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SATISFACTION WITH CHOSEN EDUCATIONAL PATHS AMONG POLISH AND CZECH STUDENTS

ABSTRACT

Satisfaction with education is an essential part of the educational process. It should be present at every stage of education, including academic education. By experiencing satisfaction in the education, a person is likely to feel more motivated to realise his or her own educational and professional goals. The aim of this article is to present a study on individually satisfaction with education among Polish and Czech students, based on research conducted between November 2023 and April 2024. The study involved 356 respondents. A diagnostic survey method was employed, utilizing a questionnaire technique. A survey questionnaire served as the research tool. The research revealed that the majority of students reported a higher-than-average level of satisfaction with their chosen educational paths. These findings hold significant implications for the field of education. They provide valuable insights into the factors contributing to student satisfaction and highlight areas where educational practices and policies could be improved.

KEYWORDS *student satisfaction, educational pathways, higher education, students, cross-cultural comparison*

INTRODUCTION

Satisfaction is a multidimensional concept often studied across various life domains. This study examines a specific aspect: satisfaction with education, focusing on students from Polish and Czech universities and their educational experiences. Understanding student satisfaction with education is crucial as it contributes to diagnosing the current state of higher education and offers actionable insights to improve students' experiences. The subject of this research was the phenomenon of satisfaction with education among students. The aim was to find out the declarative level of satisfaction with education among students of Polish and Czech universities.

The following research problems were identified:

1. How is the phenomenon of satisfaction with education developing among Polish students?
2. How is the phenomenon of satisfaction with education shaping up among students in the Czech Republic?

3. What is the relationship between the declarative satisfaction with education of Polish students and the declarative satisfaction with education of students in the Czech Republic?

Due to the diagnostic nature of the research, the formulation of research hypotheses was abandoned.

Global data support the relevance of this issue. The *Global Student Satisfaction Awards 2023* study conducted by Studyportals, Unibuddy, and the British Council IELTS revealed a 3.70% increase in global student satisfaction compared to 2021. Covering students from 126 countries, including Poland and the Czech Republic, the study reported an overall satisfaction score of 4.21 on a 5-point scale. In Poland, satisfaction rose from 4.09 in 2021 to 4.18 in 2023, indicating a modest improvement. In the Czech Republic, the satisfaction score was 4.35 in 2023, with earlier data unavailable. This growth in satisfaction levels may reflect the effects of initiatives aimed at improving the quality and accessibility of higher education in both countries (Studyportals, 2023).

The general concept of satisfaction is often described as an emotional reaction to the fulfillment or non-fulfillment of certain functions, tasks, or roles (Bańka, 2000, p. 329; Wołowska, 2013, p. 121; Springer, 2018, p. 48; Plewka, 2016, p. 66). In the educational context, satisfaction can be seen as the pleasure derived from participation in the learning process. However, this definition oversimplifies the intricate relationship between satisfaction and the challenges students face, such as stress or anxiety, during their academic journey. Satisfaction with education often depends on a student's ability to compare their experiences with expectations, aspirations, or perceptions of the educational process (Mazurek-Łopacińska, 2003, p. 305).

From a systemic perspective, satisfaction with education can be deconstructed into components that, together, form a unified whole. Life satisfaction, as a broader construct, is understood as the degree to which individuals evaluate the fulfillment of their aspirations and goals (Finogenow, 2013, p. 346; Zalewska, 2003, p. 30; Pujer, 2017, pp. 17-18; Łaguna, 2012, p. 165). Juczyński (2012) adapted the Satisfaction with Life Scale (SWLS) to the Polish context, emphasizing that life satisfaction results from comparing one's current

situation with personal standards. A similar approach can be applied to satisfaction with education, wherein a student's ability to assess their current academic experiences in light of their aspirations plays a critical role.

Students with clearly defined goals may still feel dissatisfied if their education falls short of expectations. However, self-awareness of aspirations and goals enhances their ability to evaluate their academic experience and envision their professional future. While satisfaction is often explored in marketing or management, focusing on students as clients, less emphasis is placed on the educational process itself. Examining satisfaction with specific educational elements offers valuable feedback for improving programs and aligning them with students' needs.

