



THE ASSESSMENT OF STUDY CONDITIONS AND THE QUALITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION IN BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

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ABSTRACT

The paper analyzes the attitudes and opinions of the students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko and the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina about the conditions of study and the quality of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. The paper is based on the results of a survey of the attitudes and opinions of the students of these two faculties on the topic: Staying in or leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina. Data were obtained on the assessment of living and study conditions and the quality of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina, on students' expectations and plans after graduation, as well as their thoughts on staying in or leaving Bosnia and Herzegovina. In this paper, the focus is on the assessment of study conditions, the areas in which students are most interested during their studies, factors that influence the choice of faculty, the quality of higher education in BiH, the expectations of students after graduating from the faculty, as well as their plans to get a job or to continue their studies. The overall results, similarities and differences in the attitudes and opinions of students from these two faculties were analyzed, as well as the mutual conditioning of the attitudes and opinions of students and the attending faculty, respondents' gender or year of study.

The conclusion is that there are no significant differences regarding the attitudes and opinions of the students according to the mentioned characteristics, as well as their mutual conditioning.

The research results can be a good basis for future, broader and more comprehensive analyses, based on a large sample of students from universities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Introduction

This paper is the result of the research of attitudes and opinions of the students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko and the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina on the topic: Whether to stay or leave Bosnia and Herzegovina, which was published in the study of the same name about these two faculties. The research results are based on a random sample of 99 students from all years of first-cycle studies, of which 53 are from the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina and 46 from the Faculty of Economics Brčko. The used sample represents 15,5% of the total number of students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko and 16,1% of the total number of students of the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina.

The aim of the paper is to analyze in detail the data on the expressed satisfaction of students when it comes to the conditions of living in a local environment, study conditions and social life, as well as data on the assessment of the quality of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Furthermore, the aim is to analyze the data on the attitudes of students about their plans after graduation as well: whether they plan

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to seek employment or continue their education. If they plan to continue their studies, whether they are thinking of doing that at the faculties in Brčko and Bijeljina, or BiH or abroad.

In the conducted research, students replied to six questions concerning living conditions in a local environment, study conditions and the entire social life, as well as their view of the quality of education in Bosnia and Herzegovina. Students also responded to nine questions regarding their plans after graduation. The similarities and differences in the attitudes and opinions of students and the potential dependence of different modalities of the observed features were tested using appropriate methods of statistical analysis.

In processing and analysis of data and results of the research, the methods of descriptive statistical analysis and a chi-squared test were used, for researching interdependence of different modalities of two or more features, using the software intended for statistical analysis of data (IBM SPSS 26).

1. Literature review

Higher education studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina are organized in accordance with the Bologna declaration, which was signed in 2003, while its introduction and use started in the academic year of 2006/07. Organizational specificities of BiH are reflected in this sphere as well. Going from one to the other entity, district, Brčko, certain cantons in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and universities themselves, studies are organized according to various systems, taking into account the number of years during which they are realized (4+1, 3+2, 3+1, ili 4+2). This pluralism in the manner of conducting the Bologna declaration is a topic that demands special attention, bearing in mind that one of the main ideas of the abovementioned declaration - academic mobility of students and teaching staff, is highly questionable in this organization of studies.

In this paper, an attempt was made, among other things, to check what students think about study conditions and the quality of higher education in BiH, and how they cope in such an environment. Considering that there have been more than fifteen years since the beginning of the implementation of the Bologna process in higher education in BiH, we believe it is a sufficiently long period to sum up certain results.

The literature dealing with examining students' attitudes on study conditions and the quality of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina is scarce. The situation is somewhat different in the neighbouring countries. Namely, the significance of one such research has been recognized there.

