

PREFERENCES OF BUSINESS STUDENTS IN QUALITY OF TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

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Abstract: Currently there are scarce studies focusing on student preferences as practitioners in adult business education. The aim of this article is to identify and evaluate factors of crucial to meet expectations in adult business education. The data for study were collected among distance university students at a private Czech university. The results are based on a quantitative survey using a questionnaire data collection of 2,265 students. The used indicators are based on students' satisfaction with the education process. Descriptive statistics, two and multi dimensional statistical methods were used to evaluate the quantitative results. The factor analysis was employed to identify responses related to the perception of the educational process. The analysis found three groups of students according to their main preferences – usefulness orientation, business orientation, and output orientation. Half of adult already employed business students have difficulties to adapt to new or different knowledge and skills presented by education process. They may have problems with teachers' authority. The second half of students–practitioners enjoy deepening their knowledge; they closely cooperate during education process, share their ideas and appreciate teaching techniques. Both groups expect education process to be linked with knowledge and skills needed in business. Support of employed students with study materials is necessary; it fulfills their expectations. Furthermore, significant differences in behaviour of male and female students regarding their expectations towards higher business education were found. A limitation of the study is a narrow focus on case study of one private university.

Keywords: Business university; education; perception, student; quality

JEL Classification: I21, I23

INTRODUCTION

Education institutions which focus on education and training of adult already employed students aim mainly to satisfy requests and needs of their stakeholders, primarily students. Therefore most of such institutions take part in different surveys and researches to update their knowledge of current demands (Cancela et al., 2010). The trend of education and training is now focus on globalization, social networks, internet and it is necessary to employ those trend also in education process to meet students' expectations (Windham, 2005). Other important factors are also differentiated requests of employers (Devlin and Samarawickrema, 2010). Those and other factors need to be taken into account while addressing students' satisfaction and thus evaluation and perception of quality of study programs. Student satisfaction are also base for evaluation of quality of education and for formative and summative decisions (Berk, 2005). According to Devlin and Samarawickrema (2010) it is necessary to continuously monitor those attributes, evaluate the results and implement outcomes into further planning and realization of study programs.

Starý and Chvál (2009) define the teaching quality as the desirable (optimal) level of functioning and/or production of teaching process that can be specified with certain requirements (e.g. educational

standards) and thus can be objectively measured and evaluated, which is now also the objective of the new Universities Act of the Czech Republic.

The aim of this paper is to identify and evaluate factors crucial to meet expectations in adult business education. Given the focus of this study, it is convenient to characterize more closely the spheres of the assessment, to which attention will be further paid. These areas are perceived and assessed by students based on their feedback provided on lessons, as further described in methodological section of this paper. The paper is divided into four main parts. Firstly, theoretical background of the study was presented. Next chapter introduces used methods in the study at the selected business university. This chapter is followed by results, discussion of the main outputs and finally, conclusions are drawn from the most important results.

1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

At first, it is important to mention that the actual teaching of a subject may influence motivation of students, their interest in such subject and, also to assess and address future career interest and opportunities (Stark-Wroblewski et al. 2007). One of the important elements of the subject is managing and fulfilling expectations of students. If the reality has fulfilled or even exceeded the expectations, such subject is assessed as more interesting and more enjoyable (Remedios and Lieberman, 2008). Kolitch and Dean (1999) include a curriculum among typical entries of the student assessment, while assessing mainly the correct and suitable inclusion of a subject into the curriculum (Marsh, 1987; Tang et al., 2012). Adequate study materials are also being considered an integral part of the learning activity (Stankevičiene et al., 2007), and therefore their usefulness is being assessed (Mehdzadeh, 1990). One of the most common requirements by students is the combination of theoretical basis of taught subject with practice (Lucas and Milford, 2009) and realization of practical oriented activities (Stankevičiene et al., 2007). A number of students are already working during studies, which leads to better knowledge of labor market opportunities and practical skills, but on the other hand it may lead to a lower quality of theoretical background and knowledge (Mocanu, Zamfir and Pirciog, 2014).

