Psychosocial Factors which Influence College Student's Academic Pathway

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Abstract—This research purpose is to identify psychosocial factors, which influence students decision for academic field.

In this research there were used motivational questionnaire (identifying respondent's portrait), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) and Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire (MSLQ). These instruments were applied on a sample of 170 students of both sexes from the faculties located in Bucharest. The data are introduced and operationalized with the Microsoft Excel (2007) and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics, v.20). The research results identifies that family, personal skills influenced students' academic filed. Also, it show that high self-esteem is correlated with high academic motivation and high motivation for earning.

This is also confirmed by other studies where high self-esteem and strength is an important factor in the prediction of academic achievement in students (Mohammad, A. 2010).

Keywords—self-esteem, academic motivation, learning motivation, college students.

I. INTRODUCTION

Starting University is a life challenging and opportunities for adolescents/young adults (Hunsberger, & Prancer, 2000). Many students have difficulties to cope with the psychological, emotional, and academic realities of higher education, which can affect the academic performance (Francis, McDaniel, & Doyle, 1987). Some studies suggest that psychosocial factors (PSFs) such as self-efficacy, attitude toward learning, motivation, self-esteem, academic stress and can predict students' performance (Robbins, Oh, Le, & Button, 2009). Many young people think that the transition from high school to the college is negative and generates stress. (Pancer and others, 2000; Wintre and Yaffe, 2000). Many students feel overwhelmed in their first college year by the academic requirements (Sax et al, 1999). A lot of students living both in campuses and with their parents exhibit psychological disorders and even mental confusion in the first year of college, while some of those who live far from family mentions cognitive failures (Fisher and Hood, 1987).

When there are successes, young adults self-esteem increases, and it manifests itself: confidence, strength of ongoing actions, the desire to overcome the difficulties, activism, self-consciousness of honor and duty. Opinions of others regarding his/hers actions become very important. The development of self-identity is slower due to material, emotional (for comfort and belonging), mentality (values) dependency, which can cause conflicts and frustrations between young adult and parents. As such, it can lead to behaviors too rigid or too loose, which significantly influences the evolution of his/her personality.

Debesse (1970) states that adolescence has two functions: the adaptation to the environment when the adolescent forms his behavior and habits in order to respond to social external demands, to integrate himself in the society and exceed the objectives set. This explains the fact that some teenagers are eager of overtaking, being in a state of permanent search, they are dissatisfied and manifest trends to perfection, while others are more at peace with what they do and achieve and are more docile and pliable. Motivation and personal effectiveness affects essentially, the adolescent behavior. Together with the skills and attitudes, motivation constitutes an element that energizes or blurs the mental reserves and maintains or inhibits some tensions, leading to some degree of involvement in activities. Motivation is the underlying involvement in activities, making up reasons. Through them, the goals and interests are selected and ranked, leading to the formation of aspirations, where the emotional component is critical during adolescence. Adolescents with a high degree of personal efficacy are more likely to do well in school (Zimmerman et al, 1992). Personal beliefs related to efficacy are important in vocational development (Betz, 1994; Betz and Hackett, 1981).

The concept of motivation has been studied from several perspectives (e.g., Freud, 1962; Hull, 1943; Skinner, 1953). However, the resurging interest in motivational models and

theories as a result of the important development of theoretical frameworks concerning college student change (Pascarella & Terenzini 1991), become strongly evident by the recent use of goal theories and motivational dynamics such as self-regulation, self determination and expectancy-value models of motivation in order to understand and explain students' performance, achievement and child development within the context of educational psychology (Covington, 1993, Dweck, 1999, Eccles & Wigfield, 2002). Researchers have yet to agree on the precise nature of motivation (Pintrich & Schunk,1996). Early theorist often propounded the concept of motivation to describe human behavior in general. However, the focus on motivation has largely shifted towards addressing behavior in specific settings and contexts such as academic and educational context (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meece, 2008). Pintrich and Zusho (2007), define academic motivation as the internal processes that instigate and sustain activities aimed at achieving specific academic goals. Tucker, Zayco, & Herman, (2002) viewed motivation as "cognitive, emotional, and behavioral indicators of student investment in and attachment to education". Numerous studies that focused on the relationship between academic motivation and school performance in particular (e.g., Armitage, 2008; Boon, 2007; Kushman, Sieber, & Harold, 2000; McInerney & Van Etten, 2004; Martin, Marsh, Debus, & Malmberg, 2008) suggest that motivation is positively related with academic performance. In fact motivation is regarded as the most important factor that influences academic performance and success. According to Tucker et al., (2002) motivation is directly linked to academic performance and achievement; all other factors affect achievement only through their effect on motivation. This study will focus on academic motivation, motivation for learning and psychosocial factors, which influence students' academic path.

