

WHO IS GUILTY THAT I FAIL IN CLASSROOM: STUDENTS' PERSPECTIVE ON HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract. *Societal changes, widening gap between generations influences teaching in higher education and student-teacher relationship. These transformations urge higher education institutions to prepare their teachers for the pedagogical work in new conditions and there are plenty of discussions reconsidering previously used approaches and pedagogy. Consequently, the focus has been shifted to empower students to take charge of their own learning and abundance of innovative teaching methods has been introduced both with and without integration of technological tools. However, the study results frequently present the universities still do not cope with the increasing speed of changes in students' behaviour, attitude and knowledge challenges understanding the specifics and needs of the age group. Previous studies argue that Latvian tourism educators do not handle this challenge too well as tourism industry representatives report on decreasing level of knowledge and poor work ethics of students. The aim of this research is to explore motivation and attitude of tourism students towards studies in higher education institutions in Latvia. The study is based on focus group discussions and explores dominating factors affecting students' attitude and motivation towards study process. Data was analyzed by using the method of content analysis and results varies among students of different study years. In general, the role of bachelor studies in students' life varies from high priority till secondary. A majority of students refers to extrinsic motivators as defining factors that make them to invest effort in studies. Consequently, students are more critical regarding teachers' performance than their own and do not always see a direct link between their efforts and study outcome. They prefer to avoid complicated study topics and uncertainties in study process.*

Keywords: *intrinsic motivation, extrinsic motivation, undergraduate students, study content, study motivation, teacher.*

Introduction

Today's students are active learners rather than spectators (Scott, 2015); however, Saavedra and Opfer (2012) claims that lecture model through which teachers transmit factual knowledge still prevails as the dominant instructional approach in education throughout much of the world. This approach typically

leads to indifference, apathy and for most learners, boredom. (Scott, 2015) Challenges related to student motivation in study process is much discussed and not unique problem specific only in some countries and higher education students in Latvia is not an exception where teachers and later employers are concerned how to light a sparkle in the eyes of student or young employee.

For longer time Latvian higher education system has been criticized for not providing education according to the labour market needs of state and global economic and social development trends. A fragmented network of higher education institutions (HEI) suffers from shortage of financing, decreasing overall number of students and as result universities face a stiff competition to attract students, it also challenges the level of study quality. Additionally, higher education study places are not fully doted by the state budget and is not accessible for everyone (Saeima of the Republic of Latvia, 2014). These are only few problems related to the HEI in Latvia, consequently, the image of Latvian higher education system is not enough attractive.

Motivation of undergraduate students in Latvian HEI has been researched before - students` motivation in specific universities (Baldiņš & Raževa, 2014), online and on-site motivation of students in different disciplines such as medicine (Druvmale - Druvleja et al., 2014), information technologies (Gribanova & Abeltina, 2018), etc. Several theme related PhD thesis have been produced such as Kraģe`s (2013) research that explores the role of university culture on professional motivation of pedagogy students. Recently research about student engaging study methods has been done in University of Latvia within “Erasmus +” co-financed project “Entrance to future education” (Paegle, 2018).

Overall there are few studies related to motivation of undergraduate students in Latvian universities; however, the publications give rather fragmented look to student motivation and many Latvian HEI struggle to attract students and exploration of student motivation might have potential to improve the content and organization of the studies, thus promoting the competitiveness of HEI. Additionally, generational change and technological development add some extra pressure to teachers how to balance and transform existing framework of higher education according to the needs of younger generation and labour market and global development trends.

The research aim is to explore motivation and attitude of tourism students towards studies in higher education institutions in Latvia. Research is based on qualitative data from three focus group discussions and five semi structured interviews exploring factors impacting students` motivation such as the role of student, teacher, study content and methods, study environment. Data was analysed by using the method of qualitative content analysis.

Research limitation is the selection of focus group participants because attendance was voluntary and it is likely that those students who participated in

the discussion are more motivated in studies once they choose deliberately to devote time to express their opinion on the issue. The second research limitation is related to the possibility that participants might express socially desirable opinions. Additionally, five semi-structured interviews were conducted by students interviewing other students to make sure that the presence of teachers in FGD has not provoked giving socially desirable answers.