The factor of satisfaction extends beyond the educational domain, impacting other areas of life. Research demonstrates a positive correlation between job satisfaction and overall life satisfaction (Wołowska, 2014, p. 131; Białas & Litwin, 2013, p. 162; Kopertyńska, 2008, p. 247). Improving one aspect of life, such as education, can enhance related areas, contributing to an individual's overall well-being and professional prospects. Moreover, higher satisfaction levels are associated with greater creativity, an essential trait in navigating the demands of the modern world (Grobela, 2015, p. 150; Gębuś & Pierzchała, 2016, p. 37).

Recent studies highlight the factors shaping student satisfaction and dissatisfaction, as well as priorities for improving satisfaction. Hall (2022) found that students consistently emphasize the importance of practical courses and training, reflecting their desire to be well-prepared for professional life. This underscores the need for universities to align educational offerings with students' expectations and career aspirations.

Drawing from the literature, this study identifies five core components of satisfaction with education:

- a sense of purposefulness in education (Juczyński, 2012; Chodkowski, 2021; Frisch, 2006),
- loyalty to educational choices (Hall, 2022),
- a vision of future possibilities (Douglas, McClelland, & Davis, 2008),
- satisfaction with the fulfillment of personal aspirations (Finogenow, 2013; Zalewska, 2003; Pujer, 2017; Łaguna, 2012),

- declarative feelings of satisfaction with one's educational path (Bańka, 2000; Wołowska, 2013; Springer, 2018; Plewka, 2016).

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

The study employed a quantitative paradigm using the diagnostic survey method, well-suited for examining respondents' attitudes, interests, and motives (Łobocki, 2003, p. 244). The questionnaire technique was utilized to minimize researcher influence and ensure respondent anonymity (Maszke, 2008, p. 233).

In the study, an original survey questionnaire consisting of 7 closed-ended questions was used. The closed-ended questions allowed respondents to provide answers by selecting the appropriate number on a 1-7 scale. Cronbach's alpha for the Polish version was 0.90, indicating very good test reliability (George & Mallery, 2016, p. 240). For the Czech version, Cronbach's alpha was 0.84, suggesting good test reliability (George & Mallery, 2016, p. 240).

The questionnaire used in the present study was inspired by the SWLS tool, which was developed by E. Diener, R. A. Emmons, R. J. Larsen and S. Griffin and then adapted by Zygfryd Juczyński for Polish diagnostic needs. It is important to mention the fundamental differences between the questionnaires. The SWLS tool consists of 5 statements and refers to the overall level of satisfaction with life. The tool created by the authors of this publication refers only to the category of satisfaction with education.

The construct of satisfaction with education consisted of specific dimensions, extracted from the literature. As understood by the authors of this paper, the following can be identified as components of satisfaction with education: a sense of purposefulness of education (Juczyński, 2012, p. 128, Chodkowski, 2021, p. 159, Frisch, 2006, p. 5), loyalty to choice (Hall, 2022), a vision of future possibilities (Douglas, McClelland, Davis, 2008 p. 31), a sense of satisfaction with one's aspirations (Finogenov, 2013, p. 346, Zalewska, 2003, p. 30; Pujer, 2017, pp. 17-18; Łaguna, 2012, p. 165), a declarative feeling of satisfaction with the choice made (Bańka, 2000, p. 329, Wołowska, 2013, p. 121; Springer, 2018, p. 48; Plewka, 2016, p. 66).

Surveys were carried out among a group of students from Poland and students from the Czech Republic between November 2023 and April 2024. In the case of Polish students, the research took place using a paper survey. The research location for Polish students was the Jan Długosz University in Częstochowa. In the case of students from the Czech Republic, the same research tool was used in an online format. Students from the following Czech universities took part in the survey: Slezská Univerzita v Opavě, Ostravská Univerzita, AMBIS. Vysoká škola v Praze. The predominance of universities in the Czech Republic is dictated by the online form of data collection.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE GROUP OF POLISH STUDENTS

The group of Polish students surveyed was diverse in terms of demographics. While gender was considered, the sample was heavily female-dominated, making it difficult to draw meaningful conclusions based on gender. This may be dictated by the random selection of the survey sample or by the general characteristics of the university.

The respondents included 190 (94.06%) women and 12 (5.94%) men. Due to the strong unevenness of the groups, it was decided to exclude the gender demographic variable from further analyses. Gender was not identified as a specific category in the analyses themselves, but it should be noted that the percentage of women was significantly higher.

