

THE ECONOMIC UNIVERSITY EDUCATION – AN OPTION FOR THE HIGH SCHOOLS GRADUATES FROM ROMANIA

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Abstract: This paper explores the circumstances in which the high schools graduates choose the high education system. For this purpose we use the results of an investigation among the students of an economic faculty. We approach the aspects of the choices between the public or private faculties and universities from different towns.

Keywords: Occupational Choice, High Education, Labor Market

1. Introduction

In the present, on the Romanian labor market there are serious changes that make it difficult to foresee. In this context, the high school graduates choice of the field they will study is very complex. In the last years, it increased the competition between the universities in order to call the high schools graduates. After the collapse of the Communist regime in December 1989, the number of the universities from Romania is much bigger than in the previous period. Many private universities appeared whose survival depended on calling fees payers students. In the same time, the circumstances of low financing from public funds, even of the state universities have to offer paid studies, besides the ones financed by public funds.

In the competition for calling the high schools graduates, the universities used until now different promotion methods. Their offer was various, including programs of studies in the economic, law, technical, military, sport, artistic field a.s.o. For the university year 2008 – 2009 it is anticipated competition intensification, in the context of demographic decreases from the beginning of the ‘90s would lead to the significant reduction of the high schools graduates’ number.

In the present, the economical university studies are taken into consideration by many high schools graduates. In Romania, after the transition to the market economy, the offer of jobs as economists increased very much. The universities adapted to these evolutions, raising the offer of studies programs in the economic field.

The occupational choice for the high schools graduates was approached in several studies. Some authors questioned the rationality of the choices, claiming these graduates do not have accurate information about the universities and about the labor market (Varga, 2003). There were also stressed out the particularities of the occupational choice for the former socialist countries (Kertesi, Kollo, 2002).

In this paper we approach the relevant aspects for the university studies choice of the high schools graduates. In this purpose, we use an investigation among students from the first year at the Faculty of Economic Sciences from the State University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati. It is one from the big universities in Romania that call high schools graduates from many regions of the country, especially from the South – East one. This university includes 15 faculties: Faculty of Mechanical Engineering, Faculty of Computer Science, Faculty of Electrical and Electronics Engineering, Faculty of Naval Architecture, Faculty of Metallurgy and Materials' Sciences, Faculty of Food Science and Engineering, Faculty of Mechanical Engineering Braila, Faculty of Sciences (with three fields: Physics, Mathematics and Chemistry), Faculty

of Letters and Theology, Faculty of Physical Education and Sport, Faculty of Economic Sciences, Faculty of Medicine, Faculty of Law, Faculty of History and Philosophy and Faculty of Arts. We tried to find out the reasons a high school graduate choose State owned faculties of economic sciences.

Obviously, the results of our investigation could not be extended for all the faculties of economic sciences from Romania. Anyhow, this research may bring some clues about the factors that influence significantly the graduates' options regarding the university studies.

2. Data collection

The data we used for this paper come mainly from an investigation we realized in the period February – April 2008 on a sample of 129 students from the first year of study in the Faculty of Economics – University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati. All of them graduated high school in 2007. There were not included in the sample students from the Distance Education (DE) or from the Republic of Moldova because their choices regarding the economic university studies were done in special circumstances.

The Faculty of Economics has in the first year (excepting the DE) 524 students. Among them the number of girls is almost three times bigger than the number of boys, aspect that will be approached later.

The sample we used has a weight of 24.6 % from the total of students in the first year of study. The whole sample includes 96 girls and 33 boys, representing a rapport close by the one at the level of all the students in the first year.

Our research developed in different phases. Initially, we practiced group interviews when the students were invited to explain the circumstances they chose the field of university studies (a group consisted in between 8 and 15 students). Then, under the protection of anonymity, the students answered at questions concerning the concrete aspects of the option for the economic university studies. Later, some of the students offered supplementary explanations for the answers they gave in the questionnaires. In the investigation we tried to maintain an atmosphere that helps students' sincerity and lack of inhibition.

3. Choice between universities

When they decided about the future university studies, the investigated persons had the possibility to choose between state or private universities from Galati County or from other counties. From all the 129 students we interviewed 55 (38.8 %) tried in 2007 to enter a university from another county. There were taken into account especially universities from Bucharest, Iasi and Cluj, being considered by the students better seen than the ones from Galati.