Handal et al. (2011) in their work showed a demand by students for a clear view of a subject, its objectives and requirements presented during the first lecture. Kang (2008) research also identified the importance of quality additional materials. Allaudin and Kifle (2014) emphasized the importance of the adequate way of explaining the subject matter. Also the necessity to adapt the pace of lecture and quantity of provided information relate to the above mentioned factors of perceived quality lessons (Stankevičiene et al., 2007). An important factor is the creation of a learning environment adapted to age, type and level of the lesson and level of previous knowledge of students (Lingard et al., 2001). Proper preparation of the content and structure of the lesson would help a teacher when selecting appropriate materials, technical and other aids (Ižová and Polčáková, 2015). Other attributes of the lesson are closely linked to a personal approach of a teacher and his/her teaching approach, while affecting of mentioned factors is also idiosyncratic. To plan above mentioned attributes of lessons, Panasuk and Todd (2005) suggest to assess the overall system and to choose the best approach and, most importantly, to be able to implement the final new strategy.

Feedback and the awareness of how students perceive their teachers and their style of teaching can provide valuable suggestions for future shaping in teaching the subject as discussed by Mc Dowell (1999), Gibbs and Simpson (2004), Ahmed and Aziz (2009). Teachers are being assessed in various spheres. For example, in the research of Bonfadini (1998), these include personal traits, professional competence, student-teacher relationships and classroom management. It is also possible to assess teachers based on their teaching competencies. For example, Tigelaar et al. (2004) combined these competencies into following groups: the person as teacher, expert on content knowledge, facilitator of learning processes, organizer and scholar/lifelong learner. Student assessments also focus on interpersonal skills of the teacher in the mentioned competencies, i.e. facilitating learning.

Bustos-Orosa (2008) in his study, stated that one of the assessed attributes can be the ability of a teacher to attract attention of students and engage and motivate students, and which leads to the deeper level

of thinking of students (Peck et al., 2006). Of course, sometimes the most efficient teaching-learning methods are not always related to the most satisfied students. Thus, to measure the satisfaction, it is necessary to let students finish the course and assess to determine, where their knowledge and skills increased. Thereafter, they can appreciate the advantages of the deeper focus and engagement during lessons. Buck (2008) also points out that students usually have different motivation to achieve their goals (intrinsic or extrinsic) and different expectations on teachers with quite differentiated characteristics, approaches and different learning outcomes.

In view of the above-mentioned intentions and objectives, students should be given and learnt appropriate competences during their studies. The performance of individuals, especially in their working lives, is very closely related to the acquisition of competencies, skills and abilities (Mocanu, Zamfir and Pirciog, 2014).

2. METHODOLOGY

This paper was prepared utilizing a quantitative survey, analysis of secondary and primary resources and knowledge synthesis. As regards secondary resources, scientific monographs and articles dealing with the topic were analysed to identify factors. Additionally, materials and methods of the higher education quality management were searched and reviewed (i.e. accreditation standards and TQM in higher education area in Europe and USA, such as ESG, EQAR, ACBSP, AACBS, IACBE, ATHEA and others). Websites of the mentioned higher education institutions that actively deal with the analysed issue were also used. In order to cover all relevant studies, a variety of keywords for education, quality, learning, management, development and similar other ones were used. The research is descriptive and empirical in its nature because the primary data were collected using the survey method through the fact-finding techniques such as questionnaires and interviews.

The data for the evaluation of current level of education and learning at a Czech private university were collected in a primary quantitative survey by means of the questionnaire investigation. The survey was conducted by trained student and academic staff volunteers. The student data comprised a total of 2,265 students and 168 teachers in academic year 2016/2017. The evaluated subjects contained the areas of business economics, economics, management, marketing and human resource management. Only students who passed the entire education and the evaluation process of the mentioned selected areas took part in the survey. The data were collected using CAPI (computer assisted paper interviewing) and CAWI (computer assisted web interviewing) and subsequently processed using a statistical software. The sampled population included students who are matriculated as both part-time or distance students. Part-time study is a specific form of study, where students are currently working at full time jobs while studying. All part-time students are already employed and thus their lessons, courses, exams, and other study duties are only on weekends. That makes it possible for them to work regularly during working days and study on weekends without interrupting their careers. When applying for part-time study, all students declare to their employers that they will be supported during their studies. Therefore, the study programs are modified for them to be reachable during weekend days, holidays, and evenings. Part-time students are mostly are highly interested and motivated to study and thus, they are able to connect their knowledge from job positions with theory and lessons at the university.

