

## STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TO WORK AND STUDIES: PRACTICAL CASE

Vilmante Kumpikaite<sup>1</sup>, Ruth Alas<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Kaunas University of Technology, Lithuania, vilmante.kumpikaite@ktu.lt

<sup>2</sup> Estonian Business School, Estonia, ruth.alas@ebs.ee

### Abstract

Intensive global competition, higher customer expectations and greater focus on quality have resulted in much greater requirements placed upon employees today than decades ago (Quinn and Spreitzer 1997). The challenge has been to internalize a new type of organizational behavior in order to operate successfully under unfamiliar conditions. Learning, both institutional and individual, and the ensuing corporate changes are seen as a prerequisite for the success and survival of organizations. This paper analyses the attitudes to work and studies of Lithuanian and Estonian students. The main research question is: what main attitudes do students have to their work and studies, are any differences in attitudes between different specialties of students in Lithuania and Estonia and, if so, what are the reasons for these differences? The paper reports the findings of a study of 236 university students in Lithuania and Estonia, which revealed their main attitudes to work and studies, factors that can influence their career.

*Keywords:* students' attitudes, work, motivation, Estonia, Lithuania.

### Introduction

Growing importance of globalization of knowledge and information technologies make us to understand the importance of lifelong learning, modern technologies, and knowledge spread. Employees' job performance, employees' behavior in general, is their knowledge, what they are able to do and what they believe. Questions of employees' skill development, their competence advantages is researched by Kazlauskaite & Buciuiniene (2008), Zakarevičius & Zuperkiene (2008), Kumpikaite (2007&2008), Kumpikaite & Ciarniene (2008a, b), Alas (2007), Savaneviciene *et al.* (2008) and others.

Higher school students will become employees in organizations. Therefore it is important to develop students to be good employees for future. Professors try to give for students the best knowledge and to teach them to be good specialists for their work life in organizations. However, they, deal with the problem that students do not want to learn, to work every day and to get more knowledge. What is the reason for this situation?

What constitutes and influences students' attitudes is a subject of ongoing discussion and research (Siegel & Ranney, 2003). Researchers consider that the attitudes people have toward concepts and issues determine how they will behave in various situations (e.g., Fishbein & Ajzen, 1975). Schoenfeld (1985) claimed that attitudes and beliefs are part of "cognition" itself, while Koballa (1988) proposed that beliefs form the basis for attitudes. Consequently it is important to find out what attitudes to work and studies students have. Students' approach, especially in science, is field of interest of such researchers as Aiken & Aiken (1969), Marion (1986), Hogan (2000), Scherz & Oren (2006) and others. Teaching effectiveness and its dimensions were developed in researches by Feldman (1976), Marsh (1987), Marsh & Dunkin (1992), Centra (1993); Braskamp & Ory (1994) and Peltier *et al.* (2003).

The purpose of this paper is to introduce students' attitudes to work and studies using results of empirical research of students in Lithuania and Estonia. Methods used in this paper are scientific literature analysis, empirical study, and statistical data analysis, correlation analysis, using SPSS and Excel programs.

This paper is divided in to four parts. The first part describes research background based on scientific literature. The next section gives basic information about the survey and its sample. After this research's results are shown and finally, conclusion and short discussion is given in the last part.

## Research background

Following scientific literature, three main directions for finding students' attitudes to work and studies were developed for this survey (see Figure 1).

