

*Marijan Tustonja*¹²⁹
*Anđelka Čuljak*¹³⁰
*Ivana Šimunić*¹³¹

SATISFACTION OF STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES WITH STUDYING AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MOSTAR

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Abstract

This study aimed to examine students with disabilities' satisfaction with their studies at the University of Mostar. The research questions were: to what extent difficulties limit students in everyday life and study; how satisfied students are with accommodation; how satisfied students are with study organization, teachers, colleagues and acquired knowledge. The study involved 15 of a total of 28 students with disabilities at the University of Mostar. The majority of respondents (80%) were female, undergraduate, and full-time students. To examine the research questions in this study, the "Satisfaction Assessment Questionnaire for Students with Disabilities at the University of Mostar" was applied. The questionnaire consisted of 25 closed-ended questions with offered answers. The majority of respondents in this study were students aged 20 to 23. The results showed that students with disabilities achieve good and successful study results. Students showed satisfaction with student services, teachers and colleagues from the study group. Additionally, students would enrol in their studies again. They are satisfied with the concept of the particular study subjects, but 53% of students are not satisfied with the offer of elective courses. Students express satisfaction with the acquired knowledge and skills. It can be concluded that it is necessary to modernize the approach to work in the teacher-student relationship and use adaptive teaching materials, techniques and strategies that can empower teachers to meet the educational needs of students with different educational needs.

Keywords: disability, students with disabilities, studying, University of Mostar

129 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Mostar; marijan.tustonja@ff.sum.ba

130 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Mostar; andjelka.culjak@ff.sum.ba

131 Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, University of Mostar; ivana.simunic@ff.sum.ba

Introduction

The Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities sets out that persons with disabilities are “those who have long-term physical, mental, intellectual, or sensory impairments that, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder their full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others.” (Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, 2010). Different social systems in Bosnia and Herzegovina use various terms and definitions, resulting in minor or bigger practical problems. The Framework Law on Higher Education in Bosnia and Herzegovina covers students with disabilities only in Article 7, which reads as follows:

“Access to higher education within the scope of which the licensed higher education institutions operate in Bosnia and Herzegovina shall not be restricted, either directly or indirectly, based on any realistic or assumed basis such as: sex, race, sexual orientation, physical or other disability, marital status, colour of skin, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic or social origin, affiliation with an ethnic community, property, birth, age or any other status.”

Data on students with disabilities in Bosnia and Herzegovina are not fully available to the public (Ćuk, Radonjić, 2020). When ensuring the quality of study conditions for students with disabilities, higher education institutions should take into account individual interviews with the candidate to meet additional needs at all stages of academic planning and resource planning. The candidate should be acquainted with the possibilities that the university or faculty offer and agree on the means of satisfying their needs from the first step of application, access to the entrance exam, until passing through the study period. (<https://www.efzg.unizg.hr/UserDocImages/KID/SSI%20Brosura.pdf>). Inaccessible and inadequate education excludes most persons with disabilities, thus reducing or preventing their development and training for life and work (Bratovčić et al., 2013). The data show that one of the main shortcomings of the educational process is the insufficient practical component (Turčilo et al., 2019), which is especially reflected in students with disabilities and the limitations they have. Students with disabilities show a significantly higher degree of financial burden than other students (Farnell et al., 2014). Students with disabilities should interact with educational institutions to meet their needs

and motives. A group of factors affect satisfaction, such as the curricula, place, and connectivity of university departments. Regarding curricula and their effects on student satisfaction, research shows that educational goals differ in terms of age and degree of disability. The University of Mostar established an Office for Students with Disabilities (Siordia, 2014; Al-Qaryouti, 2012). The University of Mostar established an Office for Students with Disabilities. Its main task is to provide assistance, support, and develop an inclusive approach for this category of students (www.sum.ba/sum/studenti/ured-za-podrsku-studentima). The establishment of the Office at Universities is an example of good practice in developed European universities (Korkut and Dorčić, 2014). Contemporary theoretical starting points for understanding the concept of quality of life start from the elementary hypothesis that the full inclusion in the life of the social community can influence the quality of life of persons with disabilities as subjects in modern society (Bošković, 2014).

The World Health Organization definition defines quality of life as:

“An individual’s perception of their position in life in the context of the culture and value systems (...) It is a broad ranging concept affected in a complex way by the person’s physical health, psychological state, level of independence, social relationships, personal beliefs and their relationship to salient features of their environment.” (WHOQOL, 1997).