A review of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation in the context of Y and Z generations

The researchers of educational issues recognize that motivation as one of the most significant components in student learning in any environment (Covington, 2000; Firat, Kılınc, & Yüzer, 2018). Motivation is composed by intrinsic and extrinsic elements. Stirling (2013) definition of intrinsic motivation refers to behaviour that is driven by internal rewards.

Intrinsic motivation from students' perspective is enjoyment of learning, and performance of activities for their own sake, in which pleasure is inherent in the activity itself. Specifically, intrinsically motivated student work is characterized by an orientation toward mastery; curiosity; persistence; task-endogeny; and the learning of challenging, difficult, and novel tasks (Thoonen, Slegers, Peetsma, & Oort, 2010). Intrinsic motivation is based on psychological need satisfaction as autonomy, competence support and relatedness in both aspects - environment and relationship (Reeve, 2015). However, rapid decline of intrinsic motivation is observed while entering early adulthood (Kyndt, Coertjens, & Van Daal, 2015).

On contrary, extrinsic motivation is based on offer of benefits in terms of perceived potential outcome, providing incentive to engage in action which may not be inherently pleasing, in some cases it includes avoidance of punishment (Deci & Ryan, 2010). The examples of extrinsic motivation factors referred to the study process are finance related (rewards, scholarships), grades, fame, individuals (parents, teachers etc.).

Several studies indicate that motivational autonomy of students grow over the courses (motivation that is based mostly on intrinsic factors); however, diverse motivations exist and audience cannot be considered homogenic as some decades ago (Gonzalez, Paoloni, Donolo, & Rinaudo, 2012; Araujo Leal, Miranda, & Souza Carmo, 2012).

A teacher's performance in the classroom is challenged by the generational change of audience. Generation is a group of people that fits within a certain range of ages, location they live, and significant life events they have experienced at critical developmental stages (Yusoff & Kian, 2013). The majority of contemporary audience is composed by so called generations Y and Z who were born between 1980 and 2000. This group expects a lot of personal attention,

frequently they have high demands regarding HEI performance. They are masters in technology utilization living in digital ecosystems, family oriented, confident and ambitious team players, however they want to be motivated by the fact that they will have a pleasure in the life (Kane, 2017; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015; Randstad, 2017; Stanimir, 2015). Few sources also mention liberal, open-minded attitude, permanent access to the choice, and the fact that universal and specific ethical norms are not binding for the new generation, they are poorly equipped with the emotional quotient (Parment, 2013; Pew Research Centre, 2014; Stewart, Goad Oliver, Cravens, & Shigeiro, 2017; Randstad, 2017).

Karakas, Manisaligil, & Sarigollu (2015) indicate that during the learning process new generation may face three major problems such as lack of concentration, lack of engagement, and lack of socialization (Karakas et al., 2015). Also request of detailed guiding from superiors during learning process could lead to disability of critical thinking and decision making (Gursoy, Maier, & Chi, 2008).

Whereas learning and educating is a personal activity, its effectiveness is dependent on appropriate, adequate, reliable and attractive learning conditions (Althunibat, 2015). In all cultures, learning has always been the most important one and different teaching methods have been determined according to social behaviour, expectations and values (Crompton, 2013).

Initial recognition of the different needs of the new generation, led some researchers to argue that generations Y and Z do not have the right set the rules and behaviours due to education (Arum & Roksa, 2011). On the contrary, other research findings suggest that education has to adapt itself to the lifestyle of the new generation since they are the generation that will be entering higher education and workforce in the next two decades (Conklin, 2012; Thompson & Gregory, 2012). Mentorship, on-job learning or professional, career based education, collaborative environment supported by creative space concept are considered to be positive approaches to study process from the perspective of the Y generation, also letting them see the bigger purpose (Schroeder, 2018; Deloitte, 2016).