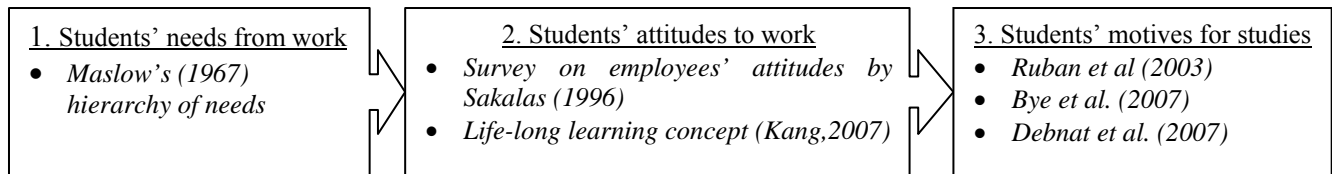


Figure 1. Directions of the research

Maslow (1967) is one of the most famous motivation theorists. In 1944 he depicted hierarchy of needs, where physiological and safety needs were described as lower-order needs; and social, esteem and self actualization needs were described as higher-order-needs. Using Maslow's needs in this study it was selected to explore:

- a. Safety needs, where salary, work conditions and work guarantee were analyzed
- b. Social needs, where good work atmosphere, understanding supervisor, good interpersonal relations and wish to belong to some social group were selected for the survey.
- c. Esteem and self actualization needs, where esteem and self actualization was called as higher needs. Here students' opinion of possibility to use their skills and knowledge, quick career, prestige and possibilities to be promoted was found out.

If we understand what kind of needs students want to satisfy from their work, it lets us to explore students' attitudes to work. In order to analyze them, 4 questions of employees' survey (Sakalas, 1996) were used in the following way:

- a. You want to perform the work nominated you as better as possible, despite received salary.
- b. Any work should not make troubles in your normal life.
- c. You see work as business: the more you are paid the better you work and vice versa.
- d. To live it is necessary to work, but you would not work if you could.

The discourse of lifelong learning potentially expands the theoretical exploration of adult education beyond pedagogical applicability, because there are many more things that we learn in our lives than are taught in educational settings (Kang, 2007). We made an assumption that positive view for life-long learning concept also shows affirmative students' attitudes to work. This assumption was explored in the survey too.

Knowing students' attitudes to work, we can find out and students' reasons for their studies. Bye *et al.* (2007), Debnat *et al.* (2007) try to understand motives of students at the different levels. Professors in the entire world deal with students who do not care or who do not want to work every day. As the phenomenon of disengagement is becoming more prevalent, researchers are focusing their studies on the concept of motivating reluctant learners (e.g., Brophy, 1998; Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Lumsden, 1994). Nowadays students are similar in the entire world. What is the reason students go to study? Do they seek a diploma or knowledge? Researches in different countries deal with this question. Ruban *et al.* (2003), Griffin *et al.* (2008) recognized a distinction between students seeking learning and seeking certification. However it happens sometimes that students study only because their parents want them to do this or only because students know that they will be able to get better work after graduation of university. In this research 5 groups of reasons for studies were depicted:

- a. Wish to gain more knowledge.
- b. Wish to get a specialty.
- c. Studying because it is interesting and students like it.
- d. Wish to get a diploma.
- e. Reason that student's parent wanted him/her to study for that specialty.

Reviews dimensions made a background for our research of studying students' attitudes to work and studies. The presentation of research and its results is given in next sections.

## Description of research

### Goal of this study.

Our aim was to investigate students' attitudes to work and studies. More specific questions were:

- a. What needs students want to satisfy from their work?
- b. What are students' attitudes to work? Do they want to work or would they not work if they could?
- c. What are students' motives for studies?

### Sample.

Looking, in the past two decades, Estonia and Lithuania, Eastern European countries, have experienced the process of emerging from the Soviet Union and joining the EU (Alas, 2007). After getting Independence in Lithuania and Estonia, and failed economic situation in these countries, students left high schools and did not graduate them at all. They did not see the reason to study and tried to do their own business. But growing unemployment rate changed the situation. Employers had big possibility to select among many applicants and to choose the best. Such situation influenced young people to study and to gain the qualification. Such similarities let authors to explore students' attitudes to work and studies in these two post communist countries.

