

THE EXAMINATION OF THE ASPECTS OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION SELECTION IN A GROUP OF BSc. COURSE STUDENTS

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ABSTRACT

The main aim of the study was to gather information on the aspects of higher education institution selection of B.Sc. course students in the University of Szeged, Faculty of Agriculture. A survey by questionnaire was carried out among first year students about their experience in the importance of information sources of colleges and universities.

By the results it seems that the main resources for young people are the opinion of parents, relatives and friends (63%); also the internet the homepage of the university (44%) is very popular. The third in the rank is the participation on Open Days (42%), where they can get direct information and impression about the institution. Students are looking for the course specialisation, the length of the course, the scholarship or tuition fee among the admission information. Almost every answer contained remarks in the 'Others' point which means that the individual interest is broad.

Keywords: higher education, institution selection, promotion of courses, career orientation

INTRODUCTION

Career orientation is one of the major elements of preparing for adulthood. The general objective is to help students select their further schools and career. Considering the students' age and their own opportunities, the school must provide a comprehensive picture about the possibilities for further education and the world of labour. In order to achieve this, they need to provide conditions, activities, which can enhance students to try their abilities, deepen in the fields of their interests and by doing so they can develop their self-knowledge and also the knowledge of the careers. On preparing their decisions the students are influenced by a great number of effects and information in this period determining their further life.

The transformation of the economic structure induced changes in the labour market; crowds remained unemployed, and it means a need for increased training and retraining programmes, career selection, and career correction came to the forefront and career counselling got to the labour market organisations. The labour market organisations help career choice with information on labour market, training and education, thematic counselling aimed at work, career and job search rehabilitation as well as organising individual and group activities. In job centres there are clubs for job searches, psychological service and Job Information Consultancy. The continuous changes in the industry (KOMAREK, 2012) also generate a demand for modification of career and further education.

The objective of the labour market service is to support career selection decisions and finding a job. It is a problem though, that the handicapped living in a small settlement cannot use these services. WEINPER (2004) believes the efficiency of the system is hindered by the distribution of the information providing system, the capacity of counselling is scarce, the teachers are not prepared and the students have no adequate information on labour market.

The objective of the pilot programme called PHARE 2000 '*Transition from education to the world of work*' is to update and, in a wide range, disseminate (using IT) the services of the career orientation system in three regions of East Hungary. The participants in the project are

the job centres, local authorities, pedagogical institutions, regional training centres and colleges. The results of the project:

- three networks for career selection and career orientation was established;
- three hundred teachers and career orientation experts by regions were trained with up-to-date teaching material;
- effective career selection and career orientation counselling started within and outside the school system,
- the necessary infrastructure (information background and consultancy network) has been established;
- the internet counselling is operating (chat, web-camera), the harmonisation of the existing career selection information systems were started on regional level;
- the nationwide dissemination of the system is in process.

Regarding the needs for higher education they are significantly different by age and residence (IMRE, 2006). They are more levelled with the 17-year-old, where they are reflected in the different local labour market possibilities, the immediate job possibilities and the judgement of their individual future.

After 1990 the differences between schools were more open compared to the previous situation. On the one hand, the secondary grammar schools with different grade education can be formally distinguished; on the other hand they operate with declared different curricula with a variety of offers beyond the compulsory ones. One thing, however, did not change: the role of the school and qualification in determining life chances, consequently the better off parents still try to educate their children in the best schools, probably it is only the "hit accuracy" became somewhat lower (ANDOR – LISKÓ, 1999).

Students need help with finding the most suitably life career and with preparing for that, which is also society's interest. This help must be provided for students partly by the school, and partly by the external counselling institutions in the form of career orientation programmes and other professional services concerning career selection and the walk of life. While the exclusive scene of career orientation tasks is the school (and naturally the family), the various counselling possibilities belong to both the school and the labour market institutions; the need for them is determined particularly by the fact in which age it comes up. We can find examples both in the practice of the European Union (OECD, 2004) and other countries as well; nevertheless those who are jobseekers or unemployed must turn to the special network of the labour market service institutions (CSÁKÓ, 1998).

