

## A Study of Satisfaction with Education for Master's Degree and an Analysis of the Factors Influencing the Choice of the Field of Study

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### Abstract

The article is concerned with the analysis of the factors influencing the choice of the field of Bachelor's or Specialist's education, based on the survey of the undergraduates of one of the Moscow universities. Based on the survey results, the main reasons that influenced the choice of the field of education for a Master's degree are identified; the correspondence of the field of Master's studies to the sphere of professional activity and professional interests of students is investigated. On the basis of the research, the satisfaction of the students with the level of knowledge received, the possibility of its application in practical professional activity, and the orientation of the undergraduates towards further scientific activity are estimated. The results of the scientific research confirm almost completely the original hypothesis and make it possible to draw conclusions about the trends that are currently developing in the field of education. Despite the fact that the survey is conducted among the undergraduates of one university, the results represent the general problems of higher education.

**Keywords:** Field of education; Master's degree program; Bachelor's degree program; Quality of education; Satisfaction with education.



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### 1. Introduction

In the framework of the analysis of the specialties and fields of education at Russian universities by the criteria of quality of enrollment, popularity and relevance in the labor market (Nakhratova *et al.*, 2017), it is concluded that the most popular among the applicants are the enlarged areas of education: "Economics" and "Jurisprudence", as evidenced by the points of Unified State Examination for budget openings, the number of beneficiaries, the high percentage of requests made on the portal "Moe obrazovanie", the number of openings with tuition fee payment. These fields are attractive due to a prestige and high level of wages in the market. However, there is a suggestion that the motivation for enrollment at the Master's level may differ from the previous level of education; accordingly, the Masters will place different demands on the level of education (Demchenko *et al.*, 2017).

Five hypotheses are formulated:

1. When choosing the field of basic education (Bachelor's or Specialist's), the applicants are guided by the popularity and level of payment for future professions, the number of budget openings, the passing grade of the Unified State Examination, without taking into account the demand in the labor market and true professional interests.

2. Having received basic education, a graduate is not always able to find a job corresponding to the profile of education. In the course of employment, it becomes clear that there is a lack of some knowledge, skills and abilities, requiring the Master's degree (Demchenko *et al.*, 2017). Therefore, the field of Master's education does not always coincide with the profile of the previous education.

3. Education for a Master's degree becomes attractive due to the availability of state-financed openings and a postponement from military service. This is especially true for full-time students.

4. The education for a Master's degree is a more conscious choice. "Needless to say, a high degree of awareness and expediency are practically rare, and often it is quite difficult to define the action as conscious and rational" (Bondaletov, 2015). However, we believe that this choice is connected with the understanding of the need for additional professional knowledge; therefore, the level of education requires the practical orientation and content of the educational program.

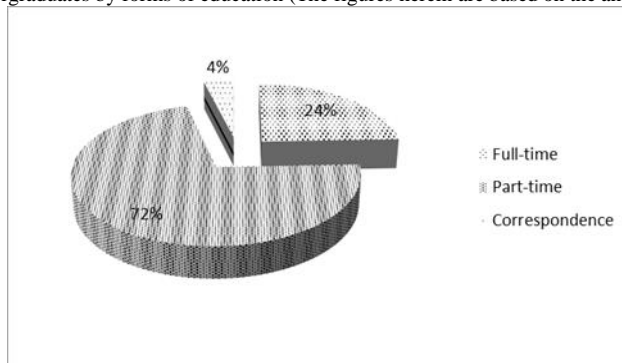
5. The field of the Master's program corresponds to professional activity and the field of professional interests.

## 2. Methods

According to the purpose of this study is to determine the degree of satisfaction with the education for a Master's degree.

To confirm or contradict the formulated hypotheses, a study on the satisfaction with education was conducted among the undergraduates of the Russian State Social University, the city of Moscow. The study was conducted using the questionnaire method. The survey was performed in May 2017 among the undergraduates of various fields and forms of study (Figure 1), in which 127 first- and second-year students took part (of which 90 students enrolled in state-financed openings, 37 enrolled on contractual basis); the first-year students were completing the second term of education.

**Figure-1.** Distribution of undergraduates by forms of education (The figures herein are based on the analysis carried out by the authors)



To obtain the information required for analysis, the students were asked to fill out the anonymous questionnaire of nine questions.