Also due to the very high heterogeneity of respondents in terms of age, it was decided not to carry out analyses relating to age groups. However, it should be mentioned that the youngest participants in the study were 18 years old, while the oldest were 49.

In relation to the category of area of residence, three groups of respondents were distinguished. Respondents living in rural areas included 111 people (54.95%). The group of respondents living in a city with up to 100,000 inhabitants included 40 respondents (19.80%). The last group living in a city with more than 100,000 inhabitants included 36 people (17.82%).

Respondents with a secondary education included 130 people (64.36%). The second most numerous was the group of people with a bachelor's degree; the number of people in this group was 65 (32.18%). The group of people with a master's degree included 7 people (3.46%).

The last grouping variable was the type of study the respondents attended. Two groups were identified in this category. The group of full-time students included 125 people (61.88%). The group of part-time students included 77 people (38.12%).

THE PHENOMENON OF SATISFACTION WITH EDUCATION AMONG POLISH STUDENTS

The group of Polish students included 202 respondents. After analysis using the Jamovi programme, the descriptive characteristics are as follows, shown in Table 1.

Table 1. *Characteristics of descriptive statistics (N=202)*

Statistic	Value
N	202
Mean	33.4
Median	34.0
Standard deviation	7.52
Minimum	7
Maximum	49

Source: own research

The above data indicate that Polish students show satisfaction with their education at a higher than average level. In order to find out which elements of the categories listed by the researchers are particularly satisfying for students, an analysis was carried out detailing specific questionnaire questions. The maximum number of points possible was 7, while the minimum was 1.

Question *one* related to the category of *comparing the current state with one's own vision of academic education*. Among the answers obtained, the mean was 4.41. Question *two* referred to the *sense of purposefulness of academic*

education (mean: 5.30). Question *three* referred to *loyalty to the choice and declaration of making the same choice of educational path again* (mean: 5.05). Question *four* referred to the *declarative sense of satisfaction in relation to the whole academic education* (mean: 4.88). Question *five* referred to the *declared sense of satisfaction with the choice of a specific educational pathway* (mean: 5.12). Question *six* referred to the *sense of satisfaction of one's own aspirations* (mean: 4.36). Question *seven* referred to the *declarative evaluation of the conditions of education* (mean: 4.26). The distribution of respondents' answers will be presented below (table 2).

Table 2. *Distribution of respondents' answers to individual questions (N=202)*

Question number	Number of responses	Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
	Percentage							
1	<i>n</i>	5	10	22	66	64	30	5
	%	2,48%	4,95%	10,89%	32,67%	31,68%	14,85%	2,48%
2	<i>n</i>	2	5	13	20	62	70	30
	%	0,99%	2,48%	6,44%	9,90%	30,69%	34,65%	14,85%
3	<i>n</i>	6	10	20	26	45	59	36
	%	2,97%	4,95%	9,90%	12,87%	22,28%	29,21%	17,82%
4	<i>n</i>	3	9	21	39	53	58	19
	%	1,49%	4,45%	10,40%	19,31%	26,24%	28,71%	9,40%
5	<i>n</i>	2	7	15	31	64	54	29
	%	0,99%	3,46%	7,43%	15,35%	31,68%	26,73%	14,36%
6	<i>n</i>	9	15	22	53	67	24	12
	%	4,45%	7,43%	10,89%	26,24%	33,17%	11,88%	5,94%
7	<i>n</i>	8	13	28	63	57	26	7
	%	3,96%	6,44%	13,86%	31,19%	28,22%	12,87%	3,46%

Source: own research

The above data indicate that the most satisfying element listed in the questionnaire tool was the sense of purposefulness of education. Thus, it can be assumed that the respondents may see academic education as a tool to achieve their own educational or professional goals. In contrast, the lowest score was obtained in the context of the conditions of academic education. This may mean that in the case of learning conditions, respondents have somewhat higher expectations than the actual state found by them.