When it comes to the motives for such research, it can be said that examining students' general attitude toward the quality of higher education is very significant at this moment, both due to rapid changes and the implementation of the current reform of higher education, as well (Koledin, 2011). Also, ideally, students should be asked about their opinion on education quality, and included in the application of quality assurance methods. Their attitudes should be taken seriously in the execution of the study program (Ivković, 2009). It is necessary to recognize the importance of shedding light on the attitudes of young adults about how active participants they are in a socially imposed process of institutional changes which greatly influence their higher education (Mojić, 2015). The fact that this is indeed a warning for the academic community, but also the entire country, is confirmed by the results (Stević et al., 2023) which have, among other things, shown that three quarters of the interviewed students from two faculties of economics have modest or no expectations after graduation.

In order to improve the quality of classes at universities, and with it the satisfaction of students, various research methods, techniques and instruments that contribute toward a better understanding of potential problems, difficulties and challenges that teachers and students face, ought to be applied. It could present a starting point for the paper about the advancement of the teaching process in higher education (Marković and Mamutović, 2022).

Dragun and Relja (2006), in their paper, want to determine students' expectations, wishes and motivation for possible inclusion of students in academic mobility programs, and examine potential obstacles to these activities. They consider mobility very important for the professional, scientific and personal development of students, and emphasize it as one of the most important goals of the Bologna process. Thus, the possibility of attaining quality education is increased, which again leads to an increase in employment opportunities. Namely, previous research on the problems of young adults indicates that they perceive unemployment as one of the most prominent problems.

An extensive analysis of satisfaction with education service and quality of studies, whereby current and former students have been interviewed, in the first place, the students of social-human and natural-technical sciences, in BA, MA and PhD studies, can be found in the paper Lungulov (2015).

As much as this measure could potentially cause certain dilemmas, we believe that increasing the quality of higher education also improves the satisfaction of end users. The aim of the professional function of a university is the essential preparation of students for appropriate professions. From the students' perspective, this is perhaps its most important role. Higher education faces the problem of how to change the teaching process, what to do to make classes at university a common research among students and teachers, whereby student satisfaction would also increase (Savićević, 2009). The production of new knowledge and education process, which are closely related, enable the enhancement of the quality of living as the first and main goal of every reasonable society (Tasić, 2017).

It is evident that we are in times of intensive globalization and major social-economic changes. Those processes do not certainly overlook universities themselves. By looking at the global trends of changes in the field of university education, one gets the impression that a process is at work which, through tectonic shifts, is evading the foundations of the university which have been formed for a long time, creating a new form, and giving it a completely new function. In the circumstances where universities are oriented towards market functioning, university education becomes nothing more than a product (Radinović, 2011).

The state is responsible for ensuring that the part of higher education it organizes, finances and implements, is as efficient as possible by lowering social costs which occur in the form of long periods of studying, uncoordinated flows of university graduates in the labour market, and very low employability of certain professions which are partly the consequence of uncoordinated admissions policy (Babić et al. 2006). In the same paper, the authors point out the quality of human potential as a very important factor in the quality of universities themselves, and that human potential certainly depends on the quality of education.

In this research, among other things, students also replied to the question: whether they plan to continue their studies and if the answer is affirmative, where they planned to do that. Almost a third of those who responded affirmatively, expressed their intention to continue their studies outside Bosnia and Herzegovina. Jovanović - Kranjec (2013) believes that one of the possible reasons is the availability of a considerable number of scholarships offered for the continuation of studies, both in the EU countries and in America (Erasmus Mundus, DAAD, Fulbright and others). The international market of higher education has been open for a long time and available to the students in our country.

2. Results and discussion

2.1. Students' satisfaction with study conditions

The research results show that most students, 44 of them, observed within the total number, that is, in both faculties, are "generally satisfied" and that percentage is 44,4%. The number of students who are "satisfied" with study conditions is 34, that is, 34,3%. It can be said that approximately 79% of students are satisfied with study conditions in a certain way, which makes the management of both faculties content. On the other hand, 19,2% of students are not happy with study conditions, while 2% of the interviewed do not have an opinion on this matter.