Survey was made during 2007 September-2008 September in Lithuania and Estonia. 236 students from 3 different universities participated in the research. 202 students were from Kaunas University of Technology and from University of Management and Economics in Kaunas in Lithuania. 34 students were from Estonian Business School in Tallinn. 9 respondents studied Personnel Management, 88 - Economics at Faculty of Economics and Management, 63 students studied Information Technologies at Faculty of Informatics and 13 students studied Export Transportation at International Study Centre at Kaunas University of Technology. 28 respondents studied Business and Administration at the 1st course at University of Management and Economics, Kaunas, Lithuania. 34 students studying Business and Administration from Estonian Business School in Estonia participated in the survey too. 55.3 percent of all respondents were men and 44.7 percent – females. Information about age groups is provided in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Respondents' Age

Age	Frequency	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Under 20	49	20.9	20.9
21-25	178	75.7	96.6
26- 30	3	1.3	97.9
31- 35	3	1.3	99.1
Over 35	2	0.9	100.0
Total	235	100.0	

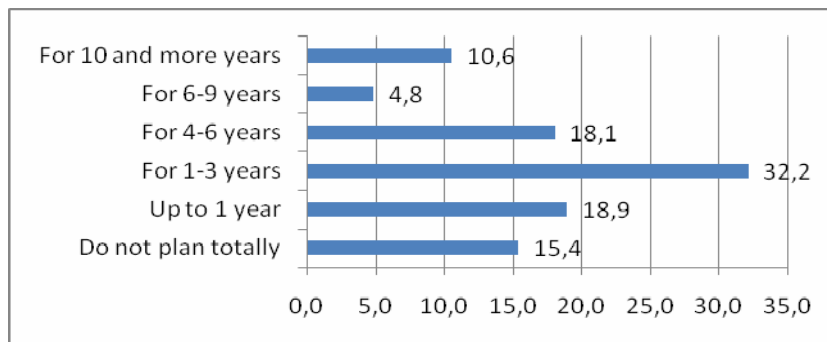
## Interpretation of results

At first, analyzing students' needs they want to satisfy the most (see Table 2) it was found that all safety needs as salary, work conditions and work guarantees are the most important for students. Social and higher needs are less important. According to results we can see that prestige, quick career and wish to belong for some social group are the least important for respondents. Significant statistical different among different specialties was found. The research showed that for students studying economics, needs of safety are more important than for students studying business and management. Also it was found that for students studying economics, needs of safety are more important than for students studying business and management.

**Table 2.** Needs, students want to satisfy from their work, in percent

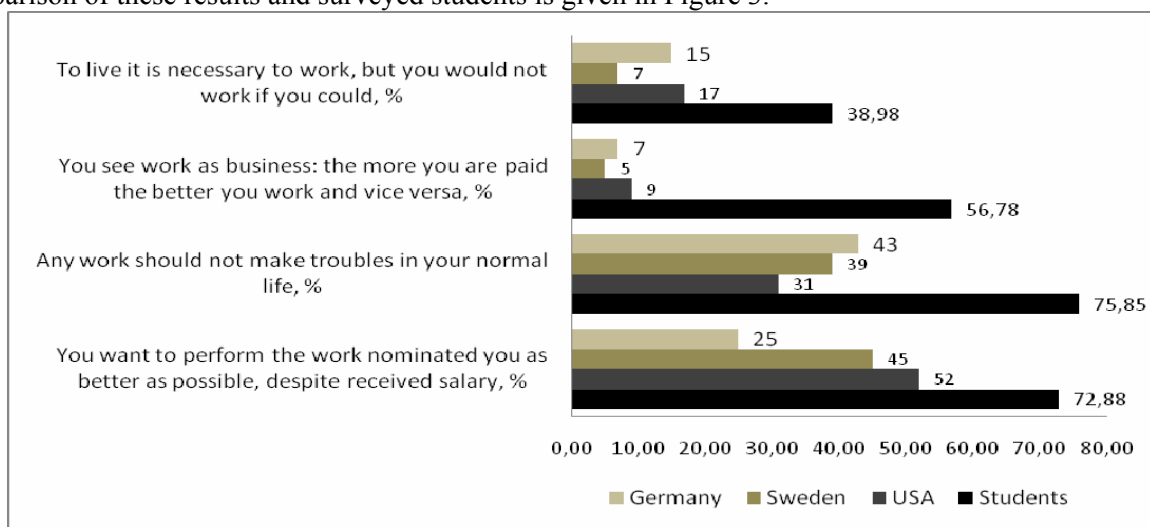
Needs	Safety needs			Social needs				Higher needs			
	Salary	Work conditions	Work guarantees	Good work atmosphere	Understanding supervisor	Good interpersonal relations	Wish to belong to some social group	Possibility to use your skills and knowledge	Quick career	Prestige	Possibilities to be promoted
<b>Evaluation, %</b>											
Very important	64.2	67.7	47.1	48.4	40.0	33.3	3.1	56.4	6.9	11.6	50.9
Important	30.5	25.2	36.9	43.1	43.6	46.2	25.9	31.1	4.0	38.2	36.6
Little important	4.0	4.9	12.4	6.7	12.0	16.9	45.1	7.6	8.9	34.7	6.7
Quit unimportant	1.3	2.2	3.6	1.8	4.4	3.6	25.9	4.9	0.2	15.6	5.8

