Adéla Fajčíková [1]

Hana Urbancová

CAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS ADAPT TO STUDENTS´ PREFERENCES? A CASE STUDY AT THE CZECH STATE UNIVERSITY

Abstract: Higher education institutions and their activities belong to the service sector, and it is therefore even more important to use marketing tools in the current competitive environment to meet the demands and needs of current and potential students. The article aims to identify students´ reasons to study at a university and to evaluate students´ preferences according to the demands placed on higher education institutions. The data were obtained using the questionnaire technique (n = 293) and evaluated by descriptive (χ2 test; absolute and relative frequencies) and multivariate statistics (factor analysis). The results have shown that there is a statistical dependence between gender, age and reasons for studying at the university and the reasons can be categorised into personal preferences versus environment preferences. Case study findings can help higher education institutions to adapt their marketing activities to attract potential students as well as to retain the existing ones and to better understand their customers´ needs.

Keywords: College/university choice, External personnel marketing, Higher education, Public university, Students´ preferences, the Czech Republic

1. Introduction

At present, higher education institutions are facing significant changes due to the massive increase in the number and diversity of educational service providers, which intensifies the competitive environment in the education market (Chui et al., 2016; Khosravi et al., 2013). Thanks to advances in technology and globalization students are gaining easier and faster access to the necessary information and, in addition to that, the increasing pressure to adapt the educational process to the new generation cannot be omitted, for the educational tools of this generation are significantly more diverse than they were in the past (Orîndaru, 2015;

Harsasi & Sutawijaya, 2018). Access to information, the possibility of comparisons, references and other things are the reasons leading to the different preferences of students when choosing a university (Leeuwenkamp et al., 2017; Prisacariu, 2015). In connection with the increasing competitive environment, Guilbauldt (2018) highlights the need for the higher education institutions for market orientation and implementation of marketing concepts as is the case in other sectors. University students must be viewed as customers, and higher education institutions must create successful customer relationship management strategies to be able to attract and retain their students (Negricea et al., 2014).

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[1] Corresponding author: Adéla Fajčíková
Email: fajcikova@pef.czu.cz

Higher education institutions can be competitive and provide better services or improve the existing ones only if they are continuously engaged in identifying students´ needs, preferences, and learning about the factors that affect their satisfaction (Prisacariu, 2015). To attract university students (customers), it is not enough to identify such students´ preferences when choosing a university, but universities must be able to react and adapt to their preferences (Foroudi et al., 2019; El-Hilali et al., 2015). It can be concluded that there is a growing pressure on university management to deal with and evaluate students´ preferences when they choose a university and to implement such findings in their strategic documents and personnel marketing. The article, therefore, aims to identify students´ reasons for choosing a university and to evaluate students´ preferences according to the demands placed on higher education institutions. The partial aims are to test the power of dependence between the selected qualitative characteristics (statistical dependence between the prevailing reasons of students to study at the university and the selected identification variables of respondents; statistical dependence between the fact what criteria students regard as crucial when choosing a university and the selected identification variables). Based on the defined partial aims, the null hypotheses are formulated in the Materials and Methods section. Introduction and Theoretical Background deal with the theoretical bases including the comparison of authors´ views on the issues. Material and Methods describe the methodical procedure used when processing the article. Results focus on the evaluation of research findings. Discussion and Conclusion then summarise the findings and recommend solutions.

2. Theoretical Background

Research studies highlight that education is a market service, and thus it is necessary to monitor not only students´ preferences but also the quality of the educational system as such (Kwek et al., 2010) as well as trends in education and use of modern technologies (Sarabdee, 2013; Borges & Stiubiener, 2015; Stefanovic et al., 2015). Hoang et al. (2016), El-Hilali et al. (2015) and Chui et al. (2016) agree that the quality of educational services is most often measured by five dimensions - tangibles, empathy, assurance, reliability and responsiveness. However, El-Hilali et al. (2015) point out that in educational services it is not possible to assess the level of services adequately before its use, and therefore, in addition to the quality of services (teaching), tangibles (material factors) play a major role in university/college choice (Hill & Epps, 2010). According to Ming (2010), the most important factors influencing the college choice is the accessibility of the institution, its offer of study programmes, its reputation and image, facilities and the background of the university, its affordability and possibility to obtain financial support and, last but not least, the fact how its graduates find employment in the future. There are far more ways to attract new students and to promote the educational institution. For example, it can focus on the scope of its cooperation with companies, on the possibility to combine work and study, on doing internships abroad, on excellent tutors from the ranks of academics, professionals and suchlike.

The demographic curve has been showing a negative development in the EU for several years, and the numbers of students have been declining in the long term, while the competition among universities has been growing, which is confirmed by Chui et al. (2016) and Khosravi et al. (2013). Therefore, it is now necessary for universities to be able to present their qualities well to the public to gain potential students. In conjunction with that, the importance of external personnel marketing, which includes individual targeted steps of the recruitment process of students, has still been growing. Every higher education institution should define a plan of its activities to build and promote its good reputation, to establish relationships with

prospective, present and future students and graduates of higher education institutions, to communicate clear and comprehensible information, thereby creating good communication with its interest groups (Deprez-Sims & Morris, 2010; Cocchiara et al., 2016).

