



STUDENTS' CHOICE OF OPTIONAL SUBJECTS

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Abstract

When a young person enters the university and becomes a student, he/she will have to deal with a number of important issues. He/she must attend classes and seminars that are frequently organized very differently from those he/she was used to in secondary education; also, he/she has to sit through them without being forced to learn during the semester, and furthermore he/she can choose some of the materials they wish to study (engaging in a written agreement to abide by certain rules and disciplines to participate the chosen courses). This paper aims to highlight the manner in which students from different academic levels and from different specializations choose the optional courses and also to analyze the manner in which the students are informed about them before the process of selection is carried out.

Keywords: choice, optional

Introduction

According to the Regulation regarding the organization and conduct of undergraduate studies (art. 5 with subparagraphs 5.4: 5.4.1 and 5.4.2) "Student participation in the program of study implies the necessary signing of a study contract which stipulates the rights and obligations of each party involved in the

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academic studies, for the period of the study program". This means that each university has well established research agreements provided in the operating methodologies and University Charter (2012) regarding the obligation of the students to sign contracts under the Regulation of professional activity in the ECTS students (Procedure University of Oradea, 2012): During the period of the education period the students' file include: tuition contract, valid for the duration of the educational period (represented by the Rector), and annual contracts concluded with college education (represented by the Dean); contracts will be completed within 15 days from the beginning of the academic year. They will contain compulsory subjects (compulsory and optional in fact) contracted by the student, consisting of specific subjects of the curriculum of the academic year in which the student is enrolled, subjects failed the previous year / years for which the student wants to redo the activity and possibly disciplines credited in advance (Article 4). This means that during the academic year a student, regardless of faculty or specialization has signed two contracts: a contract with the university, including: Contracting Parties (University of Oradea and the student who is asking a series of personal data) Object of the contract (ongoing educational activities) Duration of the contract (i.e. the whole period of schooling), Taxes (and the conditions under which they are paid and for what they will be use), rights and obligations of the parties, termination conditions of the contract, and penalties (sanctions that are presented in the order that can be applied to the student) (see: Regulations regarding the students' professional activity on the basis of the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS), 2012-2013; 2011-2012).

Objectives

To identify the main knowledge of students' about the contracts they have signed.

To determine how students choose their optional courses and criteria that they take into account when they make these choices.

Highlighting the manner in which students in different academic years choose optional courses.

Assumptions

We suppose that there are significant differences between students from different academic years regarding the information they have on the types of contracts they signed during university studies.

We suppose that there are significant differences between students from different academic years regarding how the choice of optional subjects is made.

Method

Sample of subjects

The research involves a total of 60 subjects, students of the Department of Educational Sciences, Department of Primary and Preschool Pedagogy. From the point of view of their age they are between 19 and 22 years. All subjects involved in the research are female. From the point of view of their distribution by year of: 30 second year students, and 30 students in the third year.

Methods used in research

In the present research we used a questionnaire. It consists of a total of 14 items by which those interviewed manifested opinions on issues related to: contracts that students make with the University; the choice of optional courses for each year of study; the support that is offered in addition to the various contracts; and views on how signing these contracts should happen.

The items consist of closed answers type (items 2, 3, 4, 5, 8, 9, 10, 13), split ratings (items 12 and 14), and of open answers type (items 6, 7, 11).

Subjects were asked to respond individually, and it was explained to them that their answers are confidential and will be used only for research purposes.

Analysis and interpretation of results

Based on the questionnaire presented above we obtained the information that has been processed using the SPSS (Drugaş & Roşeanu, 2010).

Thus, to test the first hypothesis, that of the existence of significant differences between students from different academic years regarding the practical knowledge they have on the types of contracts they sign and content to, the results obtained are shown in table 1 below.

Table 1. Comparison of results obtained by students on items 4 (listing contracts), 5 (contracts signed) and 8 (explanations offered for signing contracts)

Item		Mean	SD	t	p
4	2 year	2,5000	,73108	,000	1,000
	3 year	2,5000	,68229		
5	2 year	2,8667	1,19578	,787	,434
	3 year	2,6333	1,09807		
8	2 year	1,1667	,37905	,356	,723
	3 year	1,1333	,34575		

From the table we see that there are significant differences between students in year 2 and year 3 in terms of their knowledge of the types of contracts that they signed with the university or their content. We can also state is that the second year students gave more correct answers, which is probably explained by their membership, they are closer to their start as students and remember better what they signed when they started school.

Given the results, hypothesis 1 cannot be sustained; we found that there are no significant differences between students from different academic years regarding the information they have on the types of contracts they signed during their university studies.

To test hypothesis 2 students have offered answers to item 9: "How did you choose the optional courses you want to follow?" The results, by year of study, are shown in the figure 1.

Note that students in the second year state that they chose the optional courses largely based on the information they have previously received about what the courses contain (16 students i.e. 53.3%) while students in year 3 chose a on the basis of the professor that teaches that optional course (17 students i.e. 56.7%).

Pearson Chi-square test value is shown below ($\chi^2=8,923$; $p<.05$).