This paper evaluates both formative and summative internal quality evaluation of education process at the selected university. Formative evaluation was used to evaluate quality of daily lectures and teaching-learning process. Summative evaluation was then analysed in total concept of study programs and reaching of stated goals, strategy and policies of university in the long term and towards stakeholders. The purpose of evaluation is to continuously control and upgrade quality of teaching-learning process and all supporting processes together with continuous upgrade of the study plans and programs in accordance with the market (employers) and stakeholders (i.e. students) demands. The evaluation aims to reveal level of internal management of education quality and active participation of students based on students' perceptions in the studied period. The reliability of the study is supported by multiple assessment of each attribute.

The extremes of the five-point scale represented bipolar concepts of the evaluation dimension. All the questions were measured in a Likert type scale with verbal anchors in 1 (strongly agree) and 5 (strongly disagree) or, provided it was not possible to favour either of the sides, a median, neutral value could be selected (the median value was characterized by number 3). The scale permitted not only specification of respondents' attitudes, but also specification of their intensity.

Part of the querying process was also qualitative research using the tool of focus groups. A total of five focus groups were created. Three groups included bachelor students, one group included master students and one focus group included teachers. All focus groups were designed to extend and clarify the questions and answers of the paper questionnaires. The focus areas were overall level of quality of lessons, subjects, and teachers and also the overall evaluation of the education process and evaluation of management, university administration and of the educational process. The focus groups were designed separately for each study year separately for bachelors, masters and MBAs. The aim was to evaluate their opinions and perceptions on study processes and university as whole, in interaction between members of the same study year students. The group think and impulses were searched to find missing information. The students interacted among each other during the focus groups and could share experiences from their studies which did in fact add to the whole picture of paper questioning.

Participants of focus groups could express their opinion on usefulness of their study and their initial expectations compared to perception of the passing academic year. Each focus group discussion lasted 120 minutes and had four to nine participants (students or teachers). One moderator of discussion was always present to make sure all the focus group questions would be comparable. Two other observers were present in each focus group. Observers took notes and also recorded the process on an audio recorder. Also, a psychologist was present and supervised all five focus groups to make sure that the moderator does not force the group in a desired direction, and that all participants were free to state their mind. Notes and recorded interviews were subsequently rewritten, analysed and used to support the explanation of the quantitative data and results.

The analysis was used to classify the analysed competencies, when there were a number of variants of answers per question. The studied variants of perceived lessons, subjects and teachers were evaluated to replace them by fewer variables which summarize the knowledge about primary attributes gained from the data. Because the number of studied variables was quite high, and because it was difficult to present them as they were in its wideness too broad to be understandable, and the fact that no decisions could be made with such a broad information sheet, it was decided to use analyses which keep the original information and combines variables pointing the same issue without losing the detail. For this purpose, analysis of principal component, cluster analysis and factor analysis were made. Finally, factor analysis was selected to presentation, as it has the deepest view into the variables comparing all of them using rotation.

The level of correlation coefficients were sufficient according to Anderson (2009) and Hendl (2006). Moreover, 86.93% of correlations in the correlation table were statistically significant. The KMO (Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test) value reached over 0.8 which is considered as meritorious and thus adequate for factor analysis.

The number of monitored variables (factors) was reduced using the Varimax method. For the selection of substantial factors the Kaiser-Guttman rule was applied (i.e. substantial factors having a value within the range higher than 1) and subsequently Sutin test was applied. The correlation coefficients are in the interval from $<-1;1>$. If the correlation coefficient is positive, it is a direct proportion (negative – indirect proportion). For the evaluation, the value of variable correlation higher than 0.3 (moderate correlation) according to Anderson (2009) was used.

Newly designed factors should simplify the total results of the questioning. The factors explain variability and dependence of the considered variables. The factor analysis is used to create factors which summarize the use of competencies into coherent groups. The factor analysis was used based on statistically significant correlations.