Looking for how long do students plan their career, we see that 32.2 percent of students plan their career for 1-3 years, 18.1 percent for 4-5 years, 18.9 percent up to 1 year, 4.8 percent for 6-9 years, 10.6 percent for 10 and more years and 15.4 percent do not plan totally (see Figure 2). We could say that most of students plan their life only for years of studies or even do not think about their career while they study. This is not very positive situation because students are not a lot motivated to gain better knowledge for their future work.



**Figure 2.** Answers to the question ‘For how long do you plan your career?’ in percent

In the next step it was tried to explore some basic students’ attitudes to work providing them 4 propositions. Sakalas (1996) gave similar results from Germany, Sweden and the USA companies. The comparison of these results and surveyed students is given in Figure 3.



**Figure 3.** Students’ attitudes to work, in percent

Looking at students' results we can see that 75.85 percent of students agreed that any work should not make troubles for their normal life and 72.88 percent of them agreed that they want to perform the work nominated for them as better as possible, despite their received salary. This question was connected with the next one, trying to explore if students see work as business. 56.78 percent of our respondents agreed with this proposition that they see work as business: the more they are paid the better they work and vice versa. These answers show some variance between them. However using Spearman correlation analysis, it was found statistical significant negative dependents (-0.381 at the 0.05 level) between these answers. It shows that respondents are motivated by money. They work better if they are paid better and look at work as a business.

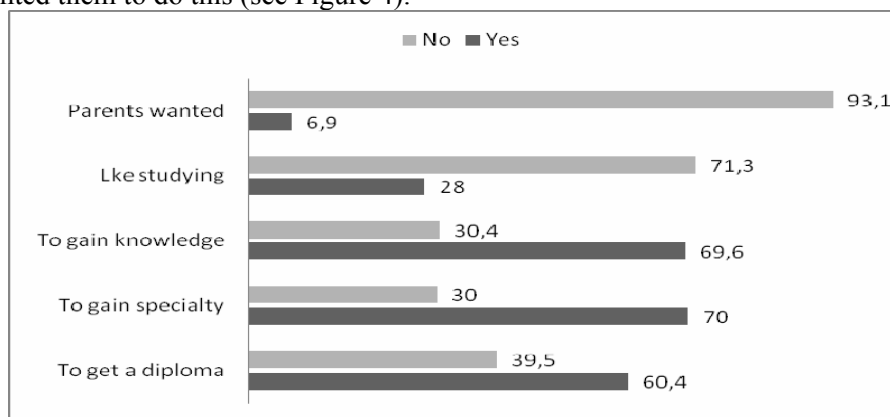
If we look at the answers of employees from different countries and our students, we see big differences. Only 5 percent of Sweden, 7 of Germany, 9 percent of the USA respondents' see work as business. It shows that they like to work and money is not very important for their decision to work. But this is very important for our respondents (56.78 percent of them look at work as at business). Other question confirms this situation too. 7 percent of Sweden, 15 of Germany, 17 of the USA and even 38.98 percent of our respondents would not work if they could. This shows quite negative approach to work of explored students. Using Spearman's correlation it was determined relations between students' needs and this question. It was found significant linear 0.202 dependence (at the 0.01 level), which shows that part of respondents work only because to satisfy their safety needs and do not have for work higher demands.

