

## Motivation for learning and choosing a professional field among students at Faculty of Economics in Trakia University

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### Abstract

*Motivation plays an important role in the development of the individual and the society and has an impact in every area of modern life. Research on the influence of motivation and the achievement of educational goals dates back decades and is based on basic theories in psychology and behavioral sciences. Creating an appropriate learning environment tailored to the learners' needs and requirements, applying innovative educational methods, competitiveness stimulates learners and strengthens their motivation to express and acquire basic skills suitable for their professional realization. The main goal of the present work is to determine the main factors for choosing a professional field and achieving better motivation for learning and acquiring professional skills and competencies in economics. A survey is conducted among students from the Faculty of Economics at Trakia University, Bulgaria, which provides feedback on their opinion and the need for transformation in learning environment in order to meet the students' needs.*

**Keywords:** Motivation, Education, Learning environment, Professional competences

### 1 Introduction

In the modern digital society, particularly in the field of education, the low students' motivation for learning is more and more tangible. Increasingly, the teacher faces the problem of learners' indifference or confidence that everything can be read on the Internet and there is no need for all these lessons and tasks. It is an indisputable fact that there is a strong relationship between motivation for learning and the achievement of educational goals at each stage - from schools to universities and then in the workplace. This raises the need to find those key factors that would increase the motivation to learn and to acquire professional realization in a chosen specialty. When a person knows what he wants, he will find ways to achieve it and to develop himself.

#### 1.1 Motivation theories

For decades, many scientists have studied motivation, and as a result, different points of view have been presented, shaped into variety of theories. Some of these theories as well as basic terms in this area are synthesized by Stirling (Stirling, 2014).

Motivation is a driving force, which is mainly divided into intrinsic (internal) and extrinsic (external). Intrinsic motivation is this one that comes from the individual and is not influenced by external incentives, while concerning extrinsic motivation, factors that are external to the learner (such as grades, rewards or potential benefits), affect his behavior and way of acting. Quite often these actions are not pleasant and interesting, unlike those that provoke intrinsic motivation and the learner enjoys performing them.

Other terms introduced by Murphy and Alexander's analysis are goal, interest, and self-schema (Murphy and Alexander, 2000). Based on their research, they believe that motivation is a state of mind in a specific context or within a specific domain, rather than a personality trait, and in Maslow's theory, behavior is determined by various factors, where one of them is motivation and the others factors are environmental forces. In this case, if the motivation is determined by the

specific situation, then it is possible to build an educational environment that motivates students to learn (Maslow, 1987).

### 1.2 Motivation in education

According to (Tohidi and Jabbari, 2012), motivation in education can have a positive impact on the way students behave towards subjects and disciplines and their actions to achieve certain goals. It can increase initiative and perseverance in activities, improve cognitive processing, help determine consistency that increases motivation and improves performance.

This is a challenge for educational institutions and teachers, who should transform the system, curricula and learning materials so that young people become more motivated, continuing to improve themselves and acquire the necessary knowledge and competencies.

One of the external factors that influence motivation is the rewards or grades in the educational process. It has been studied that when they have a controlling effect, intrinsic motivation is transformed into extrinsic and learners begin to choose the easiest way to receive a grade or reward.

The problem with assessment is that it does not always give a real feedback of the learners' progress and distorts the focus on the reward rather than the motivation to learn. Studies show that the same task can be assessed with different grades when it is submitted at different times or if it is assessed by different teachers. In this case a positive effect on the motivation could be the constant support from the teacher and the comments on the assignments in order to make learners feel more engaged in the process

The intrinsic desire to learn, according to the Self-Determination Theory, is stimulated by the basic psychological needs for autonomy, competence and relatedness (Stirling, 2014; Tranquillo and Stecker, 2016).

The study of motivation for learning and choice of professional development among students aims to identify the main factors and educational methods that have a stimulating effect on achieving the main educational goals.

## 2 Educational environment at Trakia university and motivation

Technologies are useless if they are not combined and integrated with appropriate teaching methods. Therefore, building an educational environment that motivates students is essential.

Trakia university has been using an e-learning platform since 2004, but in 2013 the platform was expanded and became official for the whole university. It is based on LMS Moodle where pedagogical principles and teaching strategies are well designed and performed. The integration of different modules aims to provide the necessary educational environment that motivates students and creates long-lasting interest in the relevant disciplines. There are elements of gamification, activities for individual and group work, personal learning path and conditional activities, tools for communication and many more. All the teachers and students from all faculties in the university took the advantages of online learning during the pandemic situation COVID-19.

