of education and different traits of the potential universities and relating features of education system.

Table 6. Intention to continue education at some university

		Intention to study			Total
		N/A	Yes	No	
Gender	N/A	0	1	1	2
	M	1	150	40	191
	F	2	130	29	161
Total		3	281	70	354

This table clearly shows that majority of graduates intends to continue their education at the university level. No gender differences are detected. But if we further analyse reasons not to continue education (40 males and 29 females), almost every student stated financial reasons as the major obstacle.

Moreover, we have analysed determination of graduates by asking them if they have already chosen particular university and major. Number of declined answers was 214 (60.5%) while only 2 (0.6%) did have strong determination (ant these were engineering schools).

When it comes to perception of school's quality by nature of founder (what in Serbia gets to whether a school is state-funded or private), 154 (43.5%) think that private schools are of no less quality compared to state-funded ones, and 198 (55.9%) are of opinion that qualities of private and state-funded universities are not equal, favouring state-funded ones.

Table 7. Major treats of intended universities

Major treats of intended university	Students	Percentage
N/A	11	3.1
Hard studies, good job perspectives	90	25.4
Easy studies, knowing poor job perspectives	44	12.4
Any school, just makes sure job at government institutions or public companies	118	33.3
Any school, if gives opportunity to emigrate	91	25.7
Total	354	100

Some more sophisticated treats of preferred choices when it comes to opting for a particular university were measured. We can see Table 7 for results. Particularly, we were in-

terested to find out which of the following makes an university the most appealing: good open-market job perspective, certainty of government jobs or possibility to emigrate. No gender differences were spotted (Chi-square test, $p>0.05$)

Table 8. Personal goals

Goal	Rating	M (students)	F (students)
Financial success	1	48	28
	2	48	36
	3	38	24
	4	26	29
	5	12	29
	6	16	15
Happy family	1	70	71
	2	53	34
	3	24	18
	4	14	12
	5	13	17
	6	14	9
Graduated from distinguished university	1	24	20
	2	21	16
	3	46	40
	4	33	44
	5	36	31
	6	28	10
Being celebrity, socializing with wealthy people	0	1	0
	1	15	11
	2	21	9
	3	24	12
	4	31	29
	5	31	18
	6	65	82
Have good job	1	32	15
	2	33	43
	3	28	35
	4	37	18
	5	43	38
	6	15	12

Respected member of community	1	31	31
	2	25	22
	3	19	29
	4	27	23
	5	42	22
	6	43	34

In the following stage, we have tried to determine some of personal goals of the population studied. Each personal goal was offered to an individual student and respondents were asked to rate them by using the Likert-like scale (1-strongly agree, 6-do not agree at all). Results are presented in Table 8.

Cheating, using someone else's academic work like own and other forms of academic dishonesty are also checked for perception and perspective. Results are presented in Table 9.

Table 9. Academic dishonesty

Cheating is stealing?	Students	Percentage
N/A	6	1.7
Yes	151	42.7
No	197	55.6
Total	354	100

2.3 *Fine distinctions*

When comparing two similar schools, we use fine distinctions to finally choose one. We were interested in contrasting hard/easy choice, but also social pressure as a driver of choice. Table 10 displays the results (note N/A for missing answers)

Table 10. Fine distinctions choice criteria

	Students	Percentage
N/A	5	1.4
Easier, knowing that my knowledge could be lean	70	19.8
Simply better school	129	36.4
Recommendation by someone important to me	94	26.6
Recommendation by parents	40	11.3
School where most of my friends will go	16	4.5
Total	354	100

And finally we have checked for any connections between declared religiosity and perceiving academic dishonesty as stealing (religiously prescribed sin). Results (Table12, Chi-square test, $p=0.001$) clearly indicate that being religious means understanding that cheating is stealing.

2.4 Discussion

This paper has intended to discuss major attitudes and values of high school graduates. First of all, attractive professions, regardless to gender, are those present in public and professional life as attractive ones, so perceiving engineering as a top profession is not a surprise at all. But gender difference is of great attention: female students are far less fascinated by engineering profession as a top choice in the generation and outnumber male colleagues in perceiving attractiveness of lawyer and economist professions. The same result is seen when analysing personal preferences, it looks very different from the original picture.

Table 12.

Cheating is stealing		Yes	No	Total
	Religious	77	79	160
	Not religious	39	85	124
	Do not know	35	33	69
Total		151	197	354

Majority of respondents will continue education at university level. One third of them will not, stating financial reasons as major obstacle. No clearer indicator is needed to conclude of the need of proper scholarship policy for gifted, determined, but not financially viable cases. What is also really interesting is the fact that only those inclining to engineering schools have already been chosen very school they would like to go to, what says something about personalities of such students.

Painful dilemma of school choice: state-funded or private - still favours government sponsored education. This may be due to at least four factors: social pressure (media generated image of government sponsored education), real cases of academic misbehaviour within private sector, willing to get a job in government sector and realistic lack of high quality private schools in a certain academic sector. What strongly supports this is high regard to traditional values found for high school students in [Radoman, 2012]

The most warning finding stemming from this research is a strong opinion on major qualities of a planned universities: assurance of job within any kind of government sponsored company, enterprise, agency or administration makes certain university "the right choice". Reasons for this surprisingly conservative stance are the attractive field of research per se, but we can if nothing more to set a hypothesis of pseudo-conservative generation, defined as benefiting of all relevant information available world-wide, having access to modern ICT, having access to business incubators, start-up academies, free classes on starting own business, and still opting for security of government sector, not recognizing real personal value of university education. We find one possible explanation in the light of socio-economic transition phenomena in [Puzic and Bezinovic, 2011]

In the study of personal goals of the respondents, roughly 15% of them perceive financial success as a determinant of personal value. Another 15% are setting this treat as a second in line by importance. So only one third correlate financial success as a major personal goal.

Growing own family is a major personal goal for some of 40% of respondents, while only 4% are perceiving graduating from a distinguished university as a top personal goal.

More depressing, equal share of respondents (4%) socializing with wealthy and influential people is detected as a sign of personal success. Having a good job is seen as a top desirable trait for 10% of students, while some 5% are setting being a respected member of community as a major feature of the future self. We find in [Eccles and Wigfield, 2002] that defined and relatively stable system of value in the society will reflect individual preferences, what makes our conclusion even stronger.

What is really important is finding regarding fine distinctions. When two similar schools are contrasted as two last and only choices, a student will pick simply better school (disregarding distinctions easy/hard, government/private). This gives us some hint that quality of education (with the whole set of elements comprising it) may be the major treat of present schools that should be worked in to make present school more attractive to neo-conservative youth. Insufficient activity of high schools in the field of modelling a value system poses another problem, as supported in [Stevanovic et al., 2009]

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