II.   METHODS

In this research there were used questionnaire (identifying respondent's portrait), Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale, Academic Motivation Scale (AMS) and Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionare (MSLQ). These were applied from November 2014 to August 2015 on a sample of 170 students of both sexes from different Departments of University of Bucharest. The data are introduced and operationalized with the Microsoft Excel (2007) and Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (IBM SPSS Statistics, v.20).

Table 1. Breakdown of participants' frequency/attendance

| Department		Frequency	Percentile	Valid Percentile	Cumulate Percentile
Valid	FPSE	53	31,2	31,2	31,2
	Economics	53	31,2	31,2	62,4
	Medical School	8	4,7	4,7	67,1
	Arts/Letters	15	8,8	8,8	75,9
	Technical Departments	41	24,1	24,1	100,0
	Total	170	100,0	100,0	

We can notice that there are equal proportions of gender representation in a ratio of ¼ male respondents (23.5% Tr) and ¾ female respondents (76.5% Tr). Aside from the gender, the profile of participants is filled by age variable with a cumulative percentile until the age of 30 of 94.1%, while the statistical average is 22.26 years - the vast majority of respondents being in the II year of study (82 people = 48.2% Tr) and third year (78 people = 45.9% Tr). These respondents have different residences and different income variables, identified by income or variable home. Depending on the variable income we are observing a balanced ratio from 100-399 EURO (51 individuals = 30% Tr), 400-499 Euro (56 individuals = 32.9% Tr) and over 500 EURO (61 individuals = 35 9% Tr).

Regarding the variable housing, among the most common response options are: family (70 individuals = 41.2 % Tr); with colleagues / rent (44 individuals = 25.9%Tr); students dorm (43 individuals = 25.3% Tr).

III.   ANALYSIS OF RESULTS

1. Motivational questionnaire - Subjects' answers to the motivational questionnaire are represented by the frequencies shown in the pie charts.

Frequency tables regarding the approval of college courses or curriculum reflect a "somehow satisfied" percentage of 35.3%, while 30.6% were located in the "satisfied" area, and 22.5% of subjects came under the "very satisfied" area (Pie chart 1).

Pie chart 1

Are you satisfied with the courses?

- No/Not really
- Somewhat Satisfied
- Satisfied
- Very satisfied
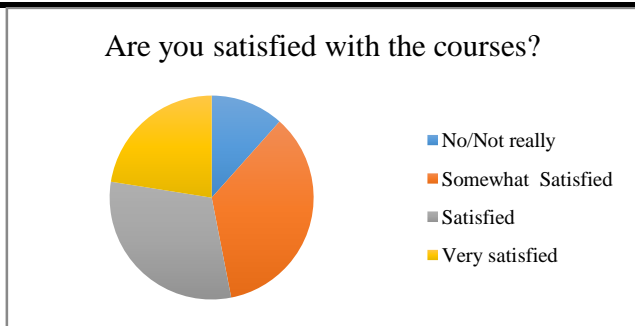
Frequency tables for college choice reflects a 10% of a "somewhat satisfied" subjects, while 25.3% were "more than satisfactory", and 44.9% of subjects reported "very satisfied" (pie chart 2).

Pie chart 2

Did you want the faculty you enrolled?

- No/Not really
- Somewhat
- Somewhat more
- Very much
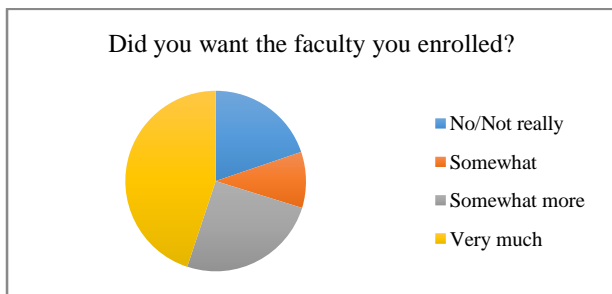
Frequency tables for high school - field of study reflect a rate of 11.8% subjects who reported a "somewhat"/satisfactory level, while 28.2% were situated at a more than satisfactory/"Somewhat more" level, and 29.4% of subjects fell under "very/a lot satisfied" category (Pie chart 3).

Pie Chart 3

Did you think at this academic field since highschool?

