Understanding Motivation and Satisfaction in Higher Education: Cultural Insights from Croatia and Poland

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ABSTRACT

One of today's organisational imperatives is to secure a high level of employee motivation and satisfaction. Those represent important organisational factors, focused on the organisational future, because motivated and satisfied employees, besides developing their own careers, contribute to successful organisational results and recognition. Consequently, organisations are striving to recruit and retain not only employees with an exceptional level of knowledge, work experience, or skills and abilities, but also employees who are motivated to work. High educational institutions are the most important resources of future satisfied and motivated employees, current students, who educate and prepare them according to contemporary and everyday increased market demands. Therefore, it is valuable to monitor, evaluate, and increase students' motivation and satisfaction during their educational process, as they differ, considering their personal and cultural differences, as well as different type and level of their studies. The sample of this research consisted of two separate groups of students, such as a graduate group of Croatian and Polish students, considering students from the same field of studies. The first assumption of the research proposes the correlation between the motivation and satisfaction of Croatian and Polish students. The following assumption aims to reveal the cultural differences between these two groups of students, focussing on the most important satisfaction factors, such as curriculum, professors, administrative staff, and overall institutional satisfaction. Obtained results verifies the correlation between students' motivation and satisfaction, but also support different levels of their satisfaction, characterised by their different cultural backgrounds.

KEYWORDS: *career development; Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism (FEBT); motivation; satisfaction; SGH Warsaw School of Economics*

JEL CLASSIFICATION: *J24, M12, M54*

1. INTRODUCTION

Motivation, as a theoretical and economic concept, has been studied throughout history by various psychologists and theorists aiming to define it and uncover the factors that motivate people. Although the concept is now clearly defined, it still attracts the attention of various stakeholders. It stimulates their thinking, especially when it comes to applying its concepts in different life situations, particularly among different generations of people or especially among different generations of employees.

As motivation is recognised as an essential determinant of individual and organisational success, it cannot become the sole focus of the research, after someone's employment and the

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early stages of career development. It is crucial to be recognised as a prerequisite even during the education, especially higher education, which usually represents the first stage in an employee's career development. Motivated students will master subjects or entire fields of their study, and finally, they will achieve better academic success, which often predicts their future work behaviour and job accomplishment. The most motivational theorists understand students' motivation as involved in the performance of all learned responses (Afzal et al., 2010).

Although motivation and satisfaction are sometimes considered as synonyms in practice, it is important to understand the two terms clearly, both in theory and in practice. Motivation can be defined as a process that drives a person to purposeful action, while satisfaction is reflected in the comparison between what we receive and what we expect (Buble, 2000), a state that a person feels after fulfilling certain expectations or achieving performance (Weerasinghe et al., 2017). Focussing on students, it is important to recognise different factors that influence their satisfaction. It can be defined as „a short-term attitude resulting from an evaluation of students' educational experience, services and facilities" (Weerasinghe et al., 2017, p. 534).

Various sociocultural factors, such as gender, age, or cultural background, can influence students' motivation, but also their satisfaction. This may be due to norms, expectations, attitudes, or the development of the ability self-concept when assessing their competencies in different countries (Wang et al., 2020). Continuously, certain studies have been focused on researching nationality-based differences in students' motivation between East Asia and Western countries, focusing on different intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors (Wang et al., 2020), which shape their educational behaviour. Also, significant differences were found in research on students' satisfaction and performance between Chinese and Flemish students (Zhu, 2011).

To explore the motivation and satisfaction levels of students and to uncover possible differences between the various facets of student satisfaction according to cultural background (Miljak, 2020), this study was conducted among two groups of graduate students, with focus on Croatian students from Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism (FEBT) in Split, and Polish students, studing at SGH Warsaw School of Economics. This research was conducted in 2020. The main objective of this research is to show that there are statistically significant differences in the perception of satisfaction and its impact on motivation between the students of FEBT and the students of SGH. The first research question aims to uncover a potential relationship between students' satisfaction with their studies and their motivation to continue their education. Students enter a higher institution with certain expectations and are motivated to continue furthering their education. Furthermore, it will be investigated how satisfaction affects motivation. Finally, the second research question aims to test the existence of statistically significant differences in satisfaction between FEBT and SGH graduate students. Specifically, it aims to identify differences in satisfaction with the academic curriculum, professional staff, such as professors and administrative staff, and overall institutional satisfaction within these two institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Motivation is a standard term that pertains to the sum of drives, demands, needs, desires, and others (Weihrich & Koontz, 1998). „Motivation is the process of making a start, guiding, and maintaining goal-oriented behaviours" (Gopalan et al., 2017, p.1). It can also be defined as a

factor that leads to a person's behaviour while determining its direction, strength, and persistence (Sevinc et al., 2011).