55 % of the secondary school students usually surf on the net. The educational web-sites mean one source for information concerning further education issues. The most popular sites proved to be www.sulinet.hu and www.felvi.hu, these are visited by 52 and 32 percent of the students, respectively.

According to SÁFRÁNY (2004) those who apply for university or college admission think all more and more flexible about institution selection. Students from Budapest tend to apply for university admission. Girls think significantly more flexibly about institution selection. Boys are more certain about whether to go to a university or to a college. Experience showed that the acquired certificate (e.g. GCE from a secondary technical school, which does not mean qualification, but only a successful examination) is not sufficient for finding a job in many cases (KÖRTÉSINÉ TOMCSÁK, 2007).

With regard to gender, the same traditional career orientation differences can be observed: girls tend to select arts courses, while boys prefer science (FISZ 2004). It is especially the boys who make their choice considering the reputation of the institution and also the fact whether their friends who go there. A large number of students completing the questionnaire preferred the institutions close to their residence (FELVI MAGAZIN 2007/a). According to a TÁRKI (2000) study the results show that the students in the final year of secondary

education have surprisingly correct information on the wages and salaries of jobs according to qualification and also of professions requiring a degree.

Others believe that parents and relatives have a great influence on selecting higher education institutions and also the students' background as employees, entrepreneurs or owners. It is known from sociological analyses that there is close relationship between the qualification of the entrepreneurs and the size of the enterprise (CZAKÓ ET AL., 1994).

According to the examinations of JUHÁSZ (2001) the lower, intermediate and higher level management of agricultural companies can only moderately be motivated to take part in further training and extension. Among lower level managers further training, as a possibility for promotion, is only an intermediately motivating factor. The majority of the under-educated people cannot be significantly encouraged to develop their knowledge on their field with the hope they can get further on. They should perform too much for that, although in several agricultural enterprises there is lack of well educated human resource (HORVÁTH, 2008).

We encounter similar differences in the categories of private entrepreneurs and also agricultural entrepreneurs (HARCSA, 1995), which might also cover diverse realities, from the ex tractor-driver now having a 20-30 ha family farm to the ex-co-operative leader who graduated from an agricultural university and now has an enterprise on 200-300 hectares. Agro-sociological examinations showed that the farming groups which were formed after the co-operatives ceased to exist and compensation was allocated, were rather divided. The differences cannot be originated from qualifications; it is mainly due to the starting capital gained in the hierarchy of the ex-co-operative, the ability of comprehensive overview, contact system, being well-informed and experienced (VÁNTUS, 2010; VÁNTUS ET AL., 2012). However, in the background there is the fact: 10-15 years before the regime change in Hungary nobody could have been a president of a co-operative or a member in the management without a college or university degree (ANDOR KUCZI, 1997). It seems in agriculture, too, that qualification is a better marker of the socio-economical status than the diffuse and unclear employment category. In this way the qualification of the parents indirectly influences the students' choice. At the same time CSAPÓ (1994) did not find relationship between the ideological orientation of parents and their children, therefore it seems that by the age of seventeen most the students form their own opinion about social issues.

Selecting and applying to more than one school is characteristic of those who want to try themselves in college and university level as well. All this indicated that the strategy of 'getting admission to somewhere' got more popular with the students wishing to go into higher education (KATONA, 2004).

In addition to universities and colleges, the companies involved in education were present at one of the greatest national programme called EDUCATIO International Trade Fair for Education. This exhibition is especially important for students in their final year of secondary education, since they could find and meet the representatives of all higher education institutes under one roof at the same time. They had opportunity to ask about the chances and possibilities of admission, about majors and education systems, fees and supports as well as student hostel accommodation (ANONIM, 2008).

With regard to the parents' future-orienting pedagogy and based on the research of SALLAY (2003) it can be observed that the pedagogical aims, attitudes and styles are focused mainly on the territory of hopes and fears concerning the family.