It is evident that the students of the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina are either "satisfied" or "generally satisfied" with study conditions in a large percentage, which amounts to about 89%. The students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko are also satisfied with study conditions in large numbers (around 68%), but still, certain differences between these two difficulties can be discerned. Due to the aforementioned differences, it has been checked whether they originate with regard to the place of studying, that is, faculty, the year of studies and student gender, i.e. if there is a connection between different modalities of the stated features. With the aim of making conclusions in relation to the aforementioned questions, a chi-squared test of feature independence, based on the analysis of a contingency table, was used.

It was primarily checked if there was a connection between the category "satisfaction with study conditions" and the category "the faculty the respondent is attending". Based on the results of the chi-squared test, which amounts to 7,453, p -value for three degrees of freedom was determined. Considering that p -value is 0,059, which is higher than the significance level of 0,05, it is concluded that the assumption that students' attitudes related to the satisfaction with study conditions and the faculty that respondents come from are independent categories, cannot be rejected. Based on this, it can be indirectly concluded that the students' attitudes in these two faculties do not differ considerably regarding their satisfaction with study conditions, regardless of the fact that they are evident in the sample. However, due to certain limitations in the application of a chi-square test in the concrete case, it can be stated that the presented

results are valid only at the level of the sample and that they cannot be generalized to all the students of these faculties.

Next, it was checked if there is a dependence between the category “satisfaction with study conditions” and the category “the year of studies that the respondent attends”. In the concrete case, it was not possible to use a chi-squared test, because as many as half the modalities of the observed features (eight out of sixteen in total) have a value less than five, which represents a limiting condition. The conclusion that can be drawn from the results is valid only at the level of the observed sample of students. However, the observed sample data, and the concrete test results obtained from them can be said not to have confirmed the existence of a connection between the observed categories, and the attitudes of the students did not differ significantly from the year of study they attended.

It was similarly examined whether there is a dependence between the category “satisfaction with study conditions” and the category “the gender of the respondent”. The result of the chi-squared test is 1,539, so p -value at the significance level of 0,05 and three degrees of freedom amounts to 0,673. With the previously stated reserves, it can be concluded that the connection between the observed categories is not statistically significant.

Regardless of all the limitations in the use of a chi-square test, it can be stated that the existence of the connection between the students’ opinions on satisfaction with study conditions was not confirmed neither with the place of study, nor the year of study, nor with their gender (Stević et al., 2023).

2.2. The assessment of the education system at a faculty

The students encompassed by the research mostly assess the education system at both faculties to be “too theoretical and monotonous”. 39,4% of students are of that opinion. The Faculty of Economics Brčko has a somewhat more favourable situation where that percentage is 37%, while at the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina, almost 41,5% of students chose this response. What is worrying is the fact that a considerable number of students, 21 of them (that is, 21,2%) categorized the education system at both faculties as “too traditional”. In this case, the Faculty of Economics Brčko is in a more disadvantageous situation with 30,4 respondents, while seven students from the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina chose this response, that is, 13,2% of them. Fewer students, 20 of them (i.e. 20,2%) think that the education system at both faculties is “modern”. Surprisingly, as many as 19,2% of students do not have an opinion on this question.

The overview of all the assessments is given in Table 1.

Table 1: The assessment of the education system at the Faculty of Economics Brčko (EFB) and the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina (FPE)

Assessment \ Faculty	EFB		FPE BIJELJINA		Total	
	Number	%	Number	%	Number	%
Modern	6	13,0	14	26,4	20	20,2
Too traditional	14	30,4	7	13,2	21	21,2
Too theoretical and monotonous	17	37,0	22	41,5	39	39,4
No opinion	9	19,6	10	18,9	19	19,2
Total	46	100,0	53	100,0	99	100,0

Source: author’s research.

The stated students’ opinions point to the need to take appropriate measures relating to the modernization of the education system, both when it comes to more quality study programs, and on the matter of the introduction of practical teaching methods (Stević et al., 2023).