Specifically, students‘ motivation can be defined as something that drives students to learn and determines the direction, intensity and duration of their learning (Grgin, 2004). Moreover, motivation in education „can have several effects on how students learn and how they behave towards subject matter“ (Tohidi & Jabbari, 2012, p.823). Students’ motivation is of great importance to their learning process, their educational choices, and even their future career decisions (Wang et al., 2020). It is an element which shapes students' attitudes to their learning process, but also a predictor of their academic success (Afzal et al., 2010). Although academics know the importance of motivation, it is a great challenge to motivate and keep students motivated in the educational process due to many current challenges. Students nowadays are faced with constant pressure and continuous demands from teachers and parents, but also from their own, focusing on acquiring knowledge and fulfilling all expectations while focusing on their future orientation and professional success (Tadić et al., 2016). Motivation and self-motivation are key factors in the success of any student. They are important for achieving goals and fostering a sense of satisfaction with their studies (Miljak, 2020).

The well-known classification of motivational factors represents extrinsic and intrinsic factors. Extrinsic factors are factors that affect a person from the environment and influence the formation of personal desired goals (Ryan et al., 1991). Looking at extrinsic motivational factors from the employee's perspective, they are seen as rewards that come from the outside, or various types of material rewards, such as salary, bonuses or other financial rewards, but also recognition, larger office space, use of a company car, etc. These motivational factors can have an immediate and strong effect, but do not last long (Armstrong, 2006). From the student‘s perspective, external motivators can be understood as being motivated to study only due to parental expectations, the value of a scholarship, better social status, good grades, or the avoidance of bad grades. To summarise, a student who is extrinsically driven is a student who is engaged in learning because he/she expects any kind of valuable reward (from his/her point of view) or wants to avoid any kind of punishment (Afzal et al. 2010). A student who completes homework only out of the fear of parental punishment for neglecting it and a student who provides all the tasks, because of his/her personal beliefs it will be of value to his/her future career, are clear examples of individuals who are motivated by external factors (Ryan & Deci, 2000). Students who are driven by their grades and are more anxious about getting good grades feel extrinsically oriented (Greenberger et al., 2008).

On the other hand, intrinsic motivation is perceived as „doing something because it is inherently interesting or enjoyable“ (Ryan & Deci, 2000, p.55) or the „feeling and enthusiasm to be involved in some certain activities because an individual believes those are interesting and enjoyable“ (Zeynali et al., 2019, p.3). Those represent the type of behaviour that is driven by internal rewards or behaviour that is motivated from within. These rewards are typically recognised as a challenge, creativity, job autonomy, self-esteem, achievement, growth, or a sense of belonging within the daily work environment. Understanding student motivation, intrinsic motivators are internal drivers that inspire them to learn and engage because they find enjoyment, satisfaction, or personal meaning in their studies. They are motivated by intrinsic motivators when they exercise some control over their learning process, see a purpose in relating the learning process with personal goals, express passion for a particular course or activity, or feel challenged by certain tasks. According to Afzal et al. (2010), intrinsically motivated students are „more enthusiastic, self-driven, challenging and feel

pleasure in their studies“, while extrinsically motivated students are „dragged with academic assignment, feel compelled to learn and always put minimal efforts to achieve maximum appreciations.“

In the Collins dictionary, satisfaction as a general term is defined as the pleasure one feels when doing something or receiving something that one wanted or needed to do or receive (Collins Dictionary, n.d.). Consequently, Locke (1969) defines job satisfaction as „the pleasurable emotional state resulting from the appraisal of one’s job as achieving or facilitating the achievement of one’s job values“. Furthermore, job satisfaction is usually described as a concept in which employees perceive their work as positive (Sudiardhita et al., 2018) or it is generally a positive reaction or feeling of employees in the form of accepted behaviour (Pudyaningsih et al., 2020; Sukmawaty et al., 2021). Finally, students‘ satisfaction, a valuable concept in their study process, results from an evaluation of their educational experiences and is influenced by various factors (Weerasinghe et al., 2017). In higher education, student satisfaction is related to multiple important learning outcomes and influences their retention or academic performance (Woong & Chapman, 2023). Satisfaction with studies and students' motivation for choosing a particular degree program are some of the indicators of the quality of studies and play a role in the success of their academic journey (Reić Ercegovac & Jukić, 2008).