The role of teachers and friendly school communities in decision-making is indicated well by the results of the research of JÁMBORI (2003); the better the atmosphere was in a secondary school class and the more the students could rely on each other, the better chances they could see for reaching their future goals in higher education and later in the workplace. Career

selection is a decision made by parents and students jointly, as a result of a relatively long process, and in the end the family determines which institution is worth selecting for their expectations to be fulfilled (LISKÓ, 1998). Career selection used to be easier. The family, the relatives, closed communities and a traditional society system helped make a decision. Today consultancy is recommended as well (FELVI MAGAZIN, 2007/b).

To maintain the continuous operation, the University of Szeged, Faculty of Agriculture makes significant efforts for recruiting students. The constant improvement of the PR activities depends on two basic factors. One is the advertising strategies of the institutions providing the same education and the other is the total of the information and activities influencing the decision of the students selecting institutes of agricultural education.

In the recent study answers were looked for to the following questions:

- Which are the influences that affected the students to select this institution?
- Are the visits and presentations held in secondary schools effective?
- What kind of information the students considered important to know about the higher education institution they planned to select?

MATERIAL AND METHOD

Based on long years experience, regular talks with students and also on the data of the literature to set a hypothesis was tried at the beginning of the work in connection with the questions of the survey. The research concentrated on the following issues:

- It is probable that in case of the questioned students the institution selection was influenced by the opinion of relatives and acquaintances, but especially by the opinion and information from friends.
- It is supposed that the students listening to the student recruitment presentations find this career-orienting activity particularly important and it affected their career choice decision.
- The duration of the major course and the social feedback of the degree had possibly the greatest role in the students' institution selection.
- The efficiency of the media used for encouraging and activating students was rather different as the target group of the examination cannot be reached in all channels with the expected result.

During the research based on the admission data first the parts of the country where the students who had selected our institution for their majors come from were analysed. Unfortunately it was not possible to contact all applicants and send them the questionnaire, due to the features of the admission system. The method is applied in the faculty for decades; and we were concerned to make it easy to complete, the questions being clear and the answers also easy to be estimated and work with.

A brief questionnaire was comprised for the first year students in full time education to find out which information helped them select an institution. The students voluntarily answered in writing (n=129). The data collection was completed in the September of the last two years.

The data procession of the results was carried out with SPSS 17.0 programme. Special emphasis was place on the collection and analysis of the answers of the 'Other' category. A number of people from the group after they completed the questionnaire were interviewed, and through these small interviews it was possible to see behind the answers to some extent and in this way to make the statistical data we obtained more perceptible.

RESULTS AND CONCLUSIONS

The composition of the students applying for admission to the University of Szeged, Faculty of Agriculture was gathered based on the location of their secondary school by counties (Figure 1). It can be observed that approx. two third of the students (65%) came from the region, which means from the secondary schools from the relative neighbourhood. At the same time the ratio of the students from the Southern Transdanubian region and also that of the foreign students was considerable.

Our faculty does not endeavour to reach a national coverage in student recruitment; however the figure indicates the territories we might strengthen the presentation, taking into account that previously much more students used to come from Fejér County.