It is a subjective method and the results depend on a researcher. Overall, the whole process of teaching-learning and education may be classified as subjective. It is necessary, of course, to pay attention to the basic data which shows the original objective results. This study was created in this manner. The resultant data from the analysis were compared to the reactions of respondents to minimize distortion. As statistics or statistical software may group variables which seem similar, there still may be mistakes in groupings. Therefore, all results were manually controlled to make sure the internal consistence of all factors is high and all variables which form each factor are valid and coherent. These prerequisites preceded the design and calculation of results of this study. The results respect the above mentioned facts to design and interpret coherent factors which may help with further evaluation and assessment of education process and its set up for future design of study programs and process management of university. The factors are constructed based on their content and relations between similar students' responses and their simultaneous use.

3. RESULTS

The perception of the groups of students and their responses to the set questions have been described. The analysis revealed three significant factors related to students' perception of quality in education. The analysis was conducted to group responses of students regarding their perception of their development. The goal was to find groups of variables with significant appearance at the same time to reveal main orientation of groups of participants. The analysis groups extreme and internally similar opinions expressed by students together and form coherent groups, which are internally consistent: (the group of students identified by the factor analysis behaves and perceives teaching process in the described manner and is very consistent in its perception; that means the whole factor describes unified and consistent group of students with very similar perception and behaviour). On the other hand each factor is very different from each other as factors group different opinion and perception of the sample. The analysis is therefore quite useful to identify differentiated groups within the searched population. Based on revealed factors it is possible to take strategic position towards each of significant group and its demands, expectations, and behaviour.

The identified groups (factors) are playing significant or dominant role in the whole sample of students. The analysis is able to capture similar responses towards different areas through the whole sample. It is of course not possible to describe all single behaviour of each student as they may differ in many ways. Yet, the analysis find and confirm significant similarities of a high number of students in the sample. The three revealed factors can describe and characterize 50% of the sample. That means we can address 50% of student desires by only three policies. That is a useful result, because everyone is different with different expectations, wishes, learning attitudes, needs, approaches to education etc., and it is impossible to satisfy all of them at the same time. The other 50% of the sample could not be described so simple in order to form coherent factor. There are too many different attitudes in the rest of the sample of students, which is normal.

The factor analysis was used to describe similarities in students' perception of education. Responses of students describing their perception establish the key areas which are in students' focus. The identified groups may help with establishment of suitable conditions during lessons by teachers and school environment.

The analysis on students' evaluation revealed three homogenous groups of students who search for specifics in education process (see Table 1). The entire research sample consists of other approaches to education process. The identification of these three above mentioned factors/groups may help with design of study program in the way of focusing on practice, addressing the needs and preferred teaching techniques by students and teachers, especially when the students are already experienced in business practice. In that case, based on results of focus groups, it is important to determine the expectations of both students and teachers. Additionally, it is important is to specify the requirements on exams for students who do not link the taught subject to its practical implications.

Interestingly, the negative perception within the searched group is minimal, based on the results, average evaluation of lessons is 1.58; modus and median are 1 (on five-point scale where 1 is the best and 5 is the worst). Therefore, it is possible to state that respondents are satisfied with the basic approach of teachers and scope of lessons. But, to get more information about preferences of students deeper analyses were used, i.e. correlation and factor analyses.

First a correlation analysis was conducted. Given that a sufficient quantity and quality of correlation coefficients was found in the correlation table, a subsequent analysis was conducted - factor analysis. Correlation matrix was not added in the text, as it has more than 700 cells and it could not fit in the paper body. The level of correlation coefficients were sufficient according to Anderson (2009) and Hendl (2006). Correlations in the correlation table were statistically significant.

According to the evaluation of the calculated data, a total of 5 significant factors were identified following the evaluation of the survey. Two of them only slightly exceeded the value of 1.0 and for this reason it had been eliminated from further assessment. In total, therefore, there were identified 3 significant factors that meet the criteria according to this methodology: Usefulness, Business, and Conditions (see the Table 1). To make calculations of the factor analysis, the final table was adjusted to leave out variables that were repeated in the factors and did not form a unique factor composition. In addition, variables that hardly reached the required minimum values in order to be included in factors were omitted.

Analysis grouped variables into factors in the composition shown in the Table 1 below. Significant dependencies are in bold. Factors are constructed based on their content and relationships to similar variable and their simultaneous use.