- No/ Not really
- Somewhat
- Somewhat more
- A lot
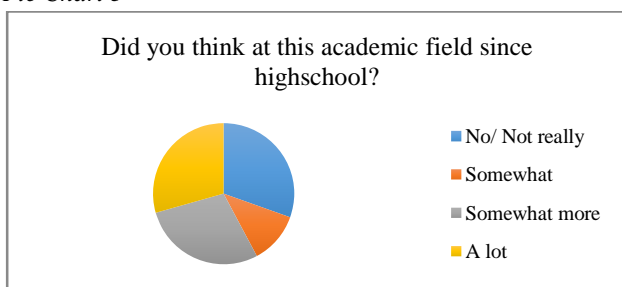
Frequency tables on the influence of friends on the decision to attend a certain college reflects a rate of 81.8% of subjects who reported that there was NO influence from friends /or the Do Not Know, while 17.6% of the subjects fell under the "Yes" chart as reflected on Pie Chart 4.
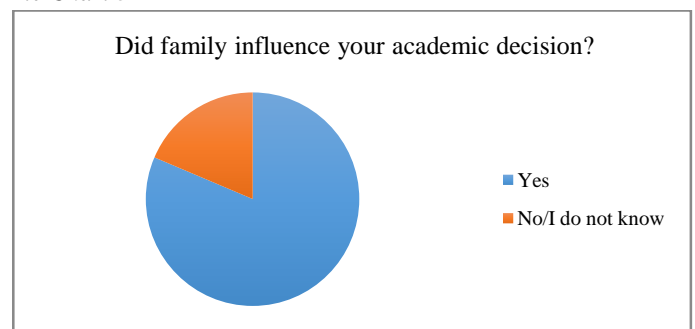
      Pie Chart 4

Did friends influence your academic decision?


- Yes
- No/I do not know
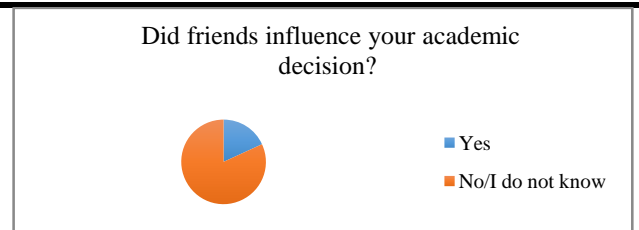
Frequency tables on the influence of family on the decision to attend a certain college reflects a rate of 18.6% of subjects who reported that there was NO influence from family members /or the Do Not Know, while 81.4% of the subjects fell under the "Yes" category as reflected on Pie Chart 5.

Pie Chart 5

Did family influence your academic decision?

- Yes
- No/I do not know

Tables of frequency on personal skills influencing the decision to undergo this faculty reflects a rate of 38.2% of students who reported that they "Do Not Know" the answer, while 61.8% of the subjects fell under the "Yes" category (Pie Chart 6).
*Pie Chart 6*

Did your personal skills influence your academic decision?

- Yes
- No/I do not know
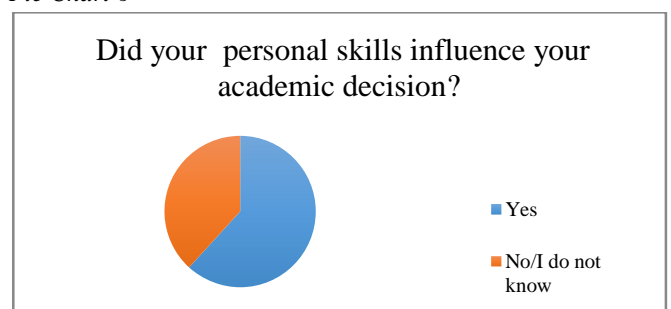
Frequency tables on the reputation of the institution influencing the decision to follow a certain college reflects a rate of 76.5% of subjects reporting that they Do Not Know, while 23.5% of subjects answered "Yes" (Pie Chart 7) .
Pie Chart 7

Did the institution reputation influence your academic decision?
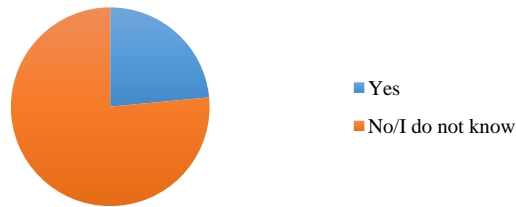
Tables of frequencies regarding if the amenities and facilities provided by the University Department influenced the decision to pursue this college reflected 70% of subjects reporting that they Do Not Know, while 30% of subjects answered "Yes" Only a small number of the interviewed students (30%) considered that the faculty facilities/amenities influenced their decision)

Tables of frequencies on the safeness of the future career influencing the student's decision to attend this university reflected that 58,2% of the subjects reported that they Do Not Know, while 41,8% of subjects answered "Yes". Almost half (41.8%) of the students felt positive that their College Department would provide a reliable career.