Universities location Counties of students residence	Universities from Galati	Universities from other counties	Total
Galati	56	40	96
Other counties	18	15	33
Total	74	55	129

Table 1 - Options of the students for universities from Galati and from other counties

From the 129 investigated students 96 live in Galati county and 33 in other counties. Most of them come from the counties situated near Galati: Braila, Tulcea, Vrancea, Buzau and Vaslui and some of them come from counties located at a certain distance from Galati: Arges, Calarasi and Constanta. It resulted there are not significant differences between the options of students with residence in Galati and from other counties (table 1). In the group interviews it resulted the distance from families was not a very important aspect in the choice of universities. The material aspects were much more important, the majority of students perceiving Bucharest, Cluj and Iasi as having a living cost much bigger than Galati. Moreover, some students who had also the possibility to follow paid studies in universities from other counties preferred, finally, to study without paying at the University “Dunarea de Jos” from Galati.

From the investigated students, 12 (9,3 %) participated at the admission to a private university. All of them were received but they finally gave up because they had the possibility of studying for free at the University “Dunarea de Jos” Galati. The students who did not participate at the admission to a private university offered different explanations. Most of them declared private universities are not well seen by the potential employers. Wrongly, some students thought, in the moment of admission, that the institutions of Romanian high education evaluation accredited none of the private universities from Galati and from the near counties.

Another important aspect was the material one, many of the high schools graduates wishing a public place. Even those admitted at the University “Dunarea de Jos” on fee-paying places have the hope to move on the public places. Some students explained they did not go to the private universities because they had the impression they would have many colleagues much older than they are.

4. Significant factors for the faculty choice

In the group interviews the students were invited to remember the most important factors that influenced their choice regarding the faculties. Four important factors may be stressed out:

- a) the perceived utility for the available jobs the future graduates of the faculty have in mind;
- b) the compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty;
- c) the faculty accreditation by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)
- d) the parents influence (table 2).

Factor	Utility of the future job	Compatibility of the knowledge	Accreditation	Parents influence
Degree of importance				
Very big	67	25	25	8
Big	34	47	30	6
Medium	22	40	6	23
Little	5	12	9	26
Very little	1	5	4	66
Total	129	129	74	129

Table 2 – The importance of the factors influencing the faculty choice

In order to compare the significant factors for the choice, the degrees of importance were transposed from 1 to 5 (1 for “very little importance” and 5 for “very big importance”). The Descriptive Statistics based on this quantification shows the biggest score was obtained by the perceived utility for the available jobs, followed by the faculty accreditation, the compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty and the parents’ influence. However, in the case the faculty accreditation it must be taken into account the fact that in the admission period only 74 from the students knew some faculties were not accredited. The values of Standard Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis indicate quite far from the normal distributions and the Confidence Levels for the average scores are significant (table 3).

Indicator	Utility of the future job	Compatibility of the knowledge	Accreditation	Parents influence
Mean	4.248	3.581	3.851	1.946
Standard Error	0.082	0.091	0.137	0.106
Median	5	4	4	1
Mode	5	4	4	1
Standard Deviation	0.927	1.028	1.178	1.201
Sample Variance	0.860	1.058	1.389	1.442
Kurtosis	0.405	- 0.113	0.0878	0.408
Skewness	- 1.054	- 0.485	- 0.994	1.150
Range	4	4	4	4
Minimum	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5
Sum	548	462	285	251
Count	129	129	74	129
Largest (1)	1	1	1	1
Smallest (1)	5	5	5	5
Confidence Level (95.0 %)	0.162	0.179	0.273	0.209

Table 3 - Descriptive Statistics of the factors influencing the faculty choice

a) The perceived utility for the available jobs the future graduates of the faculty have in mind

More than three quarters from the students we interviewed consider that jobs utility for the future graduates had a big or very big importance in the faculty choice. Six from the students associated a little or very little importance to the future jobs facilitated by the faculty. They consider that graduating a well-regarded university, no matter what faculty, is enough in order to obtain a good job.