Tab. 1: The factor analysis of variables

	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Sex (women=1)	.089	-.198	-.678
Work in the studied area	.094	.859	.050
Plan to work in the studied area	.126	.841	-.046
Demand on exam are adequate	.166	-.089	.413
Filled expectations	.744	.027	.108
Difficulty	-.013	-.054	.631
Useful	.741	.124	-.015
Related to practice	.639	.235	-.064
Study materials are accessible	.450	-.114	.104
Adequately placed in study plan	.654	.119	-.022
% of variance	21.997	15.940	10.603
Factor name	Usefulness	Business	Conditions

Source: Authors' processing

The first factor in Table 1 is formed by variables that summarize students who evaluate subjects and teaching process as satisfactory, when it is usable in practice and connected to the course of program and its content. The Factor is formed of 5 initial statements regarding quality (marked in bold in the column of Factor 1). This group of students evaluate areas of quality lessons, subjects and teachers when it fills their expectations (variable loading 0.744), it is useful (0.741), it is related to practice (0.639), study materials are accessible (0.450) and course is adequately placed in study plan (0.654). This group is not specified by gender of job position. Students grouped by Factor 1 perceive subjects as beneficial and filling their expectations, on the other hand, this group of students does not care for demands for exams. They are interested in learning process, quality of education rather than formal control. Additionally, they do not care about difficulty, the most important is for them usefulness of a course. They focus on the content of each subject or course. Therefore, this group formed by Factor 1 can be named Usefulness receptionists. It is positive to reveal that this group is rather large; the factor explains almost over 21% of behavior of students. It is very pleasant to work with this group and teach in such classes. They also positively evaluate quality of a study program and the benefits brought to them by education.

The second factor groups together students who already work (variable loading 0.859) or plan to work (0.841) in the studied subject area. The factor shows that those students are a specific group with a specific behaviour. The factor analysis did not show enough details to see, what the specifics are, but the closer analysis of the data shows the group (identified by the factor analysis as 15.9% of the sample of students) is divided into two solid parts of almost the same size. The first part is focused on their business practices and finds hard to adapt to the new or different ways of thought subject content. Sometimes, they even have a problem with teachers' authority, as they perceive themselves as experts. The other part of the Factor 2 is completely opposite to the first part. Those practitioners enjoy deepening their practical knowledge and support their own theories. They closely cooperate with the lecturer and share their ideas. Additionally, they deeply appreciate new ways of teaching techniques and possibilities. The second factor may be named Business oriented. As described, it is a factor divided into two parts. Both parts must be closely attended. The focus should be paid to the identification of their focus to address their preferred teaching techniques to reach expected synergy and sharing ideas between a teacher and students.

The third factor shows a connection with male students. They have special demands on studies, e.g. demands and content of subjects, courses and exams (0.413) and its difficulty (0.631). Totally 10.6% of students behave this way. As the sample contained 40% of males, that means a significant part of female respondents that behave in this manner. They are oriented on the support by study materials. This group probably do not place presence at the lectures and contact learning at the first place. On the contrary, they mostly self-study, and thus demands on exams are the most important thing for them. Therefore it is possible to name this factor Conditions. It is necessary to count also with this type of students within the design of the educational process. This group includes students oriented more on technical arrangements of the education rather than its content. They search for a link between the content of a subject and its fit to the exam requirements.

4. DISCUSSION

Out of the results it is possible to conclude that business workers or students already employed in business sector form a specific coherent group. It is necessary to address their expectations and tailor education and training to the expectations of the whole group of students present at the time. To work with this group of students, it is necessary to connect theory with case studies and demonstration of new knowledge and theoretical metrics or classification. Identified factors help to establish appropriate teaching-learning process to encourage students to be active in their university learning and development. It is possible to summarize that all searched areas, lessons, subjects and teachers, are closely connected, and it is not possible to manage one without another. The analyses found factors which are significant and important for all analysed areas. Those two factors are (1) completely satisfied students with all variables related to the searched area, and (2) the specific group of already employed students in business, which has specific demands on connection of theory and practice and (3) demand to learn how the new thoughts are broadening their job requirements. Other than that, attention should be paid, according to the resultant factors to the subject demands such as study materials, clear connection between content of the subject and demands for exams, and learning outcomes (desired knowledge, skills and other results). Focus on these areas may improve not only student perception of the educational process, but the process itself.

Consistent with the works of researches of Stimac and Katic (2015), Helmke (2006) or Neuhaus (2007), we can summarize that the objective of ensuring a quality of adult education is to create the culture of continuous organizational and professional self-development and self-regulation that would ensure improvement of services in the sphere of tertiary education and will conform to the needs of global knowledge economy as well as learning society.