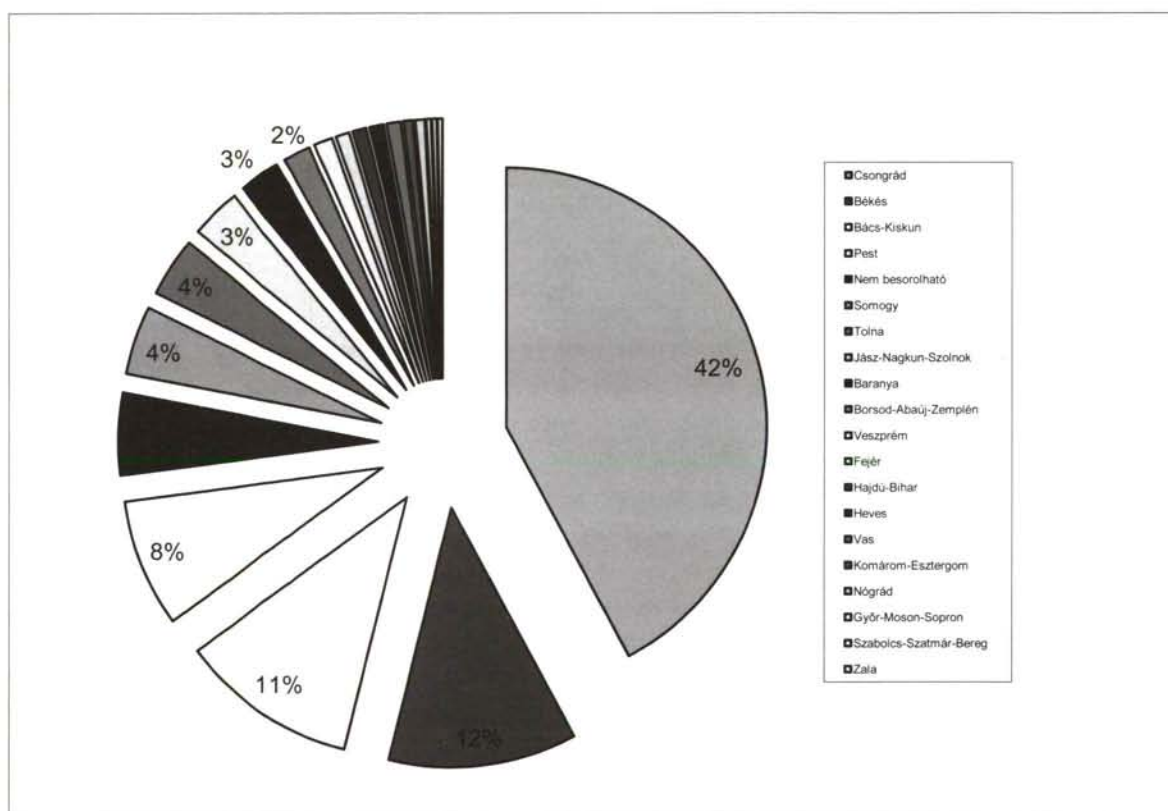


Figure 1. The ratio of applicants by counties

When selecting our institution most students made their choice based on information from relatives, friends and acquaintances (Table 1). The personal conversations justified the fact that the strongest influence was reached by a person who had previous personal experience in our faculty. Such people are those whose parents or relatives graduated from our institution in Hódmezővásárhely, and had a favourable opinion about the education here. It is similarly important when the employers, for example the management of agricultural companies are satisfied with the knowledge of the graduates of our faculty.

The third most important influence in the target group was the opinion and decision of friends. Several students selected our institution because their friends from the secondary school, their classmates also came here. It is especially important in this group that they should not be disappointed with the majors they had chosen by the influence of friends and that they can fit the qualification into their further career.

Table 1. What information did you base your decision on when selecting our institution?

Source of information	Persons (%)
• Information from secondary school teachers, or form master	19
• Advertisement in electronic media	2
• Advertisement in printed press	14
• Information from relatives, friends, acquaintances	63
• Internet information, the web-site of the institution	44
• Participating on the Open Day	42
• Student recruiting presentation at the secondary school	30
• Other	26

The website of the Faculty, the Open Days and the personal visits to secondary schools also have a significant part. The continuous maintenance and development of the website is vital for the faculty. The majority of young people turn to the internet for information (electronic media and printed press are not popular with them at all) and what they cannot find on the net simply does not exist for them.

The efficiency of the media campaign, despite of the high costs, is very low. It is usually the parents who obtain their information from newspapers and other publications.

Unfortunately the influence of secondary school teachers and form masters is weaker than expected. The main reason for that is although they must deal with career orientation they do not have enough time to present all possible higher education institutions in details and they cannot offer a whole lesson for an introduction.

Among the 'Other' answers the 'Admission Information' (*Felvételi tájékoztató*) appeared several times. Some based their decision on the EDUCATIO programme in Budapest, while others on their agricultural orientation interests.

Out of the questioned 30 % listened to presentations in their secondary school. Their answers (Table 2) indicate the importance is 3.3, which means medium level.