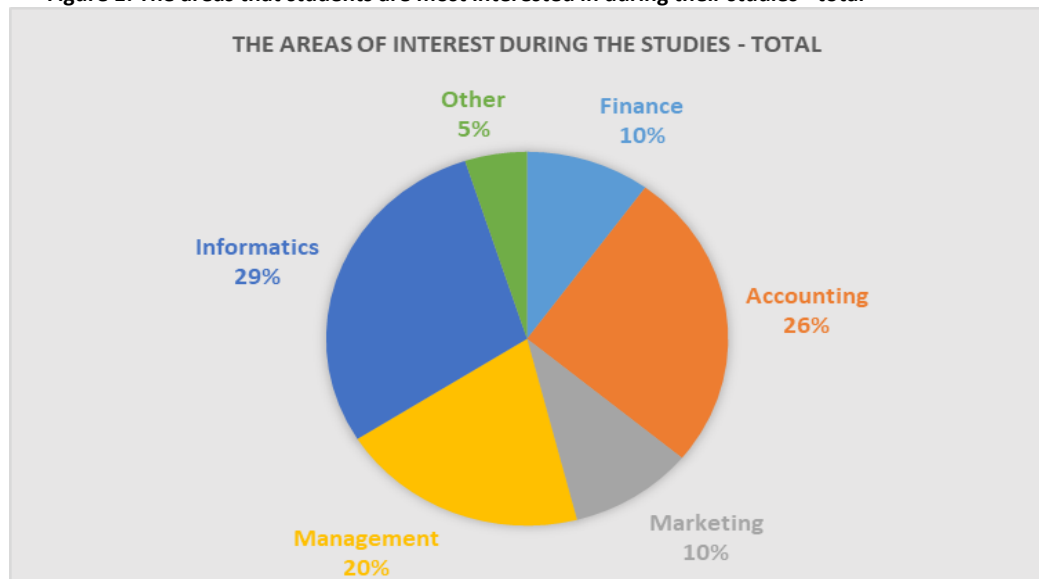
2.3. The areas that students are most interested in during their studies

The interest of students in certain scientific fields during their studies was determined through a questionnaire question whose offered responses ranged from the field of finance, accounting, marketing and management, to informatics. It is not surprising that informatics is the area that attracts students' attention the most nowadays and in its total number, that is, by observing the entire sample, this area dominates with as much as 28,3%. By observing the faculties individually, it is perceived that most respondents at the Faculty of Business Economy Bijeljina, 16 of them (i.e. 30,2%) chose precisely the area of informatics as the subject of greatest interest. Such a result is also justified by the fact that there is a major in Business informatics at this faculty. On the other hand, at the Faculty of Economics Brčko, the field of accounting attracted the most attention with 32,6% of respondents.

The least total interest of students is in the area of marketing (10%) and finance (10%). The students from the Faculty of Business Economy Bijeljina listed management (22,6%) as the second area of interest, then accounting (20,8%), finance (11,3%) and marketing (9,4%). The situation is somewhat different at the Faculty of Economics Brčko, where informatics (26,1%) was chosen as the second area of interest, then management (17,4%), marketing (10,9%) and finance (8,7%).

A graphical representation of the given data can be observed in Figure 1 (Stević et al., 2023).

Figure 1: The areas that students are most interested in during their studies - total



Source: author's research.

2.4. Students' satisfaction with social life

Based on the available data on the response to the question of how satisfied the students are with social life, it can be concluded that most respondents are "generally satisfied", 42 of them, which represents 42,4% of the total number. Slightly fewer students are "satisfied" with social life in the percentage of 38,4%. Only 16,2% of respondents are "dissatisfied" with social life, and 3% of respondents have no opinion on the matter. It is evident that approximately 81% of students believe that they have a quality social life, which is especially emphasized by the students of the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina, where this percentage amounts to about 85%. The students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko are also largely "satisfied" or "generally satisfied" with social life (around 76%), but the percentage of "dissatisfied" is more pronounced compared to the students from Bijeljina and it is 23,9% (Stević et al., 2023).

