

Students' life satisfaction and career choice Comparative study: 2006-2023

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Abstract

The article has two main objectives: (1) to investigate the level of life satisfaction and the hierarchy of motivation involved in the choice of profession and (2) to compare the current results with those obtained almost two decades ago. Did the generational changes, the economic and political changes in society, and the course of the pandemic period influence the students' perception of the two aspects in question? In the efforts to get to know the young generation of students, the levels of the sectoral indicators of life satisfaction are highlighted, as well as the reasons that led to the choice of the profession; The results obtained today are compared with those from a previous study, from 2006, highlighting the common aspects but also the differences between the two generations of students.

Keywords: life satisfaction, motivation for choosing a profession, professional interests, subjective well-being, students, generation X, generation Z

Introduction

The transition to a new level of education, the university one, represents a new step in the students' professional development, the opportunity to discover themselves and develop new skills, to assert themselves, but also a demanding, stressful period. This event brings many changes in students' lives and can influence their level of satisfaction with life, with effects on their involvement in university activities. A study conducted at a public university in Turkey in 2015 reveals that student participation in academic and extracurricular activities influences lower levels of perceived stress and greater life satisfaction. (Civitci, 2015)

Life satisfaction is a general indicator of subjective well-being. Revealing how people evaluate their own lives, is both cause and effect of satisfaction with life domains. (Mihalache, 2008). Previous studies mention that young people tend to be characterized by a lower degree of satisfaction than the mature population. In an investigation carried out in 1980 on a group of 1000 students from Bucharest, the global satisfaction indicator has a relatively low value, 4.04, on a scale where 1 means very little satisfied and 7 – very satisfied, so slightly above average. The results confirm other investigations carried out in 1977 when similar values were obtained (E. Zamfir 1997).

Diener and Lucas identify four categories of theories regarding life satisfaction: needs theory - which states that there are certain universally human needs and their fulfillment is directly related to the variation in the subjective quality of life; standard relative theory - in which subjective well-being is the result of constant comparison between the actual state and the ideal state; goal theory - in which the standards of comparison are internal: own goals, goals, purposes; cultural theory - states that variations between social levels of subjective well-being are due to the variation of elements from one culture to another. There are some theories that state that life satisfaction is relative over time, and has a certain level of fluctuation, which means that certain

personal or collective events can affect the result of the subjective assessment of the quality of life. (Diener and Lucas, apud Bălătescu, 2003).

Raiu (2021) writes about Shamis and Nikonov who refer to generation as a group of people who have common values, are born in a certain period, received a similar education and experienced the same events throughout their lives, but especially during their formation. Therefore, we expect to encounter qualitatively different results compared to those obtained from the investigation 20 years ago. The students included in the research group 20 years ago were part of the so-called Generation X. This includes those born between 1965 and 1980 and grew up in a period when both parents were involved in work, they are the generation of children with "neck wrench", being for a long time without the supervision of an adult, they learn to manage on their own. The representatives of this generation are described as independent, resilient, adaptable, flexible, with entrepreneurial inclinations. They begin to value the quality of life, appreciate the balance between family life and professional life. Generation Z includes those born between 1997 and 2012 around smartphones, tablets, and social networks. They have had unlimited access to the knowledge of humanity, using communication and information technologies, which makes them very different from previous generations. Growing up in a relatively stable period economically and politically, they learned to be free and daring, open to risk and change, less fixed, in search of quick gratification. (Csobanka, 2016).

Both generations are currently in the labor market, the difference between them being made by different values of work styles, expectations, work-life balance and expectations of employers. David (2015) shows that Generation Z is characterized by a profile with modern Western features, naturally evolving, as previous generations did, influenced by the values of the society in which they live. From a study carried out in 46 countries around the world, including Romania - "Deloitte Global Millennial and Gen Z Survey 2022" - significant differences emerge between the attitude towards employment and work, both between generations and between members of the same generation, are in different social, economic and political zones. Knowing the motivation of the professional choice is of particular importance, reflecting the particularities of each individual student, but also the characteristics of a generation. If students manage to define their goals and become aware of their motivations, they have every chance to stay on the path they have chosen and achieve the desired results, an idea also supported in a study carried out in 2019 that highlights how important is the choice of undergraduate training program and satisfaction with it in the development of the future career in the chosen field. (Urea, 2019)

The studentship is a period that allows, on the one hand, the development of special cultural and leisure activities, without having the specific worries of a mature person; on the other hand, it means a busy study program, the tension of exams, limitations of financial resources, economic and social dependence on parents, uncertainties related to the future profession, to the workplace, to the choice of a partner.