It is possible to summarize that adequate lecturers including professional teaching-learning process, and business workers industry-experiences among the staff are the key to successful and satisfactory

education program. Students put heavy emphasis on teaching carried out by competent lecturers being also practitioners working in the given or related branch they teach. Thus that there is more likely a transfer of knowledge from practice that would help students to further develop at the labour market.

As found in the presented study, the goals of students and levels of their engagement differs, as stated by Pintrich (2003). Students are mostly outcome-oriented, but each of them prefers different outcome. It is either knowledge or skills. Anyway, the reasons for both groups why to continue their studies is to increase their employability, as previously mentioned by Glover, Law and Youngman (2002) or Wharton, Goodwin and Cameron (2014). We may agree with Fryer et al. (2016) that the most important benefits of higher education perceived by students is the vision of a future wealth and security, gaining further knowledge and experience, or the acquisition of a university degree. Furthermore, according to Merriam and Brockett (2007), surveyed students are mostly Learning-oriented (most important for them are gained knowledge, skills or abilities). It is also possible to agree with Sheldon and Elliot (1999) that self-concordance of goals regarding study and applicability of results is very important for students and leads to greater efforts to achieve these goals.

We may summarize that students should be taught appropriate competences during their studies. The overall performance of graduates is dependant on the acquisition of competencies, skills and abilities during their studies. These results are in accordance with outputs of Mocanu, Zamfir and Pirciog (2014).

CONCLUSION

In current adult education and training it is necessary to focus on preferences of practitioners as students. Therefore, this study identified and evaluated factors of crucial to meet expectations in adult business education. The analysis found groups of variables with significant appearance within the groups of part-time and distance students, who are already employed or working to reveal their main orientation and preferences. Three statistically significant factors were found: (1) students oriented on usefulness of education, (2) business orientated students and (3) output orientated students.

The factor oriented on business shows that those students are a specific group with coherent behaviour going two ways. The first half focus mainly on their own business practices, and they find it difficult to be able to adapt themselves to the new or different knowledge and skills presented by education process. Sometimes, they even have a problem with teachers' authority, perceiving themselves as experts. The second half of students are completely opposite. Those practitioners enjoy deepening their practical knowledge and support their own theories, closely cooperate during education process, share their ideas and deeply appreciate new ways of teaching techniques and possibilities.

The group students who are oriented on practical use of gained knowledge and skills perceive study plan and program design highly positively and are focused on its quality. This group specifically focus on the connection of the subject content with practice and its application for their job positions. The education process fill their expectations when it is linked with knowledge and skills needed in business.

The factor which revealed orientation on demands and conditions showed connection with male students. They search for perceived or actual difficulty of the subject/program and for learning skills necessary for passing successfully and a link between the content and its fit to their expectations regarding the exam requirements. This group is oriented mainly on outputs, not in the process.

The analysis revealed a group which is not oriented on future application of their skills and knowledge in job, but rather to meet the exam criteria. This result is curious because in deeper consideration of the data the female group behave completely different. The female group more often searches practical application of their knowledge than male. They seem to be more oriented on their career rather than current education program requirements. Despite the fact that this result does not describe the full male or female group.

Orientation on usefulness of the study programs is therefore crucial. The identification of these three above mentioned factors/groups may help with design of study program in the way of focusing on practice,

addressing the needs and preferred teaching techniques by students and lecturers, especially when the students are already experienced in business practice. In that case, it is important to determine the expectations of both students and teachers. Additionally, it is important to specify the requirements on exams for students who do not link the taught subject to its practical implications. The results may help to set up expected business program realized specifically for adults and already employed students focusing both on key expectations of business students and stakeholders and achieving specific student learning outcomes desired by current labour market.

The theoretical contribution of the article lies in general identification and evaluation of the factors of the students preferences in higher education. The practical contribution of this article lies in presenting concrete results from students' and academicians' evaluating the educational process at a private university. The results are important for ensuring of academic staff and preparation of the teaching process according to the students' perceptions. Besides this study there are several promising directions for further research. It would be useful to include the influence of the students' results at the particular exams and their subsequent success searching for a job in the labour market.

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