2.5. The factors that influence the choice of faculty

When it comes to the factors that influence the choice of faculty, it can be concluded that the most frequent responses were: the interest in a certain scientific area (somewhat more than half the students believe this), as well as the costs of studying and faculty's proximity (almost half of all the respondents chose this). Observed by faculties, the students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko consider the proximity of the faculty to be the most important, followed by an equal interest in a particular scientific field and the cost of studying, while their colleagues from the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina pointed out that the scientific field studied at the faculty is the most important to them, and costs of studying, as well as the proximity of the faculty are important.

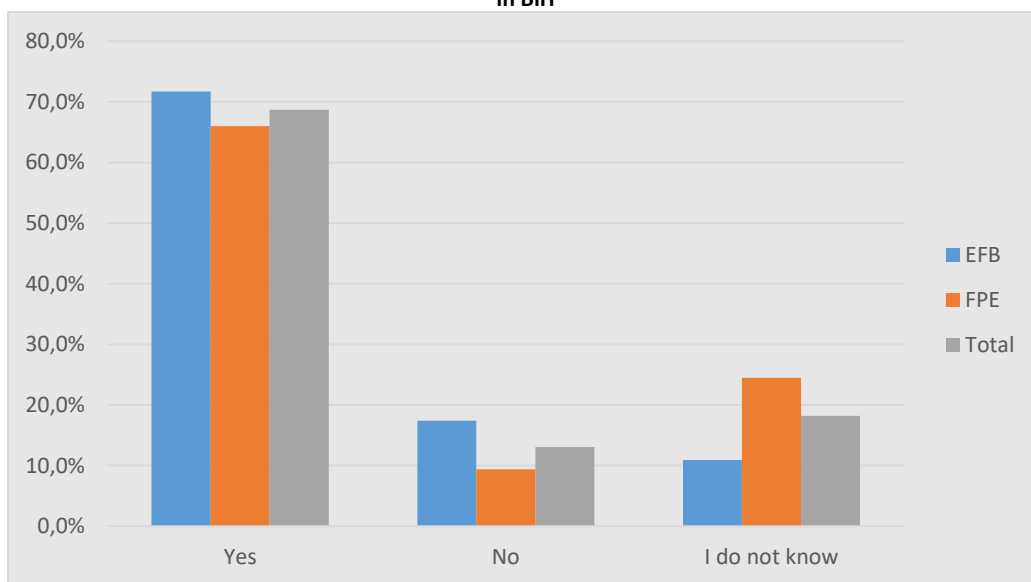
A third of all respondents consider that faculty's reputation is also a factor that influences the choice of faculty where they are going to study. The opinion of family members is important to 17,2% of students, and school friends' recommendations to just 7,1%. Only 3% of students believe that there are some factors not among the offered ones (Stević et al., 2023).

2.6. Students' attitudes on the quality of higher education in Bosnia and Herzegovina

In the research, (Stević et al., 2023) also examined if the students believed that this country provided them with quality education.

A descriptive representation of the stated data is given in the following figure.

Figure 2: Distribution of students according to the attitudes toward the quality of higher education in BiH



Source: author's research.