In knowledge but also educational approaches in relation to students, it is necessary to know two aspects: the interweaving of motivations in a given action and their relative strength. The strength of motives is given not only by their degree of satisfaction, but also by the place they occupy in the motivational pyramid.

The objectives of this study were:

1. Investigating the level of life satisfaction and the hierarchy of motivation involved in choosing a profession in a group of N=124 students

2. Comparison of the present results with those obtained following investigations carried out in the past (2005)

We assumed that the values of the quality-of-life indicators between the two groups would be significantly different.

We assumed that there would be differences between the hierarchies of the reasons for choosing the profession in the two groups.

Method

Participants – The study comprises two groups.

The first group (N=124) was made up of students from years 1 and 2, Special Psychopedagogy specialization, from the Faculty of Psychology and Educational Sciences, University of Bucharest, from the academic year 2023-2024, women and men aged between 18 - 49 years old. We will call this batch Lot 1. All participants were informed about the purpose and the way of conducting the study and gave their consent to participate. The average age is 21.5.

Regarding the type of residence, 33.3% of the participants declare that they live with their parents, 22.2% live in student housing, 17.5% live with their partner, 20.6% live with rent; 4.8% live alone, in their own home.

The second group (N=112) was composed of students of the same specialization, from the same faculty, but the participation in the study took place in 2005. We will call this group Lot 2. The age of the participants was between 18 and 41 years, the average age was 21.1 years. The living conditions during that period are as follows: At home - 36% of students, 29.33% lived with rent, 16% lived in student housing, 9.33% lived with their parents, and 2.66% lived alone, in their own home.

In both groups, we observe the high percentages representing students who live with rent, in student housing, which means an important change in their lives, but also a financial effort on the part of the family.

Instruments

To make a comparison between the two groups of students, we chose to use the same tools applied in 2005:

I used a short questionnaire to collect information including personal data (age, residence, information related to the choice of faculty).

The motivational ranking questionnaire (made by Ilie Puiu Vasilescu) includes 9 variants of reasons that determined the professional choice, in relation to the pyramid of needs. In the questionnaire used, the motivation for subsistence is represented by obtaining the best possible Remuneration. The second motivational level is based on the need for security, in two reference systems in which it manifests itself: physical: related to health (No risk of accidents, No risk of illness) and social, related to Job Safety. The next level is determined by the need for social contacts, the need for affection, embodied by: Good relations with colleagues and Good relations with the boss. The fourth level of the motivational pyramid refers to the motivations of respect and self-respect, of achieving and maintaining a good self-image. The fifth level is the need for self-realization, to carry out an activity that brings satisfaction. The struggle of motives is manifested by the fact that the lower motives are prioritized in relation to the others, so that the motivations at higher levels can become active only after the previous motivations have been satisfied. Research reveals that motives are hierarchically archived, but also that a motivation is stronger the less satisfied it is.

The Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale (author Scott Hueber, 2001 version, for adolescents) contains 40 items on five sectoral indicators of life satisfaction: family, friends, school, environment and self and is aimed at adolescents. Among the participants, 8 students are over the age of adolescence, but we chose to keep them, to be able to observe possible differences with other colleagues. The values of the sectoral indicators of life satisfaction are calculated by dividing the sum of the score of each indicator by the number of items. The higher the score of the indicators, in the individual calculation, the higher the level of satisfaction. The higher the average value, at the lot level, the higher the satisfaction level of the indicator.