The students were invited to evaluate the utility they suppose from the jobs facilitation point of view offered by the faculties of our university. There were approached globally all the engineering faculties (ENG) because, in general, the students perceive these as being very similar, which it is not quite true. There were also taken into consideration the faculties of Economics (ECO), Medicine (MED), Sport (SPO), Arts (ART), Letters, Theology, History, Philosophy (LTH), Law (noted LAW) and Sciences (SCI) (table 4).

	LAW	SCI	ENG	ECO	MED	SPO	ART	LTH
Very Good	5	2	6	91	26	3	2	9
Good	21	32	53	27	43	12	5	21
Moderate	56	53	32	11	33	35	29	62
Bad	32	30	15	0	19	51	53	28
Very Bad	20	12	23	0	8	28	40	9

Table 4 –The students' perceived utility for the available jobs offered by the faculties

In order to compare the students' perception of the jobs utility facilitation by the universities faculties, the answers were transposed in a rating scale from 1 to 5 (1 for very bad and 5 for very good). A Descriptive Statistics resulted and it indicated the biggest utility was assigned to the Faculty of Economics, followed by the Faculty of Medicine and by the Engineering Faculties (table 5). The values of Standard Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis indicate quite far from the normal distributions and the Confidence Levels for the average score are significant.

Faculties Indicator	ENG	ECO	MED	SPO	ART	LTH	LAW	SCI
Mean	3.031	4.620	3.465	2.310	2.039	2.946	2.605	2.860
Standard Error	0.106	0.056	0.101	0.087	0.080	0.085	0.083	0.084
Median	3	5	4	2	2	3	3	3
Mode	4	5	4	2	2	3	3	3
Standard Deviation	1.199	0.640	1.153	0.991	0.913	0.971	0.939	0.950
Sample Variance	1.437	0.409	1.329	0.981	0.834	0.942	0.882	0.902
Kurtosis	- 0.908	0.921	- 0.603	- 0.131	0.445	0.041	- 0.776	- 0.496
Skewness	- 0.531	- 1.462	- 0.426	0.517	0.735	0.110	- 0.280	- 0.271
Range	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	4
Minimum	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	391	596	447	298	263	380	336	369
Count	129	129	129	129	129	129	129	129
Largest (1)	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Smallest (1)	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.209	0.111	0.201	0.173	0.159	0.169	0.164	0.165

Table 5 - Descriptive Statistics of the students' perceived utility for the available jobs offered by the faculties

More than three quarters from the students we interviewed assigned a very big utility to the jobs facilitation by the Faculty of Economics. Some of them explained they thought, no matter the changes from the Romanian labor market, the economist profession would be always wanted and well-paid.

More than half from the members included in the sample assigned a big or very big utility to the profession of doctor. However, from them, quite many students consider a graduated from the Faculty of Medicine could have chances to find an attractive job more abroad than in Romania. For the 27 students who assign a little or very little utility to the profession of doctor the main explanation was in Romania there are already too many graduated from faculties of Medicine and it would be more and more difficult to obtain jobs in this field.

For 59 from the questioned students the jobs facilitation by the engineering faculties has a big or very big utility. These perceptions may be associated to the fact in the last years in the area of Galati the offer of jobs for engineers increased very much due to the acquisition by foreign investors of some enterprises. The 38 students who assign a little or very little utility to the profession of engineer consider that jobs in this field are quite tough, supposing big dangers.

For 30 students from the interviewed ones jobs facilitation by the Faculties of Letters, Theology, History and Philosophy has a big or very big utility. They are attracted especially by "Journalism" that offers, in

their opinion, interesting and well-paid jobs. Anyhow, more than a quarter of the students assign to the jobs facilitation by the Faculty of Letters a little or very little utility. In their opinion, jobs of journalist are quite difficult to obtain. The jobs offered by the Faculty of Sciences were appreciated as having a big or very big utility by more than a quarter from the students. In general, they explained they found the jobs in research or education interesting, even if there are not always well-paid. Sort of surprisingly, the Faculty of Law was not appreciated, from the jobs facilitation point of view, as having a very big utility. The general impression of the interviewed students was it would be very difficult for a graduated of this faculty to practise as lawyer. The jobs facilitated by the faculties of Sport and Arts are perceived in general as being low-paid, even if some of the students find it attractive.