Yordanova (Yordanova, 2017) explores the possibilities of the Moodle environment and describes the use of different modules and strategies for their application so that they cover the six principles to increase motivation to learn: **positive attitude, pleasure and joy, sense of significance, success, personal benefit, clarity**. Her examples could be an inspiration for other teachers and could give them ideas how to implement these modules in order to increase students' motivation and achieve better learning results.

## 3 Research questions and principles for motivation in education

The issue of motivation is discussed by other teachers and researchers who study the factors influencing the choice of profession and the elements of the educational environment that motivates them to study (Ilcheva and Dimitrov, 2012; Proshenska et al, 2017).

The survey, conducted among the students from the Faculty of Economics, includes issues related to the basic principles for building training programs and guaranteeing the quality of the training process. Some of the principles that need to be implemented to motivate students to learn and included in the survey are:

- Trainees must be motivated to actively participate in the learning process and to learn;
- Using new interactive methods to put the learner at the center of the learning process ensures active participation;
- Receiving feedback on how well they have mastered the material and coped with the relevant tasks. This motivates learners because it stimulates their effort and work. The relationship between the teacher and the learner has a beneficial effect on the effectiveness of the process;
- Well-structured teaching material, without ambiguities and contradictions;
- Conducting systematic repetitions and doing practical tasks contributes to maintaining motivation in learners;
- Practical applicability of the study material;
- The content of the study material and curricula should be in accordance with the individual characteristics of the learners (gender, age, qualification, position, learning style, etc.).

#### 4 Results and discussion

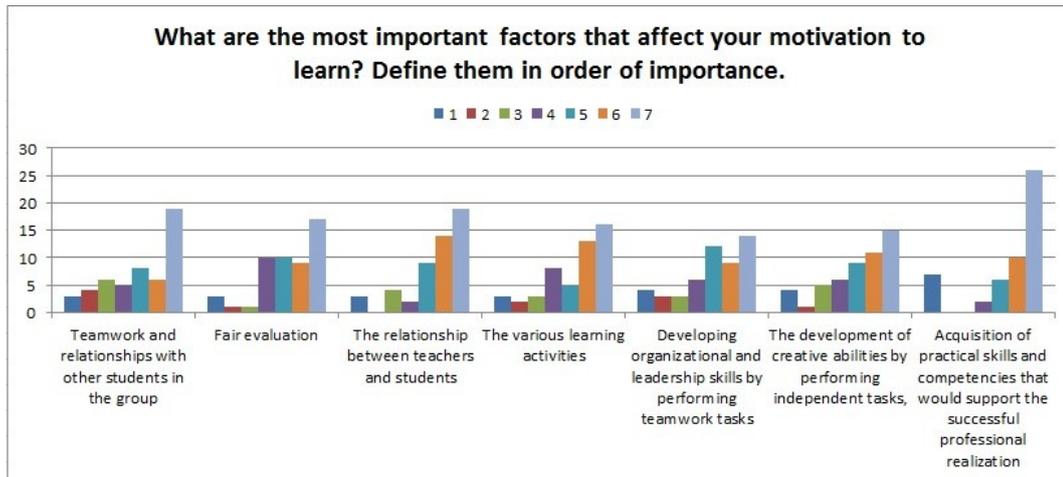
The aim of the study is to identify the factors that influence the motivation for learning and professional training among students at the Faculty of Economics in Trakia university, Bulgaria. The survey was conducted in June 2019 with part-time students and during winter semester 2019 with full-time students. There are 51 respondents that took part in the survey.

The first research question determines the reasons people decide to continue their education. The results indicate that 44 (86.27%) of the respondents have decided to continue their education at a higher education institution in order to acquire new knowledge and skills. Factors such as receiving a higher salary and greater self-confidence and prestige remain in the background by 17 (33.33%) and 22 (43.14%), respectively.

There is a balance between the expectations of the learners regarding the acquisition of theoretical knowledge 34 (66.67%) and practical skills 34 (66.67%), as well as the subsequent successful realization - 32 (62.75%). Expectations for contacts with business during the training are almost twice less -18 (35.29%). Only 1 of the respondents indicated the expectation to include businessmen from practice as teachers.

Among the factors that most influence the students' motivation, are presented in Figure 1:

- Acquisition of practical skills and competencies that would support the successful professional realization;
- Teamwork and relationships with other students in the group;
- The relationship between teachers and students;
- Fair evaluation;
- The various learning activities;
- Developing organizational and leadership skills by performing teamwork tasks;
- The development of creative abilities by performing independent tasks.