Although the same generation expresses similar motivational factors which lead them towards success and they may be focused on similar satisfactional factors, those can be quite different related to different cultural backgrounds. Those differences may especially be recognised due to different norms, expectations, and attitudes between different countries or regions (Wang et al., 2020). Weerasinghe et al. (2017) provided a thorough research analysis (literature review) of students' satisfaction, expressing different researches which focus on different factors that influence students‘ satisfaction, such as (according to the research among European countries): contacts with fellow students, course content, learning equipment, stocking of libraries, teaching quality and teaching learning materials. The authors also suggest research that provides similar factors (provided in the United Arab Emirates) as important in shaping students' satisfaction, as: quality of lectures, quality of availability of resources, and effective use of technology. Further, Spanish students express teaching staff, teaching methods, and course administration as factors which significantly shape their satisfaction, while Malaysian students express academic advising, curriculum, teaching quality, financial assistance, tuition fee, and university facilities (Weerasinghe et al., 2017).

Research among Spanish, Serbian, and Slovenian students found that all three groups of university students are motivated to learn by intrinsic and extrinsic motivational factors. However, factors, such as social power, token, meaningfulness, performance praise, and competition in personal development have been found to cause large differences between students of the three nations in terms of motivation to learn (Kolenc, 2011). In general, cultural differences were confirmed by significant differences in student motivation between eight cultural groups of Western and non-Western students (Korpershoek et al., 2021). Cultural differences were also found within Western and East Asian countries, confirming that students in East Asia are more likely to be motivated with courses that focus on long-term goals, while their Western counterparts are more motivated to achieve short-term goals. Furthermore, students from Eastern parts find courses meaningful if they are valuable to their families, while their Western peers find courses that are more meaningful to themselves as more valuable (Wang et al., 2020).

3. IMETHODOLOGY AND THE SAMPLE OF TE RESEARCH

For the research, the primary data collection was conducted in the form of an electronic survey, namely in the form of a structured questionnaire developed specifically for this study and supported by Google Forms software. The questionnaire was created in Croatian and translated into English.

In January 2020, the Croatian version of the survey was distributed to FEBT graduate students through the WhatsApp application. A total of 74 students (63.5% female; 36.5% male) completed the survey. In April 2020, the English version of the survey was created and distributed to SGH graduate students via WhatsApp and the social media platform Facebook. A total of 65 students (53.8% female; 46.2% male) completed the survey. On average, both groups of students are 22 years old. At FEBT, the majority of respondents (62%) are final-second-year students, while at SGH, the majority of respondents (52%) are first-year students.

The survey questionnaire consisted of 32 multiple-choice or closed questions, which the students completed independently, with full anonymity guaranteed. The first part of the questionnaire primarily contained multiple-choice questions related to the general characteristics of the respondents, such as gender, age, study program and year of study. The second part of the questionnaire contained five-point Likert statements on facets of student satisfaction. These factors were structured into four groups: curriculum, professors, administrative staff, and institution. The section concluded with a statement about overall satisfaction with the degree program. The third section of the questionnaire assessed opinions and attitudes related to motivation using multiple statements on a five-point Likert scale, concluding with a statement about the overall level of motivation in the graduate program.

All questions that were compared were designed identically to ensure the validity of the results. The data collected was first checked in MS Excel and then statistically analysed using IBM SPSS 25. The relationship between satisfaction and motivation is examined using correlation and regression analyses, while the differences in study characteristics between the two groups of students observed are analysed using the T-test.