Frequency tables for the hope of a stress-free profession influencing the decision to attend this university reflect a rate of 87.6% of students who reported that they Do Not Know the answer, while 12.4% answered "Yes". It is noticeable that only few students were looking for a stress free/laidback job.

Tables frequency for "information to date" as one of the students' requirements to be provided by the chosen college reflected that a 60% of subjects answered "No/I Do Not Know", while the answer of 40% of the subjects was "Yes". Almost half of the students expect that the faculty will have the latest/updated information in the field.

Frequency tables on the "future college friends/friendship" is one of the criteria influencing the choice of this College", reflected that a rate of 76.5% subjects reported No/I Do Not Know", while the answer of 23.5% of the subjects was "Yes". The low percentage in the Yes area shows that students do not take really into consideration the friendships criteria while choosing/applying to a college.

Tables frequency regarding the question "the road to professional success is one of the expectations that you have on the college chosen?" reflected that a 30% of the students answered No/I Do Not Know", while the answer of 70% of the subjects was "Yes". Almost all the students (70%) hope that the faculty is the key for success later career.
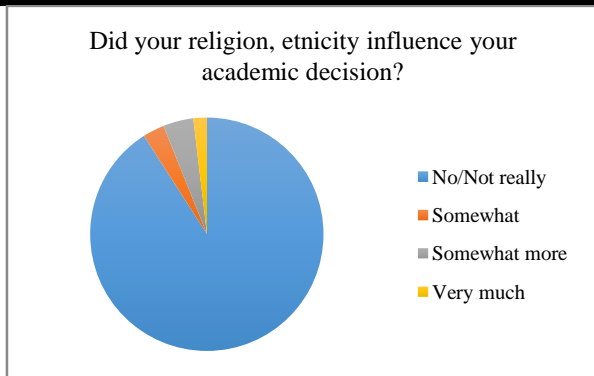
Frequency tables on question "To what extent your decision in choosing this college was the result of a thoughtful mature decision?" reflected that a rate of 2.4% of students responded "Not at all", while 9.4% answered "Not so much" while 16.5% answered "somewhat"; 34.1% Pretty Much and 37.1% of the students responded "Very Much". For most of the students the academic decision was rigorous and deeply analyzed.

Frequency tables for the question "To what extent your decision for this College was the result of circumstantial factors?" reflected that a percentage of 19.4% of the answers were "Not at all", while 27.1% of students did not answer, 28.2% of the answers were "somewhat"; 18.8% "somewhat more" and 5.9% of answers were "Very much". It is important to take into consideration that the circumstantial factors play quite a key role for some of the students' decision when choosing a college, even their number falls under a low percentage area.

Frequency tables for the item "do you regret or do you consider this college a wrong choice/decision?" showed that 47.6% of subjects response was "Not at all", 30.6% answers were "Not so much/ Not really, 10% responses were "somewhat", while 6.5% "somewhat more" and 4.1% "Very much". Few students (~ 20%) regret the decision they made.

Tables of frequency regarding the possibility of medium and long term professional and material dissatisfaction showed a "Not at all" percentage of 22.4%, "Not too much/Not really" a percentage of 42.4%, "somewhat" 17.1%, ""somewhat more"" 14.1% and "Very much" 2.9%. Most of the students do not predict dissatisfactions related to their future job or career.

Frequency tables on the reasons of a certain religious or ethnic orientation influencing the students academic decision in selecting a college reflected that a rate of 74.7% of the subjects responded "Not at all", 13.5% of the answers were "Not really", 2.9% "somewhat"; 4.1% of answers are "somewhat more" and 1.8% of the students answered "Very much". Religion and ethnic orientation would not influnece students decision in regards to academic field.

Did your religion, etnicity influence your academic decision?

- No/Not really
- Somewhat
- Somewhat more
- Very much

2. Self-esteem instrument - Rosenberg participants reported an average score of 24.82 for self-esteem. The responses provided by the subjects investigated showed scores that ranged from a minimum score of 10 points (low self-esteem) to a score of 39 points (high self-esteem). The standard deviation of 7,604 indicates a data dispersion around the high value. The distribution of scores obtained, as shown in the frequency table, is as follows: 10.6% of respondents show a low self-esteem; 40.6% of subjects presented average self-esteem; 49.4% of them show high self-esteem.

The histogram reflects an asymmetry/skewness coefficient of -0.231. This value indicates a negative asymmetry, i.e. a slight tilt to the right of the frequency distribution curve. So the subjects investigated tended to get more middle and high scores. Kurtosis coefficient (-0.706 <0) shows a flattened distribution where the scores of subjects in this group tended to scattered around an average value.