Findings and discussion

Regarding the question about the people who influenced them in choosing the faculty, the current results are like those obtained in the batch investigated in the past:

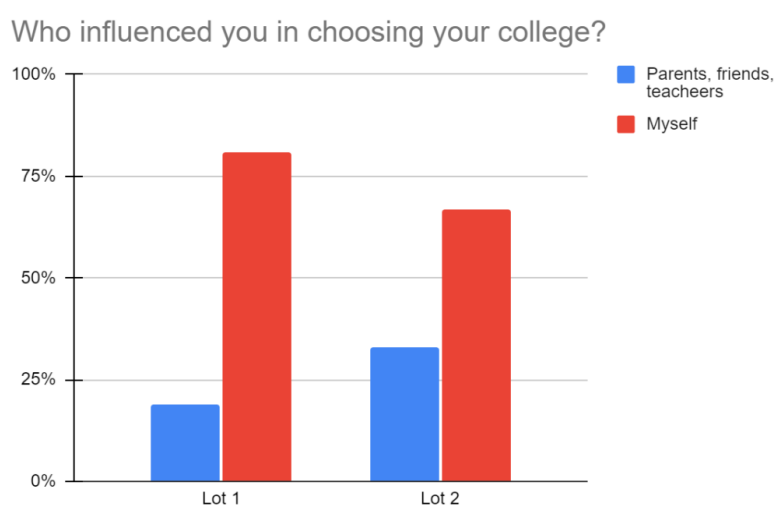


Figure 1. Who influenced you in choosing the college? - Comparative responses in the two groups

Most of the students showed a strong involvement in the choice of profession, the desire to help people with disabilities. Some of them confess that they were influenced by parents, friends, colleagues. This may mean that they have been supported and are still supported by those close to them, who have been involved in their career guidance. However, we observe that the percentage of those who declare that they were not influenced by anyone is higher in batch 1, compared to batch 2, proving a greater independence and information of the current students, in choosing the faculty.

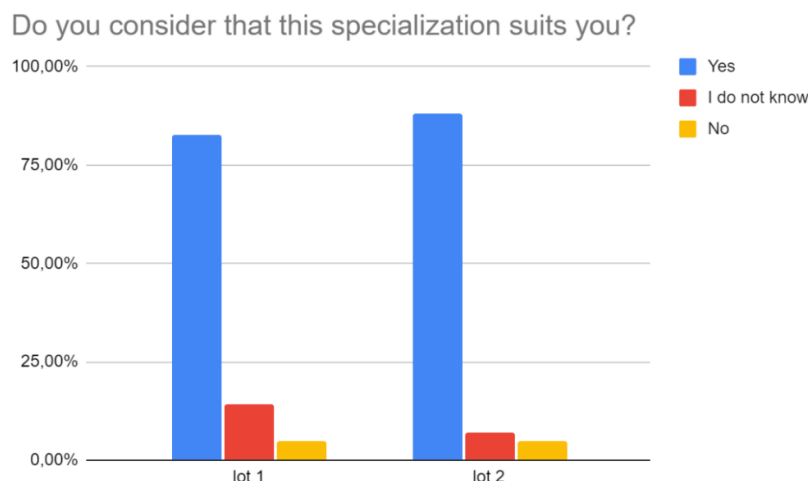


Figure 2. Do you consider that this specialization suits you? - Comparative responses in the two groups

To this question, 82.5% of students from Lot 1 answered that the field suits them, 14.3% are not sure if it suits them and 4.8% believe that this field does not suit them. Compared to them, in Lot 2 a higher percentage, 88%, considered that they made a good choice, in accordance with their qualities and desires, 7% were not sure about this and 5% stated that this specialization did not suit them. Vocational orientation is manifested through the motivation for choosing the field of study, the interest in the profession representing the most important criterion for choosing the faculty. On the other hand, the degree to which the profession chosen by students corresponds to their real abilities is an indicator of their maturity.