4. RESEARCH

The level of student satisfaction relating to four different satisfaction factors: curriculum, professors, administrative staff, and overall institution were questioned analysing each by particular statements. Consequently, satisfaction with the curriculum was measured by observing respondents' opinions relating to practical classes provided, potential choice of elective courses, knowledge and skills gained while studying and usage of contemporary teaching materials. Satisfaction with professors was measured on behalf of four different elements, such as: communication, quality of their work, motivation of students, and coherence between the theory and practice they provide. Satisfaction with administrative staff was measured by the following elements: students' office staff, library staff and restaurant and coffee shop staff (combined). Finally, satisfaction with the overall institution was measured using five different elements: choice of study programs, facilities, choice of workshops, possibility of international student exchange, and institutional reputation.

Table 1. Students' satisfaction (FEBT and SGH students) according to particular elements

Elements	**Institutions**			
Average grades	**FEBT**	**SGH**	**Cronbach's Alpha**	**N of items**
Curriculum	2.71	3.69	0.870	4
Professors	3.41	3.73	0.773	4
Administrative staff	3.70	3.94	0.619	3
Overall organisation	3.94	4.08	0.731	5
OVERALL SATISFACTION (cumulative grade)	**3.44**	**3.86**		**16**
GENERAL GRADE OF SATISFACTION	**3.68**	**4.06**		

Source: Authors, 2025.

Students' satisfaction with particular elements was assessed using a different number of statements (3-5) about each facet of satisfaction. The creation of a dimension to observe satisfaction is appropriate if there is internal consistency among the provided statements. A Cronbach's alpha value, which exceeds the threshold value of 0.70 (such as: 0.870, 0.773 and 0.731), indicates that internal consistency among the statements is present, confirming that the creation of the dimension for observing satisfaction with the curriculum, professors and overall organisation, based on the selected statements is appropriate. A Cronbach's alpha value of 0.619, which is below the threshold value of 0.70, indicates that internal consistency among the statements is present at a lower, but acceptable level.

Observing the above-presented results, it is evident higher student satisfaction (cumulative grade of 16 particular statements of satisfaction) of Polish students, which was registered as 3.86 (very good) in contrast to Croatian students' satisfaction, 3.44 (good), making the grade difference of 0.42 in the favour of Polish students. Additionally, analysing particular elements of overall students' satisfaction, it is evident higher satisfaction of Polish students within each segment of satisfaction.

Besides the cumulative grade of their satisfaction, respondents were asked to define the general grade of their satisfaction, whereas Croatian students provided 3.68 (very good) and Polish students 4.06 (very good), with a grade difference of 0.38 in favour of Polish students.

Furthermore, in the process of this research, students were grading their motivation on behalf of 14 defined statements such as: "In my field of study, I truly wish to become more competent and continue to grow further" or "I am studying because I believe that further education will enhance my professional competences". Based on the results of the Cronbach's alpha test, three statements lacked internal consistency, below 0.60, so it was necessary to exclude those statements, where finally 11 statements showed an accepted level of consistency of 0.728.

Table 2. Students' motivation (EFST and SGH students)

ELEMENTS	**Institutions**			
Average grades	**FEBT**	**SGH**	**Cronbach's Alpha**	**N of items**
Motivation (cumulative grade)	**3.53**	**3.68**	0.728	11
GENERAL GRADE OF MOTIVATION	**3.74**	**4.18**		

Source: Authors, 2025.

According to different statements relating to students' motivation, the cumulative grade was registered at the level of 3.53 (very good) for Croatian students and 3.68 (very good) for

Polish students, creating 0.15 grade difference in the favour of Polish students. Once again, the respondents were asked to define their general motivation grade, where Croatian students graded it by 3.74 (very good) and Polish students by 4.18 (very good). Again, the grade difference of 0.44 was confirmed in the favour of Polish students.

As stated in the research problem, it is expected that there is a correlation between students' overall satisfaction with their studies and their motivation to pursue education at FEBT and SGH. Students enroll in university with certain expectations and are motivated to continue their education.

For further statistical testings there were used general grades of students‘ satisfaction and motivation.

Table 3. Correlation matrix – general satisfaction and general motivation (all students)

Correlation			General grade of satisfaction	General grade of motivation
Sperman's rho	**General grade of satisfaction**	Correlation coefficient	1,000	,654**
		Sig (2-tailed)	.	,000
		N	139	139
	General grade of motivation	Correlation coefficient	,654**	1,000
		Sig (2-tailed)	,000	.
		N	139	139

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors, 2025.