Our investigation also revealed some significant differences between girls and boys concerning the utility of the professions offered by the faculties. It resulted that girls perceived a bigger utility than the boys for the jobs offered by the faculties of Economics, Medicine, Letters, Theology, History and Philosophy and Law and the boys are more favorable than the boys to the jobs offered by the faculties of Engineering, Sport, Art and Sciences (table 6).

Faculty	ENG	ECO	MED	SPO	ART	LIT	LAW	SCI
Gender								
Girls	2.979	4.708	3.521	2.146	1.938	2.979	2.646	2.813
Boys	3.182	4.364	3.303	2.788	2.333	2.848	2.485	3.000

Table 6 - Means of utility for jobs offered by the faculties calculated for genders

b) The compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty

More than half of the investigated students consider the compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty had a big or very big importance when they made their choice. We asked the students to evaluate this characteristic for the faculties from our university (table 7).

Faculty	ENG	ECO	MED	SPO	ART	LTH	LAW	SCI
Mark								
Very Good	9	96	4	11	10	16	29	8
Good	17	27	18	30	14	26	54	21
Moderate	11	6	7	14	14	29	17	23
Bad	18	0	46	19	28	37	25	52
Very Bad	74	0	54	55	63	21	4	25

Table 7 - Students perceptions about compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty

In order to establish a hierarchy of the faculties depending on the compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty the students' answers were transposed in the same rating scale we used before. The Faculty of Economics, followed by the Faculty of Law and by the Faculties of Letters, Theology, History and Philosophy, obtained the biggest score. The values Standard Deviation, Skewness and Kurtosis indicate quite far from the normal one distribution. With the exception of the Faculty of Economics, the Confidence Levels for the average scores are quite big (table 8).

Faculties Indicator	ENG	ECO	MED	SPO	ART	LTH	LAW	SCI

Mean	1.984	4.698	2.008	2.403	2.070	2.837	3.612	2.496
Standard Error	0.119	0.049	0.101	0.127	0.116	0.112	0.099	0.102
Median	1	5	2	2	2	3	4	2
Mode	1	5	1	1	1	2	4	2
Standard Deviation	1.352	0.553	1.149	1.444	1.318	1.273	1.127	1.160
Sample Variance	1.828	0.306	1.320	2.086	1.737	1.622	1.270	1.346
Kurtosis	- 0.362	1.905	0.060	- 1.358	- 0.292	- 1.032	- 0.706	-0.577
Skewness	1.050	- 1.679	1.052	0.434	0.993	0.196	- 0.551	0.559
Range	4	2	4	4	4	4	4	4
Minimum	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
Maximum	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Sum	256	606	259	310	267	366	466	322
Count	129	129	129	129	129	129	129	129
Largest (1)	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5
Smallest (1)	1	3	1	1	1	1	1	1
Confidence Level (95.0%)	0.236	0.096	0.200	0.252	0.230	0.222	0.196	0.202

Table 8 - Descriptive Statistics of the compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty

The Faculty of Economics obtained the best score with a very good compatibility with the exigencies of the study process by almost three quarters from the questioned students. At a big distance there are the Faculty of Law and the Faculties of Letters, Theology, History and Philosophy. This situation may be connected to the fact that half from the interviewed students had in high schools economic or human specializations (we must say many of them declared in the moment of admission they expected economic matters based only a little on mathematic methods). On the last position regarding the compatibility with the exigencies of the study process there are the engineering faculties regarded as having specific complex knowledge, based mostly on difficult Mathematic methods. Moreover, quite many students consider some practical activities at these faculties imply a special physical preparation and it might be a risk of accidents.

Our investigation also revealed significant differences between boys and girls regarding the compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty. The girls assigned better marks than the boys to some faculties more of Human type than of the Real one: the Faculty of Economics, the Faculty of Medicine, the Faculty of Arts, the Faculties of Letters, Theology, History and Philosophy and the Faculty of Law. On the other side, the boys consider themselves more compatible with the exigencies of the education process at the faculties connected to the real profile or that imply a better physical preparation: the Engineering Faculties, the Faculty of Sport and the Faculty of Sciences (table 9).