After applying the Multidimensional Students' Life Satisfaction Scale to lot 1 and processing the answers, we obtained the following averages of life satisfaction indicators, as seen in fig. 3:

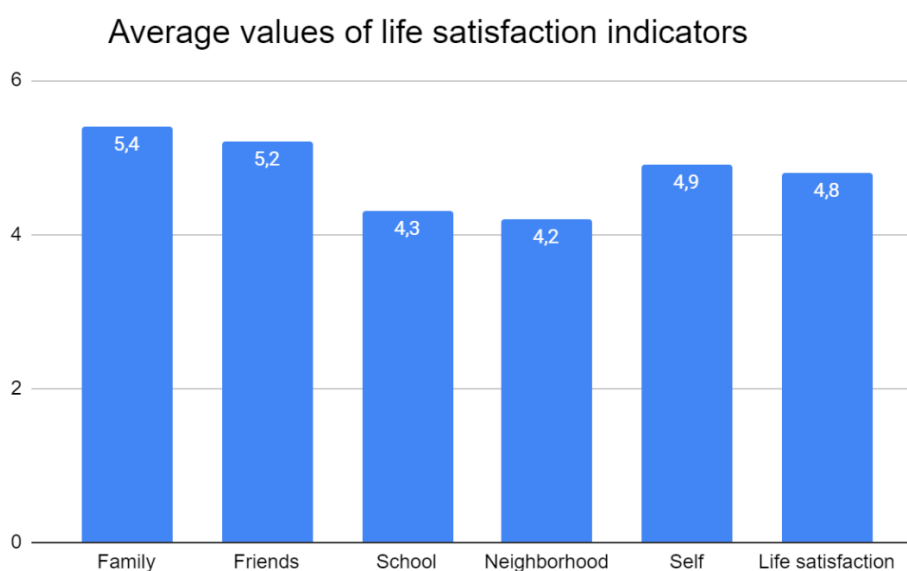


Figure 3. Average values of Life satisfaction indicators – Lot 1

The indicator related to the satisfaction felt with the family occupies the first position for the participants of Lot 1, with an average of 5.4. This may signify the existence of a strong

attachment, which contradicts the idea of generational conflict. Next comes the satisfaction felt in the field of Friends, with an average of 5.2. For teenagers, the main orientation in relationships and interests is that of people of the same age, their friends. However, in this case, friends are not the main source of satisfaction in life for the respondents. In 3rd place is self-satisfaction, with 4.9, a value that exceeds that of the average life satisfaction of this study group. On the last places are the school-related indicators, with an average of 4.3, and the neighborhood, with an average of 4.2. The average value of life satisfaction of this batch is 4.8. These average values are higher than those obtained by group 2. The differences in values can be explained by the different ways of choosing the answers, among the variants: total disagreement, moderate disagreement, slight disagreement, slight agreement, moderate agreement, and total agreement. The high values of the averages of the indicators in the first batch express the preference for the answers at the extremes, in favor of the middle, neutral ones, which characterizes this generation.

We present below the average values of life satisfaction indicators obtained in Lot 2:

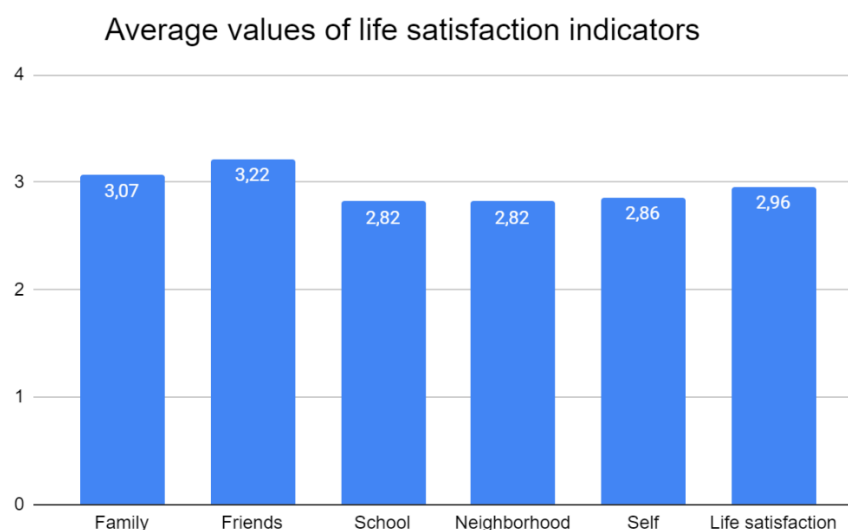


Figure 4. Average values of Life satisfaction indicators – Lot 2

It is interesting to compare the values, at the group level, of the satisfaction indicators, which reveal higher values of satisfaction with family, friends, values of self-satisfaction, social environment and school, which are above the average value, but below the value of the average value of life satisfaction. Satisfaction with the school and with the neighborhood are valued by students with equal values, a situation like that found in group 1.

