

COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE LIFE QUALITY OF STUDENTS FROM ROMANIA AND THE EUROPEAN UNION*

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Abstract

The concept of life quality is a construct concept, which is most often defined by the component elements and the interdependent relationships that are established between them. Crossing the pandemic period has led to the multiplication of studies on the quality of life, but most of the time these studies are carried out on adult or elderly subjects. We are trying to signal the importance of studying the quality of life of teenagers and young people, considering that the formation of healthy life skills can be formed more easily at these ages, which can lead to the formation of a healthy physical, mental, emotional and social.

The study consists of the analysis of European and national level documents developed in recent years, in which the life quality of young people, respectively of students/master's students, is probed. We also try to identify the research on the life quality of young people carried out in recent years in the area of research of recent years.

Key words: *Quality of life; Young student; Comparative analysis; Constatative study.*

1. Introduction

Quality of life is a complex and multidimensional concept that encompasses a variety of aspects that contribute to the overall well-being of the individual or community. Quality of life represents "the set of elements that refer to the physical, economic, social, cultural, political, health, etc. situation in which people live, the content and the nature of the activities they carry out, the characteristics of social relationships and processes in which they participate, the goods and services they have access to, the consumption patterns adopted, the mode and lifestyle, the evaluation of the circumstances and the results of the activities that correspond to the

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expectations of the population, as well as the subjective states of satisfaction/dissatisfaction, happiness, frustration, etc" (Mărginean, Bălașa, 2002).

This concept has become increasingly important in the social and health sciences, being studied and applied in various contexts. Life quality cannot be reduced to a single element; it includes social, economic, health, environment, interpersonal relationships and personal satisfaction. It is often measured through subjective and objective indicators, such as standard of living, access to health services, education, and a sense of personal happiness and fulfillment. The field of applicability of the concept of quality of life is vast and includes different fields. The quality of life is closely related to the state of health of the individual. Indicators such as physical and mental status, access to medical services and their quality are essential in the assessment of life quality in the field of health. Access to quality education and opportunities for personal development contribute significantly to the quality of life. Education level can influence career, income and personal satisfaction. The state of the environment, pollution and access to sustainable natural resources have a direct impact on the quality of life. Protecting the environment is considered a crucial component in ensuring a healthy and balanced life. There are many tools and methods for measuring quality of life, from subjective questionnaires to objective indicators such as infant mortality rates or living standards. The combination of these methods provides a more complete and relevant picture.

The literature has long suggested that the quality of school life (QSL) plays a vital role in improving students' motivation and efforts, their emotional, behavioural and cognitive engagement, performance and achievement. However, research on the quality of school life with respect to the education systems in the European Union is still fragmented.

2. The Life Quality of Young People in Europe

We propose to start by exploring the multifaceted dimensions of the quality of life among young people in Europe. As the future leaders and contributors to society, understanding and enhancing the well-being of this demographic is crucial for sustainable development. The study employs a comprehensive approach, considering various factors such as economic prosperity, social relationships, health, education, and subjective well-being. Data from diverse sources, including surveys, statistical reports, and academic studies, are analyzed to provide a nuanced perspective on the quality of life of young people in Europe.

The quality of life for young people is a key indicator of societal progress and development. This article aims to assess and analyze the current state of well-being among the youth population in Europe. Aspects such as economic opportunities, educational access, social inclusion, and mental health will be explored to gain a holistic understanding of the challenges and opportunities faced by young Europeans.

One crucial aspect of the quality of life is economic prosperity. The article examines youth unemployment rates, income levels, and access to stable employment. Additionally, the impact of economic factors on the overall well-being

of young people is discussed, considering issues such as housing affordability, cost of living, and economic inequality.

Access to quality education is fundamental to the well-being and future prospects of young individuals. This section explores the educational systems in Europe, evaluating factors such as educational attainment, access to vocational training, and the relevance of curricula in preparing young people for the evolving job market.

Social connections and a sense of belonging are integral to the quality of life. The article delves into the social dimensions of young people's lives, examining factors such as social inclusion, community engagement, and the impact of social media on interpersonal relationships.

Physical and mental health play pivotal roles in determining the overall quality of life. This section investigates the state of healthcare accessibility, mental health support, and lifestyle factors affecting the well-being of young Europeans.