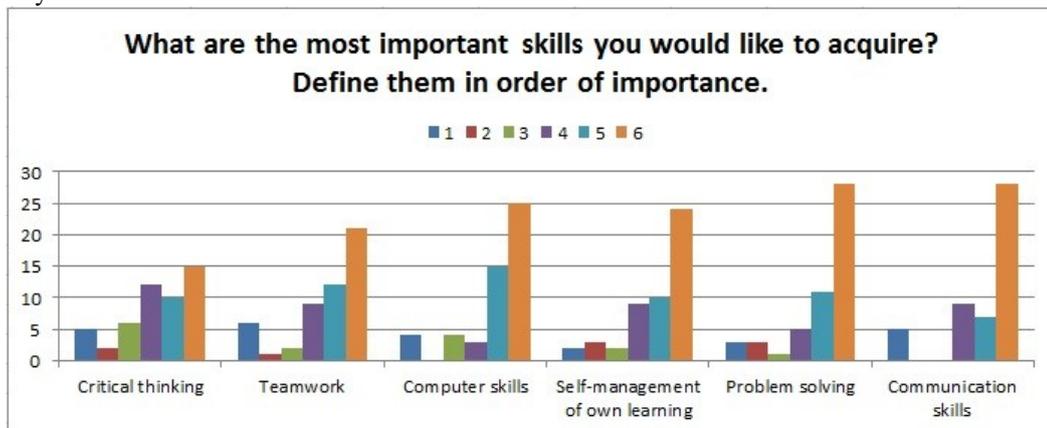


“Figure 1. The most important factors that affect motivation to learn”

According to the answers of the students shown on Figure 2., the skills they want to acquire during their studies, are ranked as follows:

- Problem solving;
- Communication skills;
- Computer skills;
- Self-management of own learning;
- Teamwork;
- Critical thinking.

These students’ expectations lead to the conclusion that applied forms of training should be based on problem solving and case studies, use of informal forms of teaching, placing the learner at the center of training and assigning new roles that involve high degree of commitment and responsibility for own learning. There is less emphasis on teamwork and critical thinking, which requires a focus on presenting these two competencies that are considered basic in the 21st century.



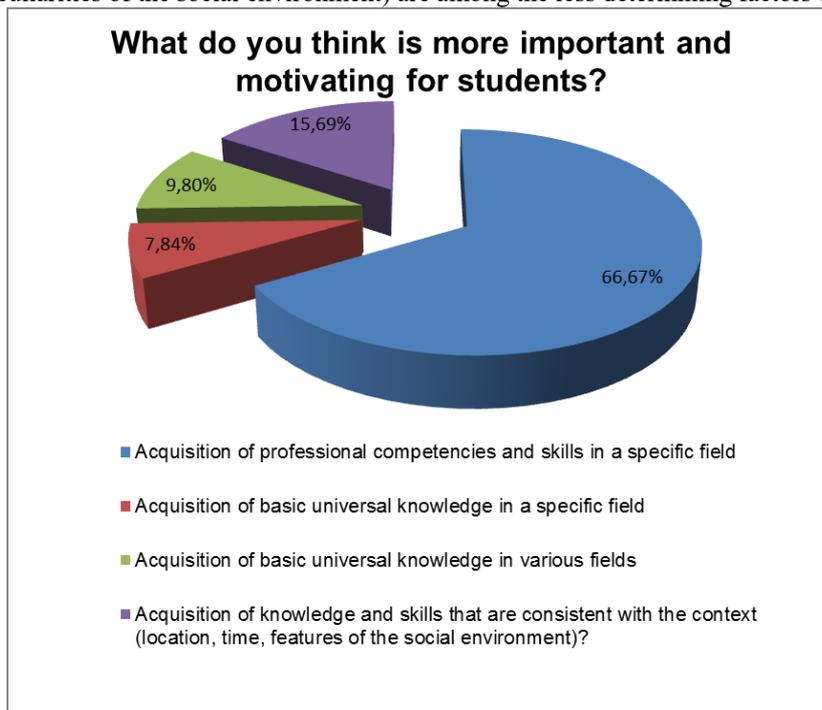
“Figure 2. The most important skills for acquiring”

Competition at the university is a determining factor on the motivation for learning of 52.94% of the respondents. For 43.14% of them, their motivation to learn is not influenced by external factors (such as competition between students), which puts teachers in the difficult task of

motivating students through various learning activities and content to actively participate in the learning process and complete their education.