In order to deepen the analyses, it was decided to investigate correlations. The Shapiro-Wilk test showed a p-value of 0.02, indicating that the distribution was asymmetric. Therefore, the Spearman rank correlation test, which is the non-parametric equivalent of the r-Pearson correlation test, was used for the analyses. The significance level was taken as $p < 0.05$. The results of the analyses are presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Relationship between satisfaction with education and demographic variables of Polish students (N=202; $p < 0.05$)*

Demographic Variable	Spearman's rho
Place of residence	-0.02
Form of study	-0.01
Education	-0.18
Age	-0.08

Source: own research

A significant negative correlation was detected between the level of satisfaction with education and the education of the respondents. This may mean that the longer a person studies, the lower their level of satisfaction with their education. This may be due to a variety of factors, such as: the form and structure of education itself, the acquisition of information negatively influencing the perception of education, one's own negative experiences during the education process. At this point it should be noted that quantitative data do not lead to an answer about the reason for the reality shown. In order to clarify this, further research should be carried out, focusing precisely on explaining the phenomenon shown.

CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SAMPLE GROUP OF STUDENTS FROM THE CZECH REPUBLIC COMPARED TO THE POLISH GROUP

The results of the research on students from the Czech Republic have been partially presented in the AD ALTA Journal of Interdisciplinary Research ([Author]).

The number of respondents from the Czech Republic was 154. Significantly more women (88.31%) than men (11.69%) took part in the study. Due to the inequality of the groups during the analyses, it was decided not to specify specific gender groups. A large variation was also shown in the context of the age of the respondents, which was ultimately also not included in the analyses. Interestingly, the youngest respondent in the Czech group was 18 years old, while the oldest was 60 (in the Polish group: 18-49).

Respondents living in rural areas were the biggest group (42.86%), followed by those living in a city with up to 100 000 inhabitants (34.41%). Last in terms of numbers were residents of cities with more than 100 000 inhabitants (22.73%). The hierarchy of the presented categories was therefore similar to that of the Polish respondents.

Educational attainment, due to system differences, was divided into four categories in the Czech group. The largest group were those with secondary education (58.44%). This was followed by those with second-level university education (22.08%). In third place were those with a first degree (16.23%). The last place in terms of numbers was taken by those with third-level tertiary education (3.25%). It should be mentioned that among the Polish respondents, the most numerous group was also those with secondary education (64.36%).

Three categories were also distinguished in the Czech group. Full-time students were the most numerous (49.35%), followed by those studying a combined form of study (42.86%), and in last place were part-time students (7.79%). In the Polish group, the full-time category was also the most numerous (61.88%), while the combined form was not identified.

SATISFACTION WITH EDUCATION AMONG STUDENTS IN THE CZECH REPUBLIC COMPARED TO THE POLISH GROUP

The total number of respondents was 356 (Polish group – 202, Czech group – 154). A summary of the descriptive characteristics of the surveyed groups can be found in Table 4.

Table 4. *Descriptive Statistics for Satisfaction with Education (N=356)*

	Polish group	Czech group
n	202	154
Mean	33.40	33.60
Median	34.00	34.00
Standard deviation	7.52	7.60
Minimum	7	14
Maximum	49	49

Source: own research

According to the analyses, the average satisfaction with education took similar values in both groups of respondents. This may mean that both Polish and Czech students declare experiencing satisfaction with education at a similar, higher than average level. In view of the systemic differences in the learning process, the above data seems puzzling. In order to deepen the analysis, it would be necessary to compare the teaching systems in the countries described and the average teaching conditions. However, in this article, which is more dedicated to diagnostics, the above thoughts will not be developed. This necessitates the design of a separate study, mainly focused on explaining the phenomenon described.

In terms of maximum values, both groups achieved the highest possible score. Despite the lower size of the Czech group, the highest score was obtained by exactly the same number of people in both the Polish and Czech groups (2). As for the lowest score, in the Polish group it was 7 and was obtained by one person. In the Czech group, the lowest score was 14. However, due to the quantitative diversity of respondents, it cannot be ruled out that a lower score would not have occurred in the Czech group.

Similarly to the Polish group, the Czech group also analysed the distribution of answers in specific questionnaire questions. It should be noted that in each question, the lowest possible answer was 1 and the highest was 7. The results are as follows, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. *Distribution of respondents' answers to individual questions in the Czech group (N=154)*