Beyond objective indicators, the subjective experiences and perceptions of young people are being considered. Surveys and psychological studies are analyzed to understand how young Europeans perceive their own quality of life and the factors influencing their subjective well-being.

The findings of this study have significant implications for policy development. Recommendations for targeted interventions and policy changes aimed at improving the quality of life for young people in Europe are discussed. Emphasizing the importance of a holistic approach that considers economic, social, and health-related factors is crucial for informed policy decisions.

By examining various dimensions, from economic prosperity to subjective well-being, the study offers insights into the challenges and opportunities faced by this demographic. It is hoped that the findings will inform policymakers, educators, and stakeholders in creating strategies that enhance the overall well-being of young Europeans, ensuring a more sustainable and prosperous future for the continent.

There are numerous studies and researches on the quality of student life in Europe. These studies are often carried out by government organizations, academic institutions, student organizations or international bodies. These researches target various aspects of students' lives, including social, economic, academic and health aspects.

EUROSTUDENT is a European organization that collects and analyzes data on the social and economic situation of students in higher education in Europe. Their research covers topics such as cost of living, living conditions, income and financial support, access to transport, leisure occupations and more.

EUROSTUDENT VII data covers 27 countries: participants are from Iceland in the north to Turkey in the south and from Portugal in the West to Georgia in the East. The indicators presented in EUROSTUDENT VII are based on survey responses collected from over 370,000 students.

EUROSTUDENT collects information on students' characteristics, including age, family status, sex, migration background, and impairments. This information helps to draw a picture of the diversity of student populations in Europe, which vary greatly on many of these characteristics.

Such data can also help raise awareness at the institutional level to enable HEIs to create inclusive learning environments that adequately address and support students (Brooks *et al.*, 2020; Claeys-Kulik *et al.*, 2019).

Another aspect studied is the socio-economic environment of students which, in particular, has a strong influence on the career and educational results of students (Avram & Cantó-Sánchez, 2017; Thompson, 2019), and effects generally on subsequent life experiences (Mazzonna, 2014). EUROSTUDENT VII discusses the educational and economic backgrounds of students, focusing in particular on equity issues and differences.

Several instruments ensure equitable access to higher education, all with the intention of opening access requirements to alternative pathways and allowing for higher education entrance through routes that deviate from traditional and more rigid requirements (Reay *et al.*, 2001).

Regarding the transition to higher education, most students enter higher education within a period of two years after leaving the regular school system in all EUROSTUDENT countries. Generally, students whose parents are not financially affluent are more likely to enter higher education with a delay greater than two years after leaving school than students with higher educated or financially wealthy parents.

The topic of equitable access into and within higher education also raises the question of which (potential) student groups are targeted by the different measures. Some common themes regarding the diversity of socio-economic and cultural realities across the EHEA “are inevitable across countries: low socio-economic background (in the form of low income or the low educational background of parents), gender, immigrant status and disability are often taken as main aspects of disadvantage. Furthermore, mature students are specifically targeted in many countries, as students from underrepresented groups often enter higher education with a delay” (European Commission *et al.*, 2020).

Another aspect studied by EUROSTUDENT is that related to the types and modes of study in the countries participating in this research, although more and more aligned over the years, they still leave room for national specificity and a diversity of cultures in the respective higher education sector. Analysis of students’ satisfaction and drop-out intentions can be helpful in investigating which students face particular challenges and are potentially at risk of abandoning their studies. Some clear cross-country findings in this regard are that, in most EUROSTUDENT countries with binary higher education systems, students enrolled at non-universities are on average more satisfied with the support provided by them. Across countries, drop-out intentions vary most clearly along the lines of study fields, with students studying information and communication technologies in all countries most likely to be seriously considering dropping their study program completely. Closer analysis of these findings at the national level can help reveal potentially at-risk student groups grappling with the organisation of their studies, who might particularly benefit from additional support.

In terms of time limitation, the findings of the latest study clearly show that students are busy: for most students, the time spent each week studying and working

corresponds to more than a full-time job of 47 hours per week on average. Time pressure is not equal for all students. Weekly the workload in hours of those who combine studies with a relatively time-intensive job is (much) higher than unemployed students: 62 versus 38 hours per week.