Tessema, Ready and Yu, (2012) argue that in the academic environment, satisfaction is defined as the degree to which students are satisfied with various issues related to the study itself. Eliot and Healy (2001) give us a more specific definition of student satisfaction, suggesting that satisfaction is a short-term attitude based on the evaluation of the student’s experience with the provided educational services. The faculty experience is different for some students with disabilities than their non-disabled peers; e.g., students with disabilities show higher levels of emotional or psychological stress. Also, some studies report a lower quality of life than their peers (Smedema et al., 2015). Research has shown that students feel different from their peers, have problems accessing accommodation and in some cases, face prejudice or stigma (Baker, Boland and Nowik, 2012; Dowrick et al., 2005; Yssel, Pak and Beilke, 2016). Understanding one’s disability and influencing academic achievement (self-awareness) and knowledge of

how to seek adaptation (self-advocacy) are linked to multiple outcomes in higher education, including performance, perseverance, and satisfaction (Belch, 2004; Daly-Cano, Vacarro and Newman, 2015; Lombardi et al., 2011; Terras, Leggio, and Phillips, 2015; Yssel et al., 2016). The research conducted by Bošković et al. (2017) showed that students with disabilities have equal levels of academic, emotional, and social adjustment. Students with disabilities and those who live independently are more emotionally adjusted. In the research on the quality of the educational process among the general population of students of the Faculty of Economics in Mostar (Mabić, 2011), the best-rated category was the expertise of the teaching staff. The well-rated categories are the working hours of the faculty and the organization of classes and exam deadlines, whereas the worst-rated are the professional practice, followed by the administrative staff.

Goals, hypotheses, and results of the research

This paper aims to examine how satisfied students with disabilities at the University of Mostar are with their studies. The hypotheses are the following:

1. It is assumed that perceived difficulties severely limit students' daily lives and studies.
2. The students are assumed to be most satisfied with the accommodation and least satisfied with the price and location of the accommodation.
3. The students are assumed to be most satisfied with teachers and colleagues and least satisfied with the skills acquired during their studies.

The study involved 15 of a total of 28 students with disabilities registered in the Office for Students with Disabilities database at the University of Mostar. The majority of respondents (80%) were female, undergraduate, full-time students aged 20 to 23. The research showed that most students have motor disorders (27%), followed by chronic diseases (20%), visual and hearing impairments (20%), and the "other" group (20%). For the purposes of this research, a survey questionnaire (Kovčo Vukadin, 2016) was used, which was adapted to the sample and research needs. The questionnaire consists of 25 closed-ended questions with offered answers.

The first part refers to socio-demographic data; the second part refers to the type, method, and costs of studies; and the last part of the question refers to satisfaction with teachers, teaching content, and support from non-teaching staff and colleagues at the study. The problem was to examine to what extent the difficulties limit students in their everyday lives and studies. It turned out that 67% of students estimate that difficulties seriously limit them in everyday life. As regards studying, 53% of students say that difficulties limit them in studying a little or not at all. Then, 47% of students think they are really severely limited. Given the results, the conclusion is that difficulties severely limit students both in everyday life and studying, thus accepting the hypothesis.

The next problem was to examine how satisfied students are with accommodation (location, price, type of accommodation, etc.). The results showed that most students (53%) lived with their parents, and 40% of students lived independently. These results agree with the results of previous research, e.g., the report of *Eurostudent* for Croatia (Šćukanec et al., 2015), which states that the most common form of student housing is accommodation with parents. Most students are satisfied with the accommodation type (87%), the location (73%), and the price of the accommodation (80%). Based on the results, the conclusion is that students are satisfied with the accommodation type, price, and location. Thus, the hypothesis is rejected.

The last problem was to examine how satisfied students are with the organization of their studies, teachers, colleagues, and the acquired knowledge. According to the research results, 67% of students are satisfied with the student office and the information. It coincides with the research of Simadi and Alqaryouti (2017). Only 46% of respondents confirmed that they were familiar with the person, service, or support office for students with disabilities. These results are surprising since there is an Office for Students with Disabilities at the University of Mostar, which conducted this research. Students express satisfaction, 66% of them, with friendliness with students. Satisfaction with colleagues, i.e., students in their academic year, was assessed positively. As many as 80% of respondents answer that they can turn to colleagues for help and socialize with them in their free time, which shows that stereotypes and prejudices do not prevail between students and respondents at the University of Mostar (Baker, Boland and Nowik, 2012; Dowrick et al., 2005; Yssel, Pak, and Beilke, 2016; Herts,

Wallis, and Maslow, 2014). In the last group of questions, students were asked to rate their satisfaction with their studies. It is important to note that 80% of them would enrol in the same study programme if they re-enrolled in their studies. Satisfaction with the knowledge acquired during the studies was assessed positively by 80% and with the acquired skills by 67% of students with disabilities, which confirms the results of Mabić (2011). Students expressed dissatisfaction with the offer of elective courses. The hypothesis that students will be most satisfied with teachers and colleagues, while they will be least satisfied with the skills acquired during their studies, is partially accepted.