Table 2. The efficiency (importance) of the student recruitment presentations

Value	1	2	3	4	5
%	0	8	69	8	15

The efficiency of the student recruitment presentations is doubtful as the number of students is low in schools where participation is voluntary and when it is compulsory, the number is high but the students are passive. They do not dare to ask questions in class. Their general opinion is that all higher education institutions 'paint a nice picture' in these presentations, this is why they only gave an intermediate grade. Those seriously interested in the chosen field prefer the Open Days, where they can talk to many lecturers and students; they can get to know the institution and the standard of service (grants, fees, accommodation, food, student life). Some would arrive with their parents and need information if they can get everything under one roof, while others are interested in the relationship between students (e.g. if there is an 'initiation ritual').

When selecting the institution the information summed up in Table 3 helped students make up their mind. The offered majors, specialisations and courses had significant influence in their

decision. It is a general opinion that in the field of animal production and wildlife management majors the faculty has traditions and favourable reputation. Students indicated several factors important for themselves in the 'Other' point.

Table 3. Information necessary to make a decision

What did you search for among the admission information?	Persons (%)
• The duration of the education	65.1
• Major/Course/Specialisation selection	83.7
• Tuition fee	34.9
• Students hostel placement	32.6
• Student life	34.9
• Other	93.0

In case of the students from this region it was important that they could study in the vicinity of their residence since more and more of them commute each day; sometimes they help on the farm and study at the same time and in case of those living in the students' hostel the lowest possible travel cost was also an important consideration.

Significant factors are:

- the grant possibilities,
- preparation for and taking a language examination locally,
- job possibilities, as well as opportunity to take part in internship programmes abroad.

Unfortunately the attendance of the language examination preparing courses, which are free of charge for our students, their activity does not reflect the result of the survey, and neither does the fact, that BA student will be able to get a degree only after they have completed their intermediate level language examination.

Tuition fee did not influence the decision of the students in the first place, which can be explained with several factors:

- most students first applied for a state financed place;
- those with paid places hope they can be transferred to the state financed category if they get excellent grades;
- tuition fees at the faculty in the research period were around 100,000 HUF, which still was regarded as a reasonable category.

Student life was mentioned by relatively few. Based on the discussions with students it might be due to the first weeks passing with orientation, getting used to the place, there is a great difference between the study methods and the requirements of a secondary school and that of a higher education institution; many do not go out in their spare time, they take up a job to earn money and everybody has their own private life instead of share their time with others.

Among the 'Other' answers we can find the standard of education, good transport and availability, the distance from their residence, the number of points necessary for admission, practical training and its standard, the possibility of taking part in other types of diploma courses, sports facilities, restaurants and entertainment facilities

Based on the results of the examination the following conclusions can be drawn and the suggestions can be made for the practice:

- although the three counties of the Southern Great Plain region are the most important area for us considering enrolment, we must not give up student recruitment in those

places where the number of students applying for admission to the faculty considerably grew or suddenly fell back;

- the costs of mass media advertisements for the information of secondary school students can be reduced, at the same time the faculty web page must be developed considerably and also the content of the career orientation presentations at the secondary schools and also the Open Days at the Faculty must be improved;
- we can and also must rely on the opinion-shaping role of the agricultural experts in the region, who can recommend our faculty, based on their personal contacts or experiences, as parents, relatives or acquaintances of the applicants;
- the issues of tuition fee, grants and subsidies for students must be detailed in the information brochures, publications and presentations, despite the fact that the present sum of the tuition fee is not deterrent;
- it was obvious from the conversations with students that most applicants did not focus on student life and entertainment when making their choice.

Students can be grouped as purposeful selectors and not purposeful selectors. For those who selected purposefully it is important their degree should be competitive. Considerable but not determining numbers of students are willing to pay to obtain a degree. The opinion of the students can be influenced by media in positive and negative direction as well, for instance they read mostly tabloids and sports papers (*Blikk, Nemzeti Sport*). The next most popular source of information is teachers, the Admission Information and their friends from school and those who have already applied for admission.

During the conversations it turned out that in case the parents cannot finance the cost of the full time course, the students select a correspondence course and get a degree with studying after work. Many would like to take the “student loan” but they are not sure at all if they can find a job and be able to pay back the loan after graduating. Few students have language examination certificate when applying for admission, and they highlighted they expected difficulties in passing the intermediate level language examination.

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