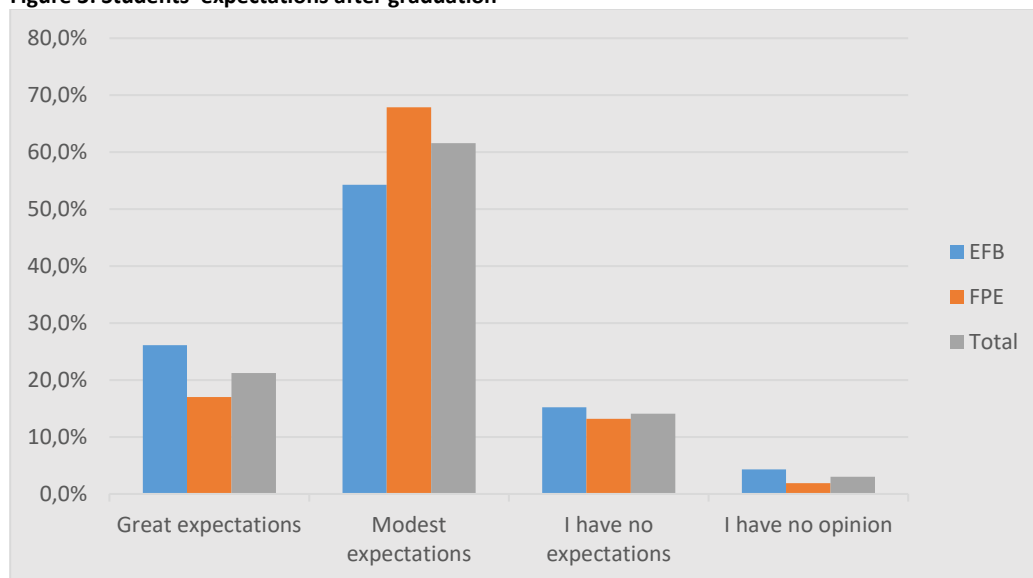
As can be seen, 68,7% of students gave the affirmative response to the posed question. A somewhat higher percentage of the indecisive ones were at the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina, 24,5% of them, while 17,4% of students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko believe that Bosnia and Herzegovina does not provide quality higher education. Observed in its entirety, that percentage is 13,1%.

2.7. Students' expectations after graduation

Satisfaction with study conditions and living conditions in this region in general, considerably influences the expectations of students after graduation. Research results (Stević et al., 2023) show that most students, 61 of 99 of them (61,6%) have modest expectations after graduation. Such an answer was given by 54,3% of students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko and as many as 67,9% of their colleagues from the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina. If we were to add those who replied, on this matter, that they were

not expecting anything to this number, we would have reached a worrying conclusion that as many as three quarters of respondents (75,7%) have modest or no expectations after graduation. Just over a fifth of all the interviewed students (21,2%) have great expectations after graduation. Observed by faculties, it is 26,1% students of the faculty from Brčko and 17,0% of them from Bijeljine. A negligible number of students do not have an opinion on this matter. (These data are shown in the following figure).

Figure 3: Students' expectations after graduation



Source: author's research.

2.8. Students' considerations on the continuation of studies

Regardless of their expectations after graduation, the aim of the research (Stević et al., 2023) was also to check if the selected students from these faculties were thinking of continuing their studies after graduation. Based on the obtained results, it can be perceived that 55,6% of students plan to continue their studies. The difference in student percentage between the two faculties is 10%, in favour of the Faculty of Economics Brčko. Around 30% of respondents have not made that decision yet, while 14,1% of them do not intend to continue their studies.

The students who said that they planned to continue their studies, listed diverse and interesting reasons for that. What is encouraging is that most students, as the reason for continuation of studies, state the fact that they want to expand their knowledge obtained in undergraduate studies in a certain area. Such an answer was given by 72,7% of students. A significant number of students also believe that more diplomas are an employment advantage. If observed by faculties, the students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko are inclined to have that opinion, while the respondents from the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina favoured the belief that more than one diploma brings a better position in society.

Going into more detail in the abovementioned analysis, the answer to the question of where the students would like to continue their studies was also considered. More than half (53.6%) of students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko expressed a desire to continue their studies in the city of current studies, while this percentage is much higher among respondents from the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina (74.1%). Only 5.5% of students want to continue their studies in Bosnia and Herzegovina (not counting the two mentioned cities), while as many as 30.9% of them plan to continue their studies outside Bosnia and Herzegovina (considerably more respondents of the Faculty Economics Brčko).

The following question is specifically related to the faculty the students were thinking of. The analysis is given per faculty which the students encompassed by research come from.

Bearing in mind the responses to the stated question, it is evident that all the students who replied that they wished to continue their studies in Brčko were specifically thinking of the Faculty of Economics Brčko. When it comes to other faculties of economics, students listed the faculties of economics in Sarajevo,

Banjaluka, Vienna and Prague. In the category of other faculties, among the responses, there were some other faculties of social sciences.