Conclusion

Satisfaction with studies is an internationally recognized and trending topic. The quality of life of people with disabilities can only be achieved through complete involvement in community life, and one of the means to support this is education. In the academic environment, satisfaction is defined as the degree to which students are satisfied with various study-related issues, e.g., satisfaction with location and accommodation type, monthly study costs, living costs, and satisfaction with teachers, studies, and colleagues.

In conclusion, it can be said that students with disabilities studying at the University of Mostar perceive difficulties as a serious obstacle in their everyday lives and studies, which may also be a consequence of their distorted perception of their own disability considering the still numerous obstacles they encounter. It can be concluded that the most common form of housing for students with disabilities is accommodation with parents. Students who live independently expressed their satisfaction with the type, location, and price of accommodation. Given that the research showed that students are not satisfied with the way teachers know how to get students interested in the subject and the way they evaluate students, it can be concluded that it is necessary to modernize the approach to work in the teacher-student relationship and use adaptive teaching materials, techniques, and strategies that can empower teachers to meet the educational needs of students with different educational needs.

The limitations of this study are that only 15 students with disabilities participated out of a total of 28 registered students with disabilities in the 2020-2021 academic year at the Office for Students with Disabilities, University of Mostar. The research was conducted via an online questionnaire, which limited our ability to receive more authentic and specific answers to the research questions and insight into the state of emotions, attitudes, and ways of expressing answers. A limitation of this research is a quantitative online survey due to the COVID-19 pandemic. At the same time, a recommendation is to do qualitative research in contact form due to the quality of feedback. This research can be a starting point for future research at the level of Bosnia and Herzegovina to obtain more complete data and show the state of this population. It would be interesting to examine the social interactions of students with disabilities during their studies, i.e., whether they interact with other students with disabilities or with students without difficulties.

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ZADOVOLJSTVO STUDENATA S INVALIDITETOM STUDIRANJEM NA SVEUČILIŠTU U MOSTARU

Sažetak

Cilj ovog istraživanja bio je ispitati zadovoljstvo studenata s invaliditetom studiranjem na Sveučilištu u Mostaru. Istraživačka pitanja bila su sljedeća: u kojoj mjeri poteškoće ograničavaju učenike u svakodnevnom životu i učenju; koliko su studenti zadovoljni smještajem; koliko su studenti zadovoljni organizacijom studija, nastavnicima, kolegama i stečenim znanjem. U istraživanju je sudjelovalo 15 od ukupno 28 studenata s invaliditetom Sveučilišta u Mostaru. Većina ispitanika (80%) bile su studentice, redovite studentice. Za ispitivanje istraživačkih pitanja u ovoj studiji primijenjen je Upitnik za procjenu zadovoljstva studenata s invaliditetom Sveučilišta u Mostaru. Upitnik se sastojao od 25 pitanja zatvorenog tipa s ponuđenim odgovorima. Većina ispitanika u ovom istraživanju bili su studenti u dobi od 20 do 23 godine. Rezultati su pokazali da studenti s invaliditetom postižu dobre i uspješne rezultate studiranja. Studenti su pokazali zadovoljstvo studentskim servisom, nastavnicima i kolegama sa studijske grupe. Studenti bi također ponovno upisivali studije. Zadovoljni su konceptom pojedinih studijskih predmeta, ali 53% studenata nije zadovoljno ponudom izbornih predmeta. Učenici izražavaju zadovoljstvo stečenim znanjima i vještinama. Može se zaključiti kako je potrebno osuvremeniti pristup u radu na relaciji nastavnik – student i koristiti prilagodljive nastavne materijale, tehnike i strategije koje mogu osnažiti nastavnike da zadovolje edukacijske potrebe studenata različitih obrazovnih potreba.

Ključne riječi: invaliditet, studenti s invaliditetom, studiranje, Sveučilište u Mostaru