After this, students were asked if they agree with conception of 'lifelong learning' and possibility to have a few specialties. Their opinion about lifelong learning and several specialties according to different criteria is given in Table 3. Most of the respondents agreed with conception of continual learning and that it is useful to have a few specialties. Speaking about specialties the lowest percent of positive answers were among students studying Export Transportation (84.6 percent) and Personnel Management (88.9 percent). However such result is also very high. Answers to this questions show optimistic perspectives that respondents pay attention to their studies trying to become perspective and effective performers.

**Table 3.** Students' opinion about lifelong learning and several specialties according to different criteria

Students studying	It is useful to have a few specialties, %	Students who agreed with conception of 'lifelong learning', %
in Estonia	91.2	97.1
in Lithuania	91.6	81.7
Personnel Management	88.9	66.7
Economics	95.5	94.3
Information Technologies	93.7	79.4
Business and Management	96.4	89.3
Export Transportation	84.6	69.2

Looking at the reasons of studies (respondents could indicate several reasons) , it was found that 60.4 percent of respondents study because they want to receive a diploma, 70 percent want to get specialty, 69.6 percent want to get more knowledge, 28.3 percent study because they like it and 6.5 percent answered that their parents wanted them to do this (see Figure 4).



**Figure 4.** Students' reasons for studies, in percent

Summarizing the results of the study we can see quite positive attitudes to work and studies. Students want to satisfy their safety needs the most. Consequently they need to work and they look at work as a business: work well if they are paid better. There through students try to gain knowledge, specialty and to receive certificate in order to get money and satisfy their needs.

### Conclusion

The following main findings were depicted from this research:

- No statistical difference was found among answers of respondents according students' age and country of studies. But research showed that there were significant statistical difference between specialties and needs motivating students. Needs of safety are more important for students studying economics than for students studying business and management.
- Results showed that students want to satisfy their safety needs from work the most. It means, they seek financial independence from their families and parents.
- Looking at students attitudes to work, we see that students' attitudes are quite different in comparison with results' of employees' opinion in Germany, the USA and Sweden. Our respondents look at work more as at business as employees of researched countries.

It is not easy to find the reasons of these differences. We have only assumption that while students did not satisfy their basic needs, do not have big work experience and financial freedom from their relatives, they wish to gain it and look at work as at business. And studies are only means to reach this purpose. However if they reach it and will have more work experience, their attitudes probably will change. They will start to take care about higher needs more and they will find interest to work not only for money but for self development and satisfaction. This would decrease number of persons who would not work if they could. Looking at such perspectives, it would be interesting and useful to repeat this research and to see how students' attitudes convert in changes of time.

Summarizing, we could say that we can see quite positive students' attitudes to their studies and work. This conclusion is based on results that most students agreed with 'lifelong learning' concept and positive possibility to have several specialties. Looking at the reasons of studies, quite optimistic perspective is that 161 respondents (from 236 respondents only 5 did not answered to this question) want to get specialty and 160 respondents want to gain more knowledge. However, negative side is that getting a diploma (141 answers) is still one of the main reasons of studies in Lithuania and Estonia. This shows that students are not a lot motivated to gain the best knowledge and it makes their teachers' work more complicated.

As every survey, this one has its limitations too. First of all it was too small sample of students in Estonia in order to speak about differences between students studying in Lithuania and Estonia. Next, it is not enough samples of respondents from different universities to try to look throw differences among them.

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