Both education clients and employers request more student-centred pedagogy which will equip learners with knowledge of subject and, simultaneously, will develop their generic skills such as collaboration, critical thinking, information technology (IT), problem solving, self-management, and self-study skills that would enhance students` ability to become lifelong learners (Ng, Yuen, & Leung, 2013; Hsieh & Tsai, 2017). Vogt & Rogalla, (2009) remind that professors who know their students better (have had longer mutual contact, have been motivated to obtain certain information) are more likely to make their instructional decisions in a meaningful and relevant way to develop competences. However, nowadays courses are often implemented in the framework of short term projects, also by using e-learning system with a reduced/limited contact, or

by involving industry professionals to cover specific topics, or courses are taught by several teachers thus limiting face to face contact and knowledge on specific needs of audience.

We have to emphasize also contextual aspects such as, marketization of higher education that enables public enterprises and institutions to operate more like business-oriented firms through application of private sector management practices and funding schemes emphasising market behaviour (Dovemark et al., 2018). The simple example are tuition fees which determine that client (student) would look for value for money also dictating the rules of the environment and content.

Research methodology

The research data was acquired during three focus group discussions (FGD) which took place in November and December, 2018. The participants were 2nd - 4th year bachelor level tourism students (N=16). Sizes of the focus groups varied from 4-8 students in a group and each discussion lasted at least 90 minutes. FGD explored students' opinion on five factors impacting their motivation and engagement in relation to study process: student, teacher, environment, content and teaching methods. According to Williams & Williams (2011) these are key ingredients of students' motivation. The first set of questions invited students to describe themselves as students and their individual efforts in the study process. Next participants were asked to discuss different aspects of study process including teachers' performance, study content, applied study methods. Students were also required to comment on environment related factors impacting their study motivation and performance. Finally, students were asked to express their opinion on their readiness and motivation to participate in the development of study courses.

Additionally, five semi-structured interviews were conducted by students interviewing other students to make sure that the presence of teachers in FGD has not influenced the outcome significantly. Interviewers were given a set of questions, similar as the questions discussed in FGD. Interviews were hold in October, 2018 and lasted approximately 45 minutes - 60 minutes each. The informants were allowed to keep their anonymity to make sure that students have openly expressed their views. These data were afterwards compared to the FGD data. All interviews and FGD were audio recorded and afterwards transcribed.

The data were analysed by using qualitative content. According to K.Krippendorf (2013), content analysis is a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the contexts of their use. The texts were studied carefully several times to acquire a sense of the whole and broken down into units - phrases and sentences related explaining the barriers and

promoters of motivation. They described factors impacting both the intrinsic motivation of students and extrinsic motivation generated by teacher, environment, study content and teaching methods. The aim of categorizing the data was to understand the role of each element in the process of forming student motivation. The list of factors in each category was defined according to the approach by Williams & Williams (2011). The credibility of data categorisation was explored by member checking.

Research results

At the beginning of the FGD students were asked about the role of the university in their lives and for majority of the students HEI related matters are not the top priority - university definitely is less important than family, frequently also less significant as work or hobbies or social activities. Only few students report that during working days they consider university their utmost priority and studies-unrelated activities have been limited.

The motivation and engagement of **students** in the study process are defined both by intrinsic and extrinsic factors as well as by a variety of individual and social factors, hierarchy of needs, perceived wellbeing and other aspects. (Williams & Williams, 2011). The data reveals domination of extrinsic motivation among tourism students as FGD participants clearly defined their need to receive rewards, avoidance to disappoint family members, as well as highlighted the significance to earn state financed budget place as significant drivers. FGD participants rarely have decided on their major study subject - tourism as result of an intentional and very considerate choice of study subject, rather the choice has been defined by a chance or distance till university. Additionally, several students doubted the value of higher education as such, its significance for the person`s future employment. Personal interest in specific study subjects is dominating intrinsic motive as a majority of students states they choose to focus on learning only if there is personal interest in the subject no matter how well teacher does the job. It is illustrated by the quote below: *“If am not interested in statistics, then teacher can be wearing the costume of a clown. I am not interested.”*

FGD participants are concerned about their wellbeing in university, according to Williams & Williams (2011) it refers to quality and meaningfully spent time in university and a majority of student`s asses` quality and meaningfulness not only in terms of new knowledge and skills, but even more - in terms of entertainment and personal interests. The content is less significant the form used to deliver the content. However, none of above mentioned guarantees the result according to the interviewed students:

“We often demand exciting lectures with high level of engagement, and we can see a professor tries to do so, but anyway we choose to be passive.”