Histogram 1

Mean = 24,82
Std. Dev. = 7,604
N = 170

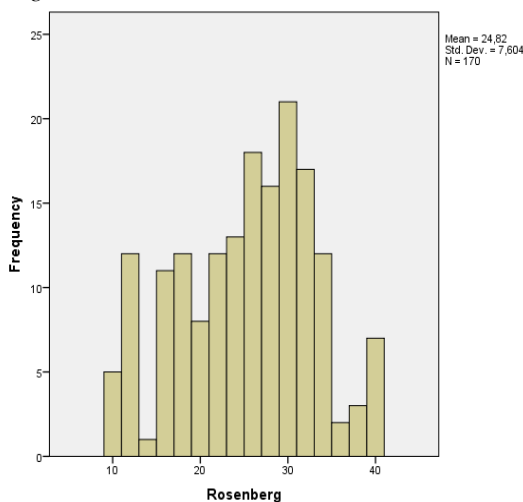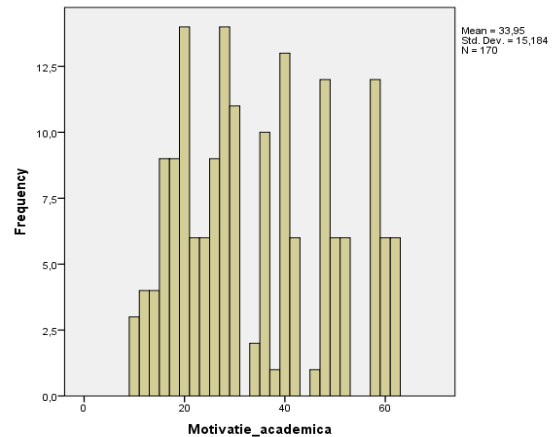3. The Academic Motivation of participants reported an average score of 33.95. The responses provided by the subjects investigated showed scores that ranged from a minimum score of 10 points (overall low academic motivation) to 62 points maximum score (overall average score of the academic motivation). The standard deviation 15,184 indicates a data dispersion around a high value. The histogram reflects an asymmetry / skewed coefficient (skewness) of -0.314. This value indicates a positive asymmetry, ie a slight tilt to the left of the frequency distribution curve. So, the investigated subjects tended to get more low average scores. The Kurtosis coefficient (1113 <0) indicates an slightly abnormal flattened distribution, where the scores of subjects in this group tended to scattered around an average value.

Histogram   2

Mean = 33,95
Std. Dev. = 15,184
N = 170

The Pearson correlation test was applied in order to analyze the correlations in the studied variables. Statistical results are presented as calculated correlation coefficients, along with the confidence intervals and correlation coefficients corrected for the accuracy. Interpretation of the results was based on the corrected coefficients.

Table 2.

Self Esteem	Academic Motivation (Overall score)			
	r calculated	r calculated 95% CI		r corrected
		Low Limit	High Limit sup.	
Self Esteem	.52*	.40	.65	.62*

	*		*
Academic		.52	
Motivation	.46*	.32	.57*
(Overall score)	*		*

N = 170. *p < .05; **p < .01.

For Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire the participants reported an average score of 51.55. The responses provided by the subjects investigated showed scores that ranged from a minimum score of 30 points to a maximum score of 90 points. The standard deviation was 17.374.

Tabel 3.

Self Esteem	Motivated Strategies for Learning Questionnaire			
	r calculat	$r_{calculat}$ 95% CI		*r* corectat
		Limit a inf.	Limit a sup.	
Self Esteem	.58**	.44	.64	.69**
Motivation for learning	.50**	.37	.63	.61**
Learning Strategies	.39**	.21	.46	.42**

N = 170. *p < .05; **p < .01.

The results indicate that a high self-esteem of the investigated subjects is always associated with a high level of academic motivation, the motivation to learn.

IV. CONCLUSIONS

Majority of students (70,2%) wanted to enroll to the current faculty and (88.4%) are satisfied with the courses. Most of them (69.4%) thought about the current faculty since highschool and their decision was rigorous and deeply analyzed. Students decisions to enroll for faculty was influenced by the family (81.4%) and personal skills (61,8%) while friends and religion/etnic orientation counted only for 17.6% respectively 8.8%.

The research results show that high self-esteem is correlated with high academic motivation and high motivation for learning. This is also confirmed by other studies where high self-esteem and strength is an important factor in the prediction of academic achievement in students (Mohammad, A. 2010).

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