The correlation coefficient value of 0.654 indicates a positive, moderate, and statistically significant relationship **(**$p < 0.001$**)** between the overall level of satisfaction with study and the overall level of motivation for studying.

Furthermore, the same testing was conducted for each institution, separately.

Table 4. Correlation matrix – general satisfaction and general motivation (FEBT students)

Correlation			General grade of satisfaction	General grade of motivation
Sperman's rho	**General grade of satisfaction**	Correlation coefficient	1,000	,420**
		Sig (2-tailed)	.	,000
		N	74	74
	General grade of motivation	Correlation coefficient	,420**	1,000
		Sig (2-tailed)	,000	.
		N	74	74

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors, 2025.

The correlation coefficient value of 0.420 indicates a positive, weak, but statistically significant **(**$p < 0.001$**)** relationship between the overall level of satisfaction with study and the overall level of motivation for studying among FEBT students.

Table 5. Correlation matrix – general satisfaction and general motivation (SGH students)

Correlation			General grade of satisfaction	General grade of motivation
Sperman's rho	**General grade of satisfaction**	Correlation coefficient	1,000	,791**
		Sig (2-tailed)	.	,000
		N	65	65
	General grade of motivation	Correlation coefficient	,791**	1,000
		Sig (2-tailed)	,000	.
		N	65	65

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Source: Authors, 2025.

The correlation coefficient value of 0.791 indicates a positive, strong, and statistically significant **(**$p < 0.001$**)** relationship between the overall level of satisfaction with study and the overall level of motivation for studying among students of SGH.

Motivation represents the desire that drives individuals to achieve a specific result, while satisfaction arises as a consequence of the difference between expectations and the actual outcome. In previous studies, the results have confirmed that satisfaction and motivation often influence each other, leading to a mutual increase in both variables, which is also tested within the stated research on the sample of the research.

Table 6. Basic information about the evaluated model with motivation as the dependent variable (all students)

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	,414[a]	,171	,165	,407
a. Predictors: (Constant), Satisfaction				

Source: Authors, 2025.

The coefficient of determination of 0.171 indicates that the estimated model explains 17.1% of the total sum of squares of deviations in motivation from the arithmetic mean. Therefore, the estimated model is not representative **(**$R^2 < 0.70$**),** suggesting that there are other determinants influencing motivation.

Table 7. The evaluated regression model where overall motivation depends on overall satisfaction (all students)

Coefficients[a]						
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardised Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
		B	**Std. error**	**Beta**		
1	**(Constant)**	2,540	,202		12,553	,000
	Satisfaction	,291	,055	,414	5,323	,000
a. Dependent variable: Motivation						

Source: Authors, 2025.

The value of the parameter associated with the satisfaction variable, 0.291, indicates that with each increase in satisfaction by one point, motivation is expected to increase by 0.291 points,

and vice versa, assuming the influence of other variables affecting motivation remains unchanged. The parameter is statistically significant (empirical $p < 0.001$).

Table 8. ANOVA table of the evaluated regression model (all students)

ANOVA[a]						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	**Regression**	4,684	1	4,684	28,337	,000[b]
	Residual	22,646	137	,165		
	Total	27,330	138			
a. Dependent variable: Motivation						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Satisfaction						

Source: Authors, 2025.

Based on the empirical F-value of 28.337, it can be concluded that the model as a whole is statistically significant, indicating that the effect of satisfaction on motivation is present ($F = 28.34$; $p < 0.001$).
Furthermore, the same testing was conducted for each institution, separately.

Table 9. Basic information about the evaluated model with motivation as the dependent variable (FEBT)

Model Summary				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	,216[a]	,047	,034	,45
a. Predictors: (Constant), Satisfaction				

Source: Authors, 2025.

The coefficient of determination, 0.047, indicates that the estimated model explains 4.7% of the total sum of squares of deviations in motivation from the arithmetic mean. Thus, the estimated model is not representative ($R^2 < 0.70$), suggesting that there are other determinants influencing motivation.

Table 10: The evaluated regression model where overall motivation depends on overall satisfaction (FEBT)

Coefficients[a, b]						
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardised Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
		B	**Std. error**	**Beta**		
1	**(Constant)**	2,873	,353		8,140	,000
	Satisfaction	,190	,101	,216	1,880	,064
a. FEBT						
b. Dependent variable: Motivation						

Source: Authors, 2025.