Work and preparation for the entrance into the labour market play an increasingly important role for students. The majority of students in EUROSTUDENT countries work several hours a week in addition to their studies. In fact, for one in five students, this work occupies such a prominent place in their lives that they self-identify primarily as workers, rather than students. Students from a non-tertiary background work more often during their student time than those from a tertiary background, whereas students from a tertiary background are overrepresented in the group of students who work only during the lecture-free period. Employment is not always a choice; half of students work because they would not be able to afford to study otherwise. This is most often the case for students without a tertiary education background. It also turns out that their earnings largely determine students' budget, accounting on average for almost two thirds of the income of students working during the lecture period.

EUROSTUDENT countries follow different concepts when it comes to structure of national public support for students. While Austria, the Czech Republic, Georgia, Italy, and Romania relies entirely on grant funding for their students, all others countries use a combination of reimbursable and non-reimbursable assistance. In 30% of countries, recipients of national public student support receive more than half of their support in form of repayable funds. Students from the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and Turkey receive particularly high rates of reimbursable support, amounting to more than two third of all national public support for students. Regarding public loans as a study funding, however, the problem may arise that students with low socio-economic environment are less willing to take them out than their peers with higher education and socio-economic background (Brown *et al.*, 2011; Gayardon *et al.*, 2019; Palameta & Voyer, 2010).

Covering their own expenses is a fundamental objective of students' financial activities. A look at the structure of students' total monthly expenses shows that living costs continue to dominate. In all countries, this type of cost requires more than half of all expenses and, on average per country, living expenses amount to 87% of total expenses. By this measure, living costs appear to be the biggest financial barrier that students and their families must overcome.

In the EUROSTUDENT countries, student satisfaction with housing characteristics of cost, location, general condition and commuting time is generally quite high. Overall, in all countries, a clear majority of all students are satisfied with these aspects. It seems that the biggest student dissatisfaction can be found with the commute time. Satisfaction also differs by type of housing. In terms of commuting time, students who live with their parents are particularly unhappy. Dissatisfaction with accommodation costs is the most pronounced among students who live with other people. Dissatisfaction with the general condition a housing is quite high

among students living in student housing. This exemplifies that each form of housing has different strengths and weaknesses.

A final aspect studied by the EUROSTUDENT VII research is the one related to international mobility. With all the importance given to international mobility, in terms of graduate mobility rates and the extent of periods abroad in the form of duration and/or ECTS, students should not ultimately be forced to become mobile. Mobility experiences can increase social stratification and the selectivity of higher education if the benefits, including those for labor market participation, depend on (certain types of) experiences abroad (Marginson, 2016; Netz & Grüttner, 2020). Ensuring experiences and benefits are available to all student groups in the same way, by providing financial support and information and by developing innovation forms of mobility that allow greater flexibility, such as virtual and mixed formats, is necessary to avoid inequalities in this sense.

European Students' Union (ESU) study organizations at the European level and conduct research to evaluate the living conditions of students. They address issues such as student rights, academic and social mobility, and access to education.

The European Students' Union (ESU), the European Federation of Psychology Students' Associations (EFPSA), the International Federation of Medical Students' Associations (IFMSA) and the Youth Health Organization (YHO) joined for the first time in 2020 to mark World Mental Health Day on October 10 with an online event "The blind spot of higher education: Student mental health" "Forgotten and undervalued, including students?"

The Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) conducts a research on higher education and the life quality of students in its member states. Their studies can cover a wide range of topics, including access to higher education, student employability and student satisfaction.

Many European countries and individual universities conduct their own studies on the quality of student life to tailor policies and services to the specific needs of their student population.

These studies provide important information for formulating and adjusting educational and social policies to improve the student experience in higher education. The results of this research can also be useful for students, parents, educational institutions and policy makers.

3. The Life Quality of Young People in Romania

The documentation revealed to us that there are several studies and researches that dealt with the quality of life of students in Romania. These studies are often conducted by academic institutions, student organizations, government bodies or non-governmental organizations.

The EUROSTUDENT organization carried out studies that also included data about students in Romania, analyzing aspects such as living conditions, student budgets, mobility and access to educational services.

In addition, higher education institutions in Romania, including universities and student associations, conduct their own research on the quality of student life to better understand the specific needs of their academic community.

The quality of life for students in Romania can vary based on various factors such as the city or region, economic background, and individual circumstances. Here are some factors that contribute to the overall quality of life for students in Romania.