Observing the two values of life satisfaction in the two groups, 4.8 and 2.96 - we could conclude that the level of life satisfaction of students in group 1 is higher than that of group 2. Life satisfaction is felt subjectively, but it can be appreciated and expressed in a particular way. If the average values are considerably higher today, what is contributing to this? It is about the specific characteristics of the representatives of this new generation Z, who appreciate more the quality of life, the balance between personal life and professional life, the daring to express and assert themselves in life, but it can also be the effect of environmental factors, changes in life social, political, economic, as well as the experiences during the pandemic, which changed the perspective of reporting individuals to life, to school, to work, to family.

Regarding the hierarchy of the reasons for choosing the profession, we find even greater changes between the two groups. If almost two decades ago, self-respect was the top reason for

choosing a profession, followed by the respect of others, the situation in the first two places in group 1 is totally different: interesting work is in first place and in second place is salary, which occupies past last position. The respect of others is less important for today's teenagers and young people, it goes down in the hierarchy, from the 2nd place to the 5th place, equal to No risk of accidents, No risk of illness, Good relations with colleagues. For students from group 1, Relations with bosses are the least important in choosing a profession, they occupy the 6th place, the last place, in this ranking. In the case of group 1, there is an apparent reversal, placing achievement motivations and subsistence motivations in the first places.

The reasons for lower positions in the hierarchy could indicate the satisfaction of those needs to some extent, and those in the leading positions signify frustration, and unsatisfied needs. Students who are over the age of adolescence first appreciate interesting jobs, but also the salary and a safe, stable job. There are no significant differences between their choices compared to their peers. The two situations with the ranking of the motivations for choosing the profession can be summarized in the following table:

Table 1. Hierarchy of motivation for choosing a profession

Position	Lot 1	Lot 2
1.	interesting work	self-esteem
2.	salary	respect from others
3.	self-esteem	without risk of disease
4.	safe, stable job	interesting work
5.	without danger of accidents	good relations with colleagues
	without risk of disease	
	good relations with colleagues	
	respect from others	
6.	good relations with bosses	without danger of accidents
7.		safe, stable job
8.		good relations with bosses
9.		salary

In Group 2, the fourth level of the pyramid, related to the motivations of respect and self-respect, of achieving and maintaining a good self-image, occupies the first places. This leads to the explanation that, in choosing a profession, these reasons are prioritized, representing unsatisfied needs. Group 1, by ranking their motivations, shows that they seek a balance between interesting work, a salary that offers them security, independence, and prestige. They seek to transform their interests, passions into possible professions that will bring them great material gains and financial stability. They are less sensitive to motivations related to workplace safety or relationships with colleagues or bosses, confirming the independent, entrepreneurial spirit, but also tendencies to reduce cooperation or maintain social relationships at a high level.

Another difference observed in the administration of the instruments of the two groups is that the answers given by the participants in group 2 were sent immediately, they engaged with curiosity and interest in the research, and the answers received from group 1 came after several interventions. An explanation could be the different interests in aspects related to self-knowledge, the different attitudes towards tasks, the level of saturation in relation to completing

questionnaires, but also the way of administration, on paper, in the past, compared to online forms today.

Conclusion

The conclusions of the research refer to the fact that both in the assessment of life satisfaction indicators, but also in the values of the level of life satisfaction, in the ranking of the reasons that direct students towards the choice of profession, there are qualitative and quantitative differences between the two study groups.

Significant differences in the values of life satisfaction indicators were found between the two groups, but also an increase in the level of life satisfaction at a difference of almost two decades.

Important changes were also found in the ranking of motivations for choosing a profession, in accordance with the characteristics of the new generation of students.

These differences are the result of the influences of environmental, social, political, cultural, economic factors, which determine specific characteristics of different generations.

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