The value of the parameter associated with the satisfaction variable, 0.19, indicates that with each one-point increase in satisfaction, motivation is expected to increase by 0.19 points, and vice versa, assuming the influence of other variables affecting motivation remains unchanged.

The parameter is statistically significant at the marginal significance level of 10% (empirical p = 0.064).

Table 11. ANOVA table of the evaluated regression model (FEBT)

ANOVA[a, b]						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	**Regression**	0,702	1	0,702	3,535	,064[c]
	Residual	14,290	72	,198		
	Total	14,992	73			
a. FEBT						
b. Dependent variable: Motivation						
c. Predictors: (Constant), Satisfaction						

Source: Authors, 2025.

Based on the empirical F-value of 3.535, it can be concluded that the model as a whole is statistically significant at the marginal significance level of 10%, indicating that the effect of satisfaction on motivation is present (F = 3.535; empirical p = 0.064).

Table 12. Basic information about the evaluated model with motivation as the dependent variable (SGH)

Model summary				
Model	**R**	**R Square**	**Adjusted R Square**	**Std. Error of the Estimate**
1	,549[a]	,302	,291	,36
a. Predictors: (Constant), Satisfaction				

Source: Authors, 2025.

The coefficient of determination, 0.302, indicates that the estimated model explains 30.2% of the total sum of squares of deviations in motivation from the arithmetic mean. Thus, the estimated model is not representative ($R^2 < 0.70$), suggesting that there are other determinants influencing motivation.

Table 13. The evaluated regression model where overall motivation depends on overall satisfaction (SGH)

Coefficients[a, b]						
Model		**Unstandardized Coefficients**		**Standardised Coefficients**	**T**	**Sig.**
		B	**Std. Error**	**Beta**		
1	**(Constant)**	2,371	,255		9,281	0,000
	Satisfaction	,340	,065	,549	5,218	0,000
a. SGH						
b. Dependent variable: Motivation						

Source: Authors, 2025.

The value of the parameter associated with the satisfaction variable, 0.34, indicates that with each one-point increase in satisfaction, motivation is expected to increase by 0.34 points, and vice versa, assuming the influence of other variables affecting motivation remains unchanged. The parameter is statistically significant (empirical p < 0.001).

Table 14. ANOVA table of the evaluated regression model (SGH)

ANOVA[a, b]						
Model		**Sum of Squares**	**df**	**Mean Square**	**F**	**Sig.**
1	**Regression**	3,475	1	3,475	27,224	,000[c]
	Residual	8,042	63	,128		
	Total	11,517	64			
a. SGH						
b. Dependent variable: Motivation						
c. Predictors: (Constant), Satisfaction						

Source: Authors, 2025.

Based on the empirical F-value of 27.22, it can be concluded that the model as a whole is statistically significant, indicating that the effect of satisfaction on motivation is present ($F = 27.22$; empirical $p < 0.001$).

Assessing and measuring overall satisfaction with the study influences motivation and other aspects of studying, such as class attendance, participation in lectures, passing exams, and more. From the perspective of professors and educational institutions, it is important to know that satisfaction can be measured using the same techniques as motivation.

Furthermore, the research was aimed at exploring the cultural differences between students from Croatia and Poland in terms of different satisfaction facets in terms of their curricula, professors, administrative or office staff, and overall institution. The assumption for this part of the research is that there are statistically significant differences in the level of satisfaction, according to the above-mentioned satisfaction factors, between Croatian and Polish students.

Table 15. The average level of overall satisfaction of graduate students (all students)

Group statistics					
	Institution	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. deviation**	**Std. error mean**
Satisfaction	FEBT	74	3,44	,52	,06
	SGH	65	3,86	,68	,08

Source: Authors, 2025.

As already mentioned, Polish students show a greater level of satisfaction, considering their cumulative grade of satisfaction. The average grade of Polish students is higher than Croatian ones for 0,42 of the grade, making it 3,44 for Croatian students (good), compared to 3,86 for Polish students (very good). The potential statistical difference is tested using the T-test and showing the results below.