Faculty	ENG	ECO	MED	SPO	ART	LIT	LAW	SCI
Girls	1.737	4.75	2.021	2.302	2.156	2.927	3.698	2.427
Boys	2.727	4.545	1.970	2.697	1.818	2.576	3.364	2.750

Table 9 – Means of compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty calculated for genders

c) The faculty accreditation by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS)

Three from the faculties from the “Dunarea de Jos” University (Medicine, Arts and Law) are not accredited for the moment. In the moment of admission only 74 from the questioned students knew that our university includes also unaccredited faculties. For almost three quarters of them the faculties accreditation had a big or very big importance (table 2). Eight students even declared they would have preferred to follow the courses of the Faculty of Law or of the Faculty of Medicine if they had been accredited more then going to the Faculty of Economics. It is important that more than half of the students had, in the moment of admission a wrong perception on the consequences for a faculty that is not accredited. They considered such a faculty gave diplomas that would not be recognized by the public authorities from Romania. The big score obtained by the faculties’ accreditation importance may offer a wrong image because there were not taken into account the opinions of the students who, at the moment of admission, did not know that the University Dunarea de Jos includes also unaccredited faculties.

d)The parents influence

Only 14 from the questioned students appreciated their parents had a big or very big influence on their faculty choice (table 2). Among them, 5 students gave up, because of the parents’ opposition, at going to the Faculties of Sport, Letters, and Arts or to the Engineering faculties. More than half from the questioned students presented as very little the parents influence. However, these opinions must be regarded with certain wariness because of certain reasons. First, it is possible that some students avoided admitting, even under the protection of anonymity, parents influenced them. Second, it is possible this influence to have been so subtle that some students not have noticed it. We consider important to present the fact none of the students declared the parents were unfavorable to the Faculty of Economics.

5. Sources of information for the faculty choice

In the group interviews the students indicated many sources for the information they based on when they chose the faculty. As it resulted, the students used four main sources:

- Friends and relatives;
- University website;
- Faculties’ promotional campaign;
- Teachers from the high school.

Nr. Crt.	Source	Nr. of students	Weight
1	Friends and relatives	56	43,41 %
2	University website	42	32,56 %
3	Faculties’ promotional campaign	22	17,05 %
4	Teachers from the high school	9	6,98 %
5	Total	129	100 %

Many students have relatives or friends who are or who were students at the “Dunarea de Jos” University or at other universities and they offered information regarding the knowledge or about the jobs they could get. Another main source of information was represented by the websites. The students noticed the ones of the private universities are sometimes better organized than the websites of the public universities.

In 2007 some public universities realized promotional campaigns in order to attract candidates. Publicity materials were done and some teachers went at high schools. For a significant number of students this campaign represented the main source of information.

An important part of the students based mainly on the information received from the teachers in high school, some of them being graduates of the faculties from Galati. Some of them explined they had more confidence in the teachers’ opinions than in the information from the universities sites or from the promotional campaigns.

Conclusions

In this paper we approached some circumstances of the high schools graduates' options for the economic university education. We identified some significant aspects of choices between the private universities and the public ones or between the faculties from a university. In this purpose we used an investigation on the students at the University "Dunarea de Jos". It resulted when choosing the town for the university studies the material aspects were very important. Many students considered in the towns where there are famous universities the living cost is too high for their possibilities.

The choice between the public universities and the private ones was influenced both by the graduates perception of the education institutions prestige and by material reasons. As it concerns the choice from the faculties in the university certain significant influence factors were identified: the perceived utility for the available jobs the future graduates of the faculty have in mind; the compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty; the faculty accreditation by the Romanian Agency for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ARACIS) and the parents influence.

For the perceived utility for the available jobs the future graduates of the faculty have in mind it was confirmed the recovery of the engineer profession. In the same time, there were revealed some significant differences between the girls' perceptions and the boys ones regarding the perceived utility for the available jobs the future graduates of the faculty have in mind and the compatibility with the exigencies of the education process in a faculty.

In the year 2008, when it is expected a decrease of the candidates number, the universities will have to be more and more receptive at the future high schools graduates requirements. The offer of studies programs will have to be adapted based on the situation from the labor market and the promotional efforts will have to be intensified.

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