The survey covered the students of the RSSU (Russian State Social University), studying in the fields of a Master's degree "Linguistics", "Economics", "Personnel Management", "Informatics and Computer Facilities", "Jurisprudence", "Culturology", "Management", "Conflictology", "Social work", "Sociology", "Technospheric Security".

Within the framework of this study, apart from the survey, the general scientific methods of research were used, based on general principles to apply general regularities to specific factors related to the educational activity of higher education institutions, special and in-depth study of the aspects of statistical data analysis, the method of analogy, generalization and extrapolation.

When writing the article, the authors widely used such theoretical methods as modeling, systematization, classification, formalization and other methods, on the basis of which the level of satisfaction of undergraduates with education was studied. The factors, influencing the choice of the areas of education, the field of scientific interests and professional activity, were put in order. those.

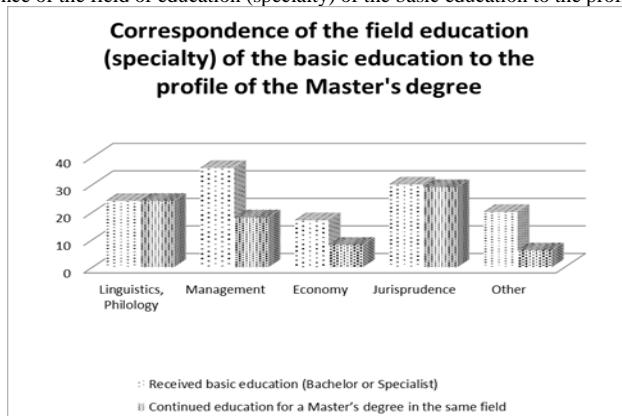
## 3. Results

### 3.1. Analysis of the Fields of Previous Education and the Reasons for Their Choice

The 81% of those surveyed have a previous "Bachelor" level of education, respectively, 19% have graduated as Specialists. These results are quite natural. Firstly, not all higher education institutions provide education in the specialties, and secondly, a Bachelor's degree in our country is not perceived as a full-fledged higher education, for many professional groups, the level of "Specialist" or "Master" is required.

Among the surveyed undergraduates, 19% of respondents received the basic education in the field of training (specialty) "Linguistics", "Philology", all of them continued their studies in a Master's degree in the same field; 24% had a basic education "Jurisprudence", 99% of them continued their studies in a Master's degree in the same field of education (Figure 2).

**Figure-2.** Correspondence of the field of education (specialty) of the basic education to the profile of the Master's degree



Among the graduates of the enlarged "Economics and Management" group (42% of the respondents), only one half continued their studies in a Master's degree in the same field. This indicates that the basic education does not correspond to the current conditions of the labor market or to the interests of the undergraduates themselves, which has encouraged them to continue their education in another specialty (Novikova, 2016).

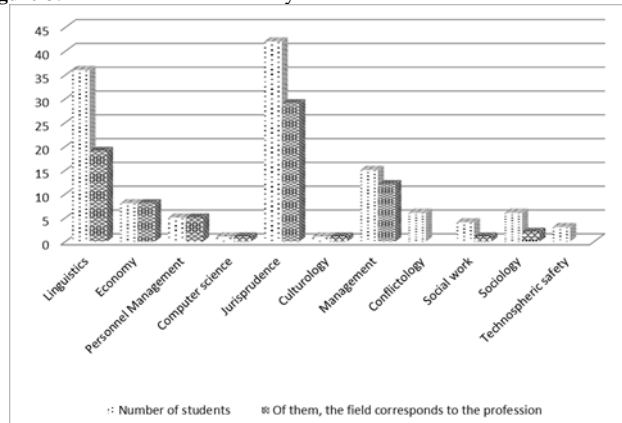
Such areas as "Healthcare", "Informatics and Information Systems", "Conflictology", "Culturology", "Pedagogy", "Social Work", "Sociology", "Ecology and Nature Management", "Nuclear Physics", "Mechanical Engineering" were attributed to "Others" group. Less than a third of the respondents continued their studies in a Master's degree (the graduates of "Social Work" and "Sociology"), which also indicated that bachelors and specialists with the relevant education were expendable in the labor market.

Reasons for enrollment. To identify the reasons for obtaining the previous level of education, the students are asked to indicate the factors (several possible) that influenced the choice of the field of education (specialty). The following results are obtained: 72% of respondents are interested in the field of education; 19% are interested in a highly paid and popular profession; 10% follow the advice of their parents. 17% thoughtlessly approached to the choice of the field of education – 9% answered "Randomly, where the points of Unified State Examination were enough" as the reason for choosing the field of education, 8% chose the answer "Ease of entry".