Table 16. T test – Difference of overall satisfaction of graduate students (all students)

Independent Sample Test									
	Leven's Test for Equality of Variances		**t-test for Equality of Means**						
	F	**Sig.**	**T**	**Df**	**Sig. (1-tailed)**	**Mean Difference**	**Std. Error Difference**	**95% Confidence of the Difference**	
								Lower	**Upper**
Satisfaction	3,334	,070	3,984	137	,000	-,4071466	,1021890	-,6092183	-,2050748

Source: Authors, 2025.

Based on the empirical F-value of 3.334, it can be determined that the assumption of equal variances for the T-test is satisfied (empirical p-value = 0.070). The F-value was obtained as a result of testing differences in variances between subsets.

Students of SGH Warsaw School of Economics have a higher level of satisfaction compared to students of FEBT. This conclusion is based on the empirical t-value of 3.98 at an empirical significance level of <0.001.

The starting assumption that there would be a statistically significant difference in overall satisfaction between Croatian and Polish students can be accepted. In order to test it more precisely, furthermore analysis is focused on particular facets of satisfaction, testing potential differences among these two groups of students. Particular testing is done considering satisfaction regarding curriculums, professors, administrative staff, and the overall institution.

Table 17. The average level of satisfaction (all students)

Group Statistics					
Satisfaction factors	**Institution**	**N**	**Mean**	**Std. Deviation**	**Std. Error Mean**
Curriculum	FEBT	74	2,71	,70	,08
	SGH	65	3,69	,93	,12
Professors	FEBT	74	3,41	,71	,08
	SGH	65	3,73	,86	,11
Administrative staff	FEBT	74	3,70	,74	,09
	SGH	65	3,94	,89	,11
Overall institution	FEBT	74	3,94	,68	,08
	SGH	65	4,08	,68	,08

Source: Authors, 2025.

In general, Polish students express a greater level of satisfaction with all aspects of satisfaction, where the evident difference is a 0.98 grade difference regarding curriculums, 0.32 regarding professors, 0.24 regarding administrative staff and finally, 0.14 regarding institution.

Table 18. T test – Difference of satisfaction regarding 4 particular elements (all students)

Independant Sample Test									
	Leven's Test for Equality of Variances		**t-test for Equality of Means**						
	F	**Sig.**	**T**	**Df**	**Sig. (1-tailed)**	**Mean Difference**	**Std. Error Difference**	**95% Confidence of the Difference**	
								Lower	**Upper**
Curriculum	4,149	,044	6,966	117,904	,000	-,98238	,14102	-1,26163	-,70313
Professors	2,609	,109	2,364	137	,010	-,31476	,13313	-,57801	-,05151
Administrative staff	1,978	,162	1,410	137	,081	-,20	,14	-,47	,08
Institution	,034	,854	1,278	137	,102	-,15	,12	-,38	,08

Source: Authors, 2025.

Considering the level of satisfaction with the curriculum between Croatian and Polish students, based on the empirical F-value of 4.149, the assumption of equal variances is rejected, as the empirical p-value (0.044) is below the 0,05 threshold. Consequently, Welch's t-test was used due to unequal variances. Finally, Polish SGH students show significantly higher satisfaction with the curriculum than Croatian FEBT students. This conclusion is supported by an empirical t-value of 6.966 at an empirical significance level of <0.001.

Taking into account the level of satisfaction with the professors between Croatian and Polish students, based on an empirical F-value of 2.609, the assumption of variance equality for the T-test is satisfied, as the empirical p-value is 0.109. The F-value was obtained as a result of testing the variance differences between the subsets. SGH students once again report significantly higher levels of satisfaction with professors than FEBT students. This conclusion is based on an empirical t-value of 2.364 at an empirical significance level of 0.010.

Furthermore, observing the above results, more precisely the level of satisfaction with administrative staff between Croatian and Polish students, it is evident that based on the empirical F-value of 1.978, the assumption of variance equality for the T-test is satisfied (p-value of 0.162). Polish SHG students show a slightly higher level of satisfaction with administrative staff within their institution in comparison to Croatian FEBT students. This conclusion is based on an empirical t-value of 1.410 at an empirical significance level of 0.081. This difference is not significant at the conventional 5% level, but is indicative at the 10% significance level and the observed difference should be interpreted with caution. Finally, the obtained results provide limited statistical evidence in favour of Polish students who seem to be a bit more satisfied with administrative staff than their Croatian counterparts.