Students` perception of their wellbeing as the motive for engagement in studies is strongly related to the workload and as they prefer smaller amount of works and considers too much effort hinders their engagement in other study courses.

Very significant for students are organizational aspects of lectures and courses in general. In fact, the role of organization frequently defines students` motivation to engage in the course even more than content and teacher`s performance. Williams & Williams (2011) points out to the hierarchy of needs.

Psychological aspects such as having feeling of security impact motivation to engage in study process - student activity by involving in discussions, expressing opinions and taking responsibilities. Some students report they experience fears to give their opinion in public, also to responsibility over group works, sometimes even to present which might be related to personal self-esteem. Students report that secure environment constructed by both - supportive classmates and understanding teacher is precondition to engage in study process. Another way how students express their need for secure environment is uncertainty avoidance - they prefer very structured approach to study process and lectures over flexible and creative approach that might bring some unexpected surprises. The quote below illustrates student`s explanation why structured approach is more preferable: *“I prefer explicit instructions defined by a professor, templates, to fill in. Than an assignment is understandable, but if you have to think and decide on your own... I had a real problem to choose the topic for both of my annual research projects. I had no idea and it made me feel very stressed!”*

Students are not in agreement what is the role of teacher`s feedback in the context of motivation. Few students report that critic as such is demotivational while others refer to the teacher`s critical feedback as mandatory element in the process of development. A majority of those admitting critique is needed prefer structured and often very detailed feedback.

All FGD participants emphasized **educator`s** personality, pedagogic talent and expertise as important factor of motivation. Results reveal that teaching (pedagogic) competences often mixed with personality features dominate over the teacher's knowledge and specific study content. A good professor among FGD participants has been characterized by pedagogical charisma, capacity to attract and keep attention, good sense of humour and skills of storytelling. The quote below describes student`s perception how good teachers should work: *“I do remember that in the 1st study semester a professor showed us pictures how he drinks the blood of snakes. This is the story! I was very keen to attend these lectures!”*

Expectations of good relationship between teacher and students are high. Students would like their teachers to be friendly, non-discriminatory, empathic. According to the quote below, some students expect very egalitarian relationship:

“Professor has to be one of us, must be understanding. The one is like your buddy - when you meet one on the street you shake hands, chat a bit.”

Student’s request of “being treated as a customer” includes personalized attitude, fast communication, empathy, approachability, engagement. Students are more motivated by teachers who share personal, relevant experiences. Technological capacity of teacher should be high even in level that the one could encourage students to embrace technologies. Regards organizational capacities students expect flexibility regards special assignments and schedule development when needed, also in case of more in-class work that has to be interesting and entertaining.

There were several comments about **study environment**. Majority of informants emphasized that they are motivated to be active and contributing study process participants if the environment is secure, emotionally literate and engaging, pointing out role of the course mates and educator’s attitude. FGD participants from the older courses indicated that experience of work and studies, internship abroad works as a catalyst in development of motivational autonomy. Besides, organizational aspects of study course and process - as clear (non-changing) syllabus with detailed descriptions of assignments and evaluation system, timely transferred information were mentioned by all participants. Part of informants mentioned obtaining and sustaining paid study place as a motivational factor. Some stressed role of family, but more in terms - that they would not like to disappoint their closer private circle of persons by showing bad results. “I still do have a question, why I have got exactly that mark in my annual thesis. Yes, you have the review during presentation of work, but this should be more specific, indication - what exactly I should improve in order to get maximum.” (4th year student)

Regards questions about the **teaching content** there were minimal specific remarks, continuously educators’ personality features and teaching style and study process organization were mentioned. Also, students claim of the ownership in study to some extent, as participation on decision making about the content and organization, group division. FGD participants emphasized that their comments should be considered as important matter to enhance the study process. However, students indicated some preferences directly related to the content. For example, that competence building should happen by usage of real life products and situations and applicable content and it must be relevant to their future profession. Despite understanding, that creativity and critical thinking skills are highly demanded in labour market (World Economic Forum, 2018), attitudes from the students towards creative tasks were conflicting. However, guest lectures who would bring different perspectives to the subject, share personal stories and add “professional’s truth” are appreciated, the content, visual representation and, also, integration of video, audio and IT technologies should be relevant to the topic.