### 3.2. Analysis of the Fields of Education in the Master's Program and the Reasons for Enrollment

Among the students surveyed, most of students are pursuing a Master's degree in such fields of education as "Jurisprudence", "Linguistics" and "Management" (33%, 28% and 12% respectively), see Figure 3.

Figure-3. Distribution of students by the areas of education in a Master's degree



Contrary to expectations, only 61% of the undergraduates obtain the education in accordance with their professional activities. The greatest correspondence of the field of education to the occupied profession is in "Jurisprudence", "Linguistics", "Management", "Economy" and "Personnel Management". It should be noted that there are fewer students among the contract students, but there is more correspondence with professional activity.

Analysis of the reasons for entering the Master's program. As the reasons why the undergraduates decided to get education in this field of education, the following variants were offered: "I want to get a diploma in a demanded and highly paid profession", "I do not have enough knowledge to work", "I'm interested in this field", "Availability of budget openings", "Postponement of military service", "I want to continue my scientific career in this field, with the possibility of enrolling in the graduate school", "Other (specify)" (several options were allowed).

According to the results of the survey, the most popular answers were: "I'm interested in this field" – 61%, "Availability of budget openings" – 31%, "I want to get a diploma in a demanded and highly paid profession" – 29%. The variants "I want to continue my scientific career in this field, with the possibility of enrolling in the graduate school" and "I do not have enough knowledge to work" gained 16% each. Less popular answers were "Postponement of military service" – 8%, and "Need a Master's degree" – 6%. The answer "Postponement of military service" could be significantly more popular if we consider the contingent of respondents, since almost one-third of full-time students have indicated this reason for entering the Master's degree.

The answers "Self-development", "Career advancement", "Urgent recommendation of parents" were chosen by one person each.

Thus, the original hypothesis is confirmed, since all variants of the proposed answers have been noted by the respondents. The result of the continuation of scientific activity is positive, as it has been chosen by 16% of undergraduates, which indicates a true interest not only in the chosen profession, but also in scientific and pedagogical activity (Ilyina, 2015).

### 3.3. The Analysis of the Satisfaction With the Education in the Master's Degree

To determine the degree of satisfaction with the education in the Master's degree, the respondents were asked to answer the question "How much satisfied are you with the education (several answers can be chosen)?" In accordance with the above hypothesis, six variants of answers were formulated, from complete satisfaction with the

educational process, to total disappointment ("Useless waste of time"), and an open version suggesting a personal opinion.

The following results were obtained: "Completely satisfied with knowledge, all disciplines are needed in practical activities" – 39%. This is a rather high indicator, which is somewhat unexpected, since when formulating the hypothesis, they have proceeded from the academic Master's curricula aimed at forming the competencies in research and pedagogical activities, which provides for the existence of such academic disciplines that are not directly related to practical professional activity (Rogach *et al.*, 2017).

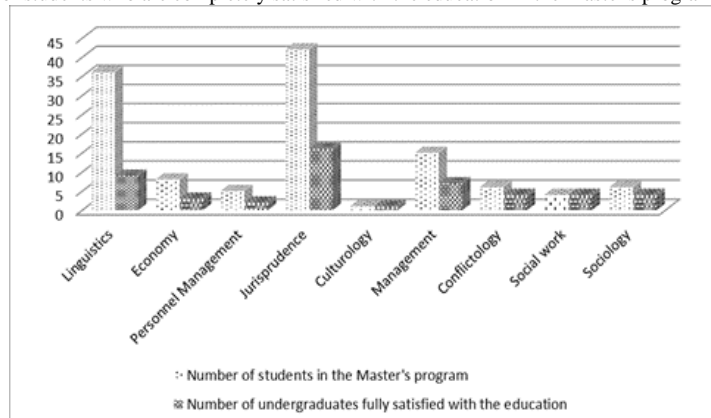
Therefore, the following answers can be deemed the confirmation of the hypothesis: "The curriculum contains a few practically useful subjects" – 38%, "Teaching is theoretical, almost inapplicable in practice" – 28%, "The information is hardly useful in practical activities" – 16%, "I need only a diploma" – 10%. Only 3% of undergraduates called education a "Useless waste of time."