Similar to the case of the students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko, more than half of the respondents of the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina plan to continue their MA studies at the same faculty. When it comes to other faculties of economics, those in Belgrade, Novi Sad and Moscow were mentioned. Several students listed specific study programs in the second cycle of studies of this or some other faculty of economics, where it is discerned that programs related to business informatics occur most often.

Conclusion

The paper analyzes the attitudes and opinions of the students of the Faculty of Economics Brčko and the Faculty of Business Economics Bijeljina regarding their satisfaction with the conditions of study and living, as well as the quality of social life and the influence of mass media and social networks on students themselves. According to the available data from the sample, it is evident that around 87% of respondents have a positive attitude about living conditions in the city where they are living. Based on the statistical analysis, it was not confirmed whether there is a connection between the students' opinions on satisfaction with living conditions neither with the place of study, nor the year of study, nor with their gender.

Approximately 79% of students expressed their satisfaction with study conditions, who were satisfied with study conditions in a certain way (generally satisfied 44.4% and satisfied 34.3%), which makes the management of both faculties content. Close to 20% (19,2%) of students were not satisfied with study conditions, while 2% of respondents had no opinion on this matter. Regardless of all the limitations in the use of a chi-square test, as a statistical analysis method, it can be stated that the existence of the connection between the students' opinions on satisfaction with study conditions was not confirmed neither with the place of study, nor the year of study, nor with their gender.

On the matter of the education system, the respondents from the observed sample, largely assess the education system at both faculties to be "too theoretical and monotonous", and at the very least traditional. The abovementioned attitudes of students point to the need to take constructive measures related to the modernization of the education system, both in terms of higher quality study programs and in terms of introducing practical teaching methods. Per area of study, students showed the greatest interest in the area of informatics, accounting and management, and the least in marketing and finance.

Furthermore, students' opinions and attitudes regarding their plans after graduation were analysed in the paper. This refers to beliefs about the possibility of employment after graduation, as well as considerations about continuing studies in the second cycle. If we were to add those who replied, on this matter, that they were not expecting anything to this number, we would have reached a worrying conclusion that as many as three quarters of respondents (75,7%) have modest or no expectations after graduation. It is evident that 55.6% plan to continue their studies. What is encouraging is that most students, as the reason for continuation of studies, state the fact that they want to expand their knowledge obtained in undergraduate studies in a certain area. 72,7% of students gave such an answer. A significant number of students also believe that more diplomas are an employment advantage.

Of great importance in the analysis are the students' attitudes regarding the factors affecting the choice of faculty. The most important among them are: the interest in a certain scientific area (somewhat more than half the students believe this), as well as the costs of studying and faculty's proximity (almost half of all the respondents chose this). A third of all the respondents also believe that the factor which influences the choice of faculty where they are going to study is the faculty's reputation. The opinion of family members is important to 17,2% of students, and school friends' recommendations to 7,1%.

For the purpose of producing admission strategies and activities for the faculty's promotion, young people's opinion on the manner of finding information about the faculty is very important. The results show that the Internet is nowadays the most prevalent way of informing prospective students about potential faculties. 84,8% of the interviewed students of these two faculties believe that. Almost half of the respondents (49.5%) choose a faculty based on a friend's recommendation, and 28.3% based on information from social networks. A negligible percentage of students get their information from radio, TV, and other sources.

By summarizing this part of the research, we can conclude that most students do not have high expectations after graduating, but it is encouraging to note that more than half respondents are thinking about continuing their studies and that their main motive for doing so is the desire to expand their knowledge in a certain area. It is also evident that almost a third of the students interviewed are considering

a master's degree outside of Bosnia and Herzegovina. When it comes to faculty, it is quite understandable that the majority of students plan to continue their studies in economics. Unfortunately, over 30 percent of those interviewed either have no opinion or feel that quality higher education is not available in our country. Among the factors that influence the choice of faculty, the following stand out: the interest in a particular area of study, the cost of studying, proximity to the faculty, and a significant number of students also consider the reputation of the faculty to be important.

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