As motivational **teaching methods** increasing students' engagement from point of view of FGD participants are experiential learning, integration of applied tasks, seminars and workshops, usage of ITC, study excursions and field trips. Majority emphasized balanced group and individual works, however some stressed that students are forced to work in groups more often than they have an opportunity to develop their individual knowledge, skills, capacity. Some informants stressed the role of rewards (even monetary) besides mark and traditional evaluation.

Conclusive discussion

Overall data overlaps with previous studies researching student motivation and the study behaviour of young people. The students are motivated by the usage of communication technologies in study process (Kane, 2017; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015; Randstad, 2017), they prefer *technology framed* teaching no matter what is taught. Similarly, the majority of students is demanding towards HEI and teachers; however, there are differences among students if they demand from both - from themselves and teachers or only from teachers or themselves. A high level of demands towards teacher and no demands towards himself/herself is frequently expressed by students who do not perceive teacher as a authority but rather "a buddy" (Kane, 2017). Data also allows to conclude that students being more demanding towards teachers demonstrate more ambitions regarding how they want to be treated by teachers and employers.

Previous studies claim students from Y and Z generations are good team players (Kane, 2017; Ozkan & Solmaz, 2015; Randstad, 2017). This study did not focus exactly on exploration of their behaviour in teams; however, students commented group work as study method. Although, participants do not deny the significance of group work, the individual work is preference mostly because they frequently find it hard to work together with somebody who is not willing to invest enough efforts to do the task. Consequently, students can be forced to do more than fair share of task or invest their time in motivating other teammates if they want to avoid low evaluation.

To sum up, students commented much less on actual content of the study courses or competencies they would like to gain, but rather focused on the organizational issues and packaging of study content (e.g. entertaining and interesting style of teaching) - how HEI could improve their wellbeing in university much more likeable thus increasing their engagement in learning. Research data confirmed findings of previous studies (Schroeder, 2018; Deloitte, 2016), that young generations are much more interested in active learning, hands-on learning and they expect from higher education that during studies they will be

introduced to different path of carrier in the industry, so that they can make well informed career decision.

Overall, on one hand it is understandable that students evaluate HEI performance from the perspective of the customer, on the other hand HEI are under pressure of the labour market and have to meet expectations of the potential employers as well as meet certain standards of quality in higher education. It might be for the first time when teachers have to adapt their teaching style to short living and changing interests of classroom audience. Students today are defined as active learners (Scott, 2015) and therefore educational system tends to empower students, also involve them in developing study courses. Research data claims today's students are active learners only if they interested into the subject and it shows another source of pressure of HEI and teacher - to involve participants that frequently do not want to be engaged.

Taking into account the context of Latvian higher education system, the focus group data presents that teachers have to deal with: diverse groups of students with very varied level of motivation to engage in study process, who want to say their word on study process; psychologically vulnerable students that need more structured way of studies; pressure to focus more on attractive teaching style rather than usability of content; demand to provide more detailed feedback and be quick in communication; changes of students` perception what is ethical behaviour in classroom, etc. It is challenging for teacher both psychologically and pedagogically and requests development of support systems in universities for both above mentioned aspects that could help all involved parties.

Overall students cannot be called homogenous audience and their perception who is bearing the main responsibility about their study performance and outcome differs - data shows the students are motivated both intrinsic and extrinsic factors. Majority of students intends to ease their workloads and cite they would choose investing of efforts into learning depending on their interest in topic or attraction; however, majority of the students are not ready to strengthen self-discipline and to find motivation when it is absent - more frequently students refer to poor performance of teaching style as source of non-existing drive for studies.

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