The additional answers characterizing the education were "A large number of subjects are not related to the field of education", "Insufficient amount of foreign language classes", "The presence of unnecessary subjects", "There is not enough knowledge by profession", "Poor organization of the educational process", "Inconvenient location of academic buildings". Each of them was chosen once. Along with this, it was noted once that all subjects were needed, but the practice was insufficient, and the useful subjects prevailed in number.

The leading role in the organization of the learning process in the Master's degree belongs to the student, who feels the need for an independent determination of its parameters. In this case, the role of the lecturer is to support the development of self-government, assisting in determining the parameters of instruction and searching for information (Piralova, 2010). Apparently, students who are not satisfied with the educational process do not pay much attention to learning outside the university.

The authors would like to return to the first popular answer and to conduct additionally the analysis of students fully satisfied with the education in the fields of education (Figure 4).

**Figure-4.** Distribution of students who are completely satisfied with the education in the Master's program in the fields of education



According to Figure 4, 47% of students are satisfied with education in the field of education "Management", 40% – in "Personnel Management", 38% – in "Economics" and "Jurisprudence". Only a quarter of the Masters who study in the field of education "Linguistics" are satisfied with the education. Therefore, when developing and updating the educational programs for vocational education in these fields of education, special attention should be paid to those remarks that have been pointed out by the majority of respondents. This will improve the quality of education and client-oriented approach of higher education institutions.

## 4. Discussion

The problems of choosing the fields of Bachelor's, Specialist's and Master's degree, the degree of satisfaction with the education, as well as the fields for improvement of the education quality are relevant and have been repeatedly discussed at international scientific and practical conferences and congresses with the participation of representatives of employers, recruiting agencies and education institutions.

Among the unemployed in the Russian labor market, a significant proportion of professionals have higher education, indicating that the supply in the labor market exceeds the demand for economic, managerial, legal and other areas.

At the same time, there is still a high demand for professional educational services, including for Master's degree programs. At the same time, students expect practical education, master classes, trainings, participation of authoritative employers and coryphaeuses in their field for experience exchange (Sheregi and Kirillov, 2017).

The problems and features of modern Russian education were discussed in December 2016 within the framework of XXVth International Christmas Educational Readings "1917-2017: Lessons of the Century" at the RSSU at the conference "Problems of Education and Upbringing in the Period from 1917 to 2017".

The quality of education, the problems of choosing education fields were actively discussed at the section: "Social and Economic Changes of the Modern World" in the framework of the XVIIth International Social Congress (ISC-2017) of the 25th International Scientific Conference on Economic and Social Development held in October 2017. The fields of education with a high proportion of students unsatisfied with the quality and conditions of

education are of great concern (Rogach *et al.*, 2016); (Vinichenko M. V. *et al.*, 2016); (Vinichenko M. *et al.*, 2018).

The main provisions of the research were presented at the VIIth Social Forum "Labor Market and Employment Policy, the State and Prospects of Development" on October 27, 2017, where the authors of the article made a report on the theme: "Analysis of the demand for education fields of Russian universities in the labor market".

## 5. Conclusion

The first hypothesis about the choice of the field of basic education (Bachelor's or Specialist's degree) is confirmed. The majority of applicants are guided by the interest in a highly paid and prestigious profession. Few of the applicants take into account the fact that the high salaries of the specialists are due not to received higher education, but to the work experience. Some element of chance in obtaining higher education should also be noted, since one of every eight respondents noted the ease of admission or the passing score of the Unified State Examination (Krukova *et al.*, 2016).

The hypothesis that a graduate is not always able to find a job corresponding to the profile of basic education is confirmed by the fact that 9 students out of 10 noted the interest in the field of education and the desire to receive a diploma in a highly paid profession.

The following hypothesis about the attractiveness of Master's degree as a means of granting a postponement from military service is fully confirmed.

Conscious choice of the field of Master's education causes the students to increase the practical orientation of their education.

These conclusions suggest that it is required to popularize the education fields that are in demand in the labor market (Sazonova *et al.*, 2017), and also to reduce the number of budget openings in those areas for which the oversaturation is observed (Kirillov and Demchenko, 2017).

Master's programs should include more practical subjects, master classes of leading practitioners. Special attention should be paid to the scientific activity of undergraduates in order to support their desire to engage in science in the future (Demchenko, 2016).

The results obtained are local, since the students of one higher education institution in Moscow have been interviewed; however, they characterize the trends that have developed in the education and labor market.

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