Question number	Number of responses Percentage	Very Strongly Disagree	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Very Strongly Agree
1	<i>n</i>	3	7	25	40	41	29	9
	%	1,95%	4,55%	16,23%	25,97%	26,62%	18,84%	5,84%
2	<i>n</i>	3	3	6	18	44	54	26
	%	1,95%	1,95%	3,90%	11,69 %	28,57%	35,06%	16,88%
3	<i>n</i>	8	14	17	14	30	37	34
	%	5,19%	9,09%	11,04%	9,09%	19,48%	24,03%	22,08%
4	<i>n</i>	5	11	16	27	29	43	23
	%	3,25%	7,14%	10,39%	17,53%	18,83%	27,92%	14,94%
5	<i>n</i>	4	5	12	18	39	43	33
	%	2,60%	3,25%	7,79%	11,69%	25,32%	27,92%	21,43%
6	<i>n</i>	3	18	23	24	38	35	13
	%	1,95%	11,69%	14,94%	15,58%	24,68%	22,73%	8,44%
7	<i>n</i>	3	16	23	49	34	18	11
	%	1,95%	10,39%	14,94%	31,82%	22,08%	11,69%	7,14%

Source: own research

The above data shows that the distribution of respondents' answers from both groups is characterised by slight differences. For both the Polish and Czech groups, the highest average was obtained for the sense of purposefulness of education. Thus, it can be concluded that in the context of the phenomenon of satisfaction with education, this is the most satisfying aspect for respondents overall. The lowest mean also in both groups concerned the same component of satisfaction with education. Polish and Czech students showed the lowest average in the context of the declarative evaluation of the conditions of academic education. This may mean that students from both countries expect higher conditions of education than they currently have.

The Czech group's data were also subjected to correlation analysis, using Spearman's rank correlation test. The level of significance was taken as $p < 0.05$. However, no statistically significant correlations were detected between satisfaction with education and demographic variables such as place of residence, form of study, education or age of respondents.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

This study explored the construct of satisfaction with educational pathways, a key component of overall student satisfaction. While satisfaction is an intuitively understood term, its academic exploration remains vital, as it provides actionable insights for improving educational experiences. Understanding the opinions of students can serve as a foundation for targeted interventions aimed at enhancing the quality of higher education.

The findings align partially with the Global Student Satisfaction Report 2023, which reported an average global satisfaction level of 4.21 on a 5-point scale, reflecting a 3.70% increase compared to 2021. Poland, although slightly below the global average (4.18 in 2023), showed improvement compared to 2021 (4.09). The Czech Republic, with a score of 4.35, ranked above average among Eastern European countries. Despite this discrepancy, the present study found that satisfaction levels among Polish and Czech students regarding their chosen educational paths were remarkably similar. This contrasts with previous findings suggesting that satisfaction levels may depend on nationality (Douglass, Duffy, Autin, 2016). The similarity observed in this study might be attributed to the shared cultural and geographic proximity of Poland and the Czech Republic, as well as the narrowly defined scope of satisfaction with educational pathways.

The results revealed no significant correlations between satisfaction with education and demographic variables in either group. This finding aligns with research indicating that satisfaction is influenced by individual characteristics, such as emotional predispositions. For example, Phua et al. (2023) demonstrated that affective traits account for approximately 25% of students' educational satisfaction, highlighting the role of personal disposition in

shaping perceptions. Similarly, proactive personality traits have been shown to correlate with overall job satisfaction (Wang & Lei, 2023). These insights suggest that factors unrelated to the educational context, such as personality or emotional well-being, warrant greater attention in satisfaction research.

The broader significance of satisfaction with education lies in its influence on other life domains. Studies indicate that higher satisfaction in education positively impacts life satisfaction, creativity, and professional outcomes (Grobela, 2015; Gębuś & Pierzchała, 2016). This underscores the importance of fostering satisfaction with education, as it extends beyond academic contexts, shaping students' overall well-being and future career trajectories.

This study faced certain limitations, primarily due to its reliance on quantitative methods, which focus on objective measures of satisfaction. To provide a more comprehensive understanding, future research should incorporate qualitative methods to capture subjective perceptions of satisfaction and its underlying factors. Qualitative approaches could enrich the findings by exploring the nuanced experiences of students, offering deeper insights into the emotional and contextual dimensions of educational satisfaction.

In conclusion, the study revealed that Polish and Czech students exhibit above-average satisfaction with their educational paths, with notable similarities between the groups. Differences in motivations for choosing universities highlight the individualized nature of educational decision-making. The findings underscore the importance of considering both individual dispositions and external factors in understanding satisfaction with education. By incorporating qualitative insights and addressing broader contextual influences, future research could contribute to more effective strategies for enhancing satisfaction and improving the educational experience.

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