Romania is generally considered to have a lower cost of living compared to many Western European countries. However, costs can still vary between cities. For example, living in the capital city, Bucharest, might be more expensive than in smaller cities or rural areas.

The availability and cost of accommodation can significantly impact students' quality of life. Many students in Romania live in university dormitories or rent apartments, and the cost can vary depending on the location.

The quality of education and the reputation of universities can affect the overall experience for students. Romania has several well-established universities, but there can be variations in the quality of programs and facilities.

The social environment and cultural scene in Romania can contribute to a positive student experience. Larger cities often offer a more vibrant social life with cultural events, nightlife, and a diverse range of activities.

Job opportunities for students, both part-time and after graduation, are crucial for a good quality of life. Romania's job market and economic conditions can influence the availability of such opportunities.

Access to healthcare services is an essential aspect of quality of life. Romania has a public healthcare system, but students may also have the option to access private healthcare services.

Romania has a rich cultural heritage and offers various recreational activities. Students can explore historical sites, enjoy traditional cuisine, and engage in outdoor activities, contributing to a well-rounded student experience.

The ease of transportation within the country can impact students' mobility. Romania has a network of public transportation, and most of the cities have well-developed public transit systems.

Access to reliable internet and modern technology is crucial for academic success and overall well-being. Urban areas in Romania generally have good internet infrastructure.

It's important to note that individual experiences may vary, and personal preferences play a significant role in how students perceive their quality of life. Additionally, changes in economic conditions, government policies, and other factors can influence the overall student experience over time.

4. Conclusions

Below are the aspects that can be influenced by the quality of life of students:

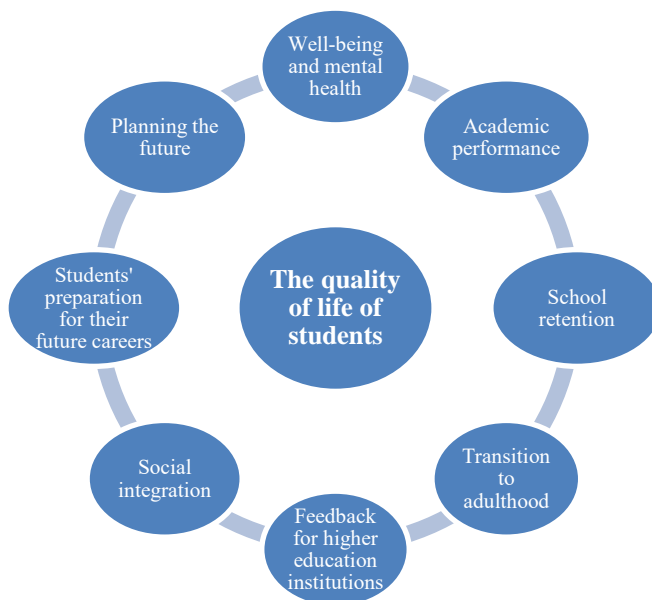


Figure 1. The aspects that can be influenced by the quality of life of students

The life quality of students has a direct impact on well-being and mental health. Positive experiences during the school years can contribute to better mental and emotional well-being, while challenges can lead to stress and anxiety. Student well-being can influence academic performance. A positive and supportive environment can contribute to focus and success in learning. A better quality of student life can contribute to a higher school retention rate. Students who feel engaged and fulfilled in their academic environment are more likely to stay in school and continue their education. The period of higher education often marks the transition from adolescence to adulthood. Studying student quality of life can provide insights into how this transition is managed and how students adjust to the demands of independent living. Research on student quality of life can provide useful feedback to higher education institutions to improve their services and better respond to student needs.

This information may include aspects of accommodation facilities, quality of academic programs, counseling services and social support. The quality of life of students is closely related to their social integration in the academic community and society in general. Students who feel part of a community and have strong social ties tend to have a more positive experience. Experiences during their studies can influence students' preparation for their future careers. A better quality of life for students can help develop the social, emotional and professional skills needed in the world of work. Studying students quality of life can provide information about their plans and expectations for the future. This information can be valuable for planning educational policies and for the professional and personal guidance of students.

In conclusion, understanding and improving the quality of students life is critical to ensure a positive academic experience and prepare students for success in their later personal and professional lives.

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