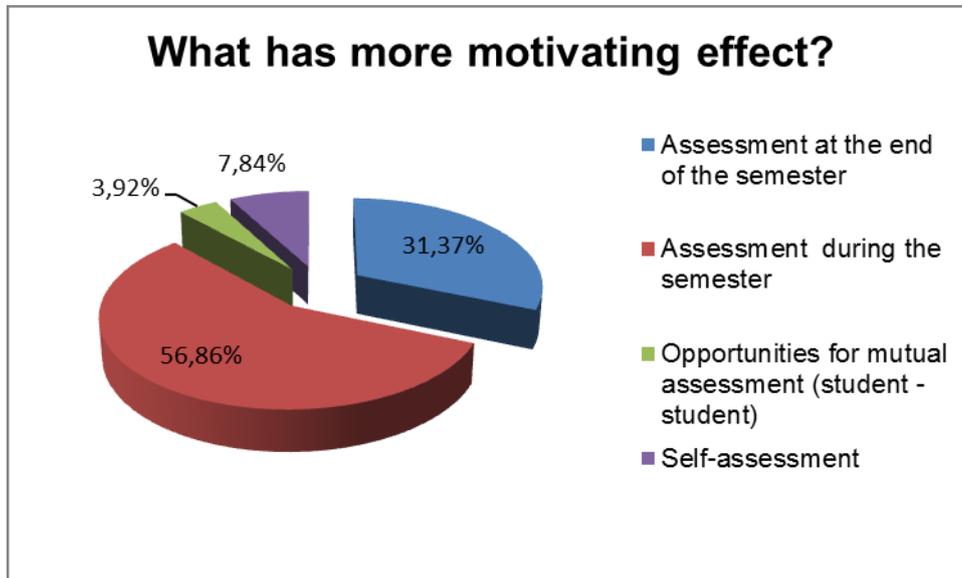
The opportunity to receive additional help from teachers in terms of preparation is one of the leading factors that keep students at the university – 29 (56.86%). Opportunity for change in a positive direction exists with regard to the application of innovative teaching methods, as there is a relatively low percentage -20 (39.22%). The result is an indication that innovative forms of learning process are still not considered as a factor that can affect the motivation to continue learning.

According to 66.67% of students more important and motivating for them is to acquire professional competencies and skills in a particular field, while the acquisition of basic universal knowledge in various fields or knowledge and skills that are relevant to the context (location, time, peculiarities of the social environment) are among the less determining factors of motivation.



*“Figure 3. Motivation and acquisition of professional skills and competences”*

Assessment of knowledge and skills also has its motivating effect as the results show that 31.37% of students prefer the traditional assessment of knowledge and skills at the end of the semester (Figure 4.). For 56.86% the assessment of knowledge and skills during the semester is highly motivating and only 11.76% believe that opportunities for mutual assessment (student - student) and self-assessment can have a positive effect on motivation to learn. This result corresponds to the low percentage of students who want to acquire teamwork and critical thinking skills during their studies.



*“Figure 4. Motivation and assessment”*

It is encouraging that the majority of respondents believe that after graduating from university they should continue to acquire new knowledge and competencies mainly through participation in qualification courses organized by educational institutions (70.59%) and non-formal forms of education - courses, offered by non-educational institutions (43.14%). This result shows that students are aware of the need for lifelong learning, which is largely realized through various innovative forms for online and distance learning, possessing opportunities to combine work and study.

## 5 Conclusions

The main role of educational institutions such as universities is to provide knowledge and train good professionals in different professional fields. The learning process is mutual and cannot be done unilaterally, and the choice of specialty is determined by various factors - desire for realization, social status, location of the university, etc.

In order to attract students and achieve good educational results, it is important to create a good motivating learning environment, because motivation is the first step to success.

According to a study conducted among students from the Faculty of Economics at Trakia university, the main reason for continuing education is the **desire to acquire new knowledge and skills for professional realization**.

The **competitive environment** and the **need to acquire more practical skills in the specific professional field** are important for students' motivation. Learners prefer application of **innovative teaching methods**, combining theory and practice that teach them how to deal with real situations. The **ability to work in groups and incorporate collaborative technologies** would improve their communication and computer skills.

**Fair assessment during the semester** is another factor that increases the motivation to learn, as well as the **relationship between students and teachers**. The various learning activities, individual and group assignments create organizational and leadership skills.

The main role of teachers is to transform and flip the traditional classroom model, creating learning resources that put the learners at the center of learning process and give them opportunities to manage their own learning. Using tools that are familiar and close to the new

digital generation of learners will place them in an environment they are used to and can easily handle. The Moodle platform used for e-learning in Trakia university is an option, offering various digital learning resources and activities that support gamification and enables personalized learning paths tailored to the students' needs.

Achieving the set learning goals is a stimulating factor and increases the motivation for work and study not only for the students, but also for their teachers. This requires constant communication and receiving feedback during the learning process in order to improve it when needed..

The pandemic situation COVID-19 has put the educational system in Bulgaria to the test and now all participants are better prepared and more experienced, ready for new challenges. The research will help the academic staff of Faculty of Economics to increase the students' motivation for learning and to prepare specialists with the skills of 21st century.

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