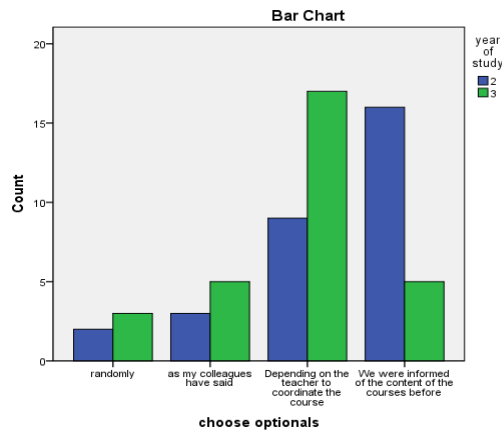


Figure1. Choosing optional courses by years of study

Table 2. The calculated value of chi-square test

	Value	df	Asymp. Sig. (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	8,923 ^a	3	,030
Likelihood Ratio	9,268	3	,026
Linear-by-Linear Association	4,529	1	,033
N of Valid Cases	60		

Note: a. 4 cells (50,0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2,50

This result shows that there are significant differences between the two samples, i.e. in the different years of study the students choose their optional courses differently, hypothesis number 2 is sustained.

However, it is worth exploring the manner in which students generally choose their optional course. In order to do this we took into account the responses of all students involved in the research.

Table 3. Responses to the question on how optional course are chosen

Choice	frequency	percent
Randomly	5	8,4%
As my colleagues have said	8	13,3%
Depending on the teacher that coordinates the course	26	43,3%
We were informed about their content	21	35%

Possible answers given for this question refers both to external criteria (versions 1.2 and 3) and the criteria related to the student's specific interests, given that he/she has information on the matter.

For a better visualization of this choice see the figure 2 below.

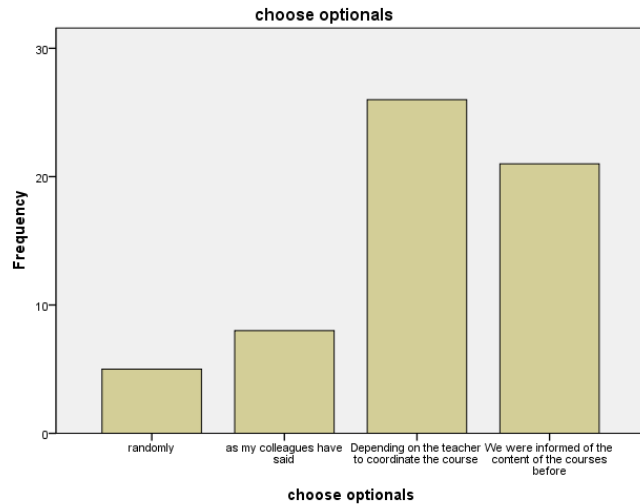


Figure 2. Students' choice of optional courses

The problem, which is quite serious, show that only 21 of the students (35%) stated that they were informed about the content of the subjects they intend to study in the following year, after studying their objectives, with how to organize the work or achievement assessment. In all other cases, the top choices are the choice depending on the teacher who coordinates the discipline. It seems that students take into account his personality, the relationship that teachers have with them, and the way in which they are treated (Roman, Bonchiş, & Coturbaş, 2011). Perhaps this element should be a warning to all those involved in the educational and instructive domain. Furthermore, it was found that students prefer briefings regarding optional courses in the following manner (see figure 3):

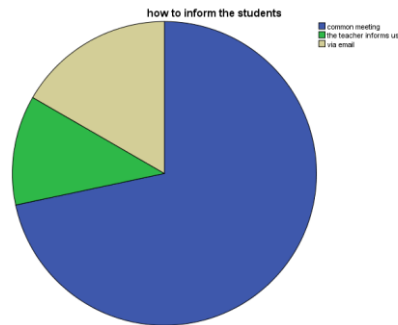


Figure 3. Preferences of students regarding the manner in which briefings on choosing optional courses should be conducted

It seems that what would be most successful are joint meetings between all students and teachers who teach optional subjects (71.7%), in which each teacher individually would describe the discipline to be chosen and the requirements they have from the participants, thus all the important elements that make that course more "interesting and attractive" in comparison to others would be presented (Boroş & Sas, 2011).

Conclusions

The study tried to highlight several important issues facing higher education, namely the choice of optional subjects by students.

The assumptions from which we started were: "Suppose that there are significant differences between students from different academic years regarding the information they have on the types of contracts they signed during their university studies" and "we assume that there are significant differences between students from different academic years regarding the manner in which these optional subjects are chosen".

We found that the hypothesis regarding students' knowledge of the types of contracts they sign could not be sustained; this, it seems that students have approximately the same information regardless of their academic year.

Not so in the case of the second hypothesis (regarding the manner in which choosing the optional courses is realized), in which we found significant differences between the two samples involved in the research.

Limitations of the study are: the relatively small number of subjects in the sample; and involvement in research of only of the students from the Department of Educational Sciences.

Strengths of the conducted study:

1. The study points to problems faced in higher education in Romania, namely the poor way in which optional subjects organized. We offer in this regard a new direction of research: a comparative study between students of different years or different specializations, analyzing the manner in which briefings could/or would like to be held.
2. The opportunities for testing solid information about the subjects that students can choose in the nearest possible future.

We believe that one of the changes to be made to the higher educational system refers precisely to the finding that implies that joint meetings with students and teachers should be organized in order for relevant information about the optional courses to be presented (the exact content of the discipline the type of students that are considered compatible with the discipline). The fact that most of the students choose their optional courses according to the teacher who coordinate them (43.3%) sustains the idea that when an individual is preoccupied with what he/she does, no matter the field, this is appreciated and thus "elected" by others.

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Received December 22, 2012

Revision received January 05, 2013

Accepted January 25, 2013