Finally, the results related to the level of satisfaction with overall institution between Croatian and Polish students, based on the empirical F-value of 0.034, the assumption of variance equality for the T-test is satisfied (empirical p-value is 0.854). Polish students report, once again, a higher level of satisfaction with the overall institution than Croatian students. However, this difference is not statistically significant at the conventional 5% level, based on a t-value of 1.278 at an empirical significance of 0.102. Consequently, the above results do not provide sufficient statistical evidence to support the assumption of statistically significant differences between these two groups of respondents relating to overall institutional satisfaction.

5. CONCLUSION

Education was and is, especially today, an important factor for the development of the individual and consequently also of the organisation. In today's modern and competitive globalised world, formal education and lifelong learning are a necessity for individuals to expand and develop their knowledge, skills and abilities, advance their careers, and, as a result, create a competitive advantage for the company and consolidate their market position. It is therefore not surprising that more and more motivated young people are opting for higher education, as the demand for such qualifications is increasing on the job market and they want to realise themselves.

In addition to financial support and organisational infrastructure, as well as personal and organisational conditions for growth and development, personal motivation that encourages individuals to work specifically towards their desired goals is essential in this process. In order to create motivated and successful employees, it is important to have motivated students

in a particular field of study who will become creators of personal and organisational success in the future. Student motivation and engagement are complex concepts that are always the focus of researchers, economists, and psychologists who have proven that motivation is one of the most important factors in learning success.

Just as there are individual differences from an early age, individual differences between students are evident as different students may be motivated by different motivational factors on their academic journey. Their opinions and satisfaction with their field of study and chosen institution are of great importance to key stakeholders in the education system, as they help to make the system more effective and of higher quality. Higher education is accompanied by motivation throughout the process, which contributes to persistence in learning and the acquisition of knowledge and skills for one's career. Students have their own aspirations, one or more goals, and are influenced by various intrinsic and extrinsic factors as they strive to develop a positive attitude towards the work and the organisation.

Having achieved the ultimate goal creates a sense of satisfaction through the fulfilment of personal interests and aspirations. The term satisfaction can be explained as a feeling that arises when comparing the difference between the desired and the achieved outcome. Concerning student satisfaction, especially in terms of globalised competitiveness, satisfaction has become one of the key factors for success and attracting new students to higher education institutions.

The sample of this study includes Croatian students from the Faculty of Economics, Business and Tourism in Split (FEBT) and Polish students from SGH Warsaw School of Economics. The respondents are young people who have a certain level of knowledge, skills, and abilities, but above all a great potential for growth and development in terms of personal and organisational achievements. Furthermore, the respondents are older students who have substantial experience in social interactions and can provide a more nuanced critical opinion of their field of study and the chosen university. Therefore, higher education institutions need to take into account the criticism, suggestions, or praise of their students to increase and improve motivation, satisfaction, and the quality of education. Greater satisfaction encourages individuals to make a positive contribution to their environment, making them more motivated and achieving greater results during their studies.

The final results of this research indicate quite high levels of student motivation and satisfaction and confirm the relationship between these two factors. Furthermore, the results also show that an increase in motivation leads to an increase in satisfaction. Finally, a statistically significant difference in satisfaction was found between Croatian and Polish students, taking into account different facets of satisfaction, especially curriculum and professors, with caution regarding statistically significant differences with administrative staff. No statistically significant differences were found in relation to the overall institution. These results form the basis for the creation and development of relevant study programs and opportunities for student progress and development that meet their interests and needs, especially considering the globalised education market. In addition, these results can also be helpful for international and exchange students when deciding where to continue their education and improve their knowledge, skills and development, which are crucial for their positioning in the market, survival, and competitiveness. The study period is a phase in a student’s life when new social relationships are forged and an identity is developed, while their values and attitudes become more liberal and young people become more independent and take on responsibilities and commitments.

The research shows a positive relationship and impact between student motivation and satisfaction that a continuous increase in these factors will lead to satisfied, motivated, and capable young people. The results obtained should show the growing need for changes adapted to the modern world. Ultimately, a strong and high-quality educational institution will be the foundation for a better future.

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