External personnel marketing can be used in all economic fields. In the case of higher education it primarily focuses on areas such as discovering prospective students (secondary and grammar schools), using a range of Public Relations tools to strengthen the employer brand as the high-quality educational institution and also evaluating the effectiveness of applied processes which are dealt with in the research of, for example, Deprez-Sims and Morris (2010). It is necessary to establish appropriate communication between the two parties, which aims to inform the potential students about educational opportunities at the particular higher education institution and it's study programme that satisfies their needs better than competing institutions.

Kwek et al. (2010) state that students´ satisfaction, the positive perception of the higher education institution and good references belong to the significant factors when evaluating the quality of education provided by the higher education institution and they can influence the decision of a potential student to apply for the study.

Given the facts above, it can be summarised that higher education institutions are in a competitive environment as well as other organisations. Only those that provide high-quality education to their students and a constructive environment for their personal development and can adapt to the coming changes can succeed in such an environment (Butt & Rehman, 2010). Higher education institutions must realise that if they want to survive, develop and prosper in a competitive environment, they must constantly try to provide a better product, i.e. the quality of the educational process and services of the higher education institution, which is evidenced by

the research of Lomas (2004). Furthermore, Todorut and Bojincă (2013) add that higher education institutions must extend their existing, often rigid, structures and requirements and support the development of completely new structures that will reflect the current demands of prospective, current and future students too. According to Aly and Akpovi (2001) and Kluse (2009), this direction can be accomplished by various quality standards.

3. Materials and Methods

Primary data were obtained by implementing quantitative research through the online questionnaire survey among university students. All first-year students of the full-time bachelor´s degree programme at the Faculty of Economics and Management, Czech University of Life Sciences Prague (hereafter FEM CULS Prague) who started studying at the University in the academic year of 2017/2018 were approached to complete it (N = 1423). The students were invited to participate in the research by email in 11/2017, followed by a subsequent invitation to participate after 14 days. In total 293 students participated in the questionnaire survey (response rate = 20.6%). The questionnaire respected the ethical point of view and anonymity of the respondents.

Based on the literature study the survey questions have been compiled, focusing on the students´ reasons for making the decision why to continue studying at a university and on the factors that affect submitting their applications for studying at a specific university. In total, 8 main reasons for studying at the university have been identified, namely as follows: extending student life, education expectations from the family, friends or colleagues, gaining a good social status, possibility of earning more money in the future, desire to continue studying, obtaining a university degree, possibility of getting a dream job and better career growth prospects. Furthermore, 8 criteria influencing the choice of the specific

university have been determined: finding a good job after graduation, quality of teaching, financial demands of study, chances of successful graduation, flexibility of education according to individual needs, accessibility of education, possibility of studying in a foreign language and abroad, specialization of the university. The identified reasons have resulted from the examined studies within the theoretical background.

Ten questions in total were asked in the questionnaire survey, 3 of which were identification (gender, age category, type of completed secondary school). In the case of identification questions, the respondents were asked to choose one of the options, and they expressed the degree of their agreement with the individual statements on the five-degree Likert scale (certainly yes, yes, neutral, rather not and certainly not). The results can be generalised to a sample of respondents.

Basic information on the sample of respondents:

- **Gender:** female (174, 59.4%), male (119, 40.6%)
- **Age category:** 18-20 (206, 70.3%), 21-23 (64, 21.8%), over 24 (23, 7.8%).
- **Type of completed secondary school:** secondary vocational/trade school (102, 34.8%), grammar school/lycée (90, 30.7%), business academy (101, 34.5%).

The following two null hypotheses were formulated and tested in the research to answer the survey questions mentioned above:

- **H01:** There is no statistical dependence between the prevailing reasons for students to study at the university and the selected identification variables of respondents.
- **H02:** There is no statistical dependence between the facts what criteria students regard as crucial when choosing a university and the selected identification variables.

The article has also been focused on finding the fact whether the selected identification variables influence the respondents´ preferences when choosing a university, and if it has been that case, then the links between their answers and explanation of such differences have further been sought. The identification variables included the respondent´s gender, age category and type of finished secondary school in both null hypotheses. Statistical tools such as tests of dependence ($\chi 2$ test) and strength of dependence (Cramer´s V) were applied to analyse the results. If the calculated p-value was below the significance threshold $\alpha = 0.05$, the null hypothesis was rejected. The strength of the correlation was determined using Cramer´s V and interpreted by the categories described by De Vaus (2014) as follows: 0.10–0.29 (weak to moderate), 0.30–0.49 (moderate to substantial) and 0.50–0.69 (substantial to very strong). Respondents´ answers were grouped into three levels (yes, neutral and no) to test dependencies. Once the results of descriptive statistics were obtained, the factor analysis (multivariate statistics) was then performed according to the recommendation of Anderson (2009). Thanks to this method, the number of explanatory variables has been reduced and the common factors, explaining the behaviour of groups of university students that have chosen university education and a particular college/university, have been identified. The Varimax method and the Kaiser-Guttman rule were used to select significant factors in the factor analysis (after the correlation analysis and principal component analysis). Data were processed only when the value of significant factors was greater than 1 and as significant values were considered those exceeding 0.3. IBM SPSS Statistics software was used to evaluate the results.

4. Results

According to the survey results, the three main reasons for university studies are as follows: the possibility of earning more

money in the future (88.7%), better career prospects (86.7%) and obtaining a university degree (85.7%). However, the results have shown that there is a statistical dependence (correlation) between individual reasons for university studies and the respondent´s gender and age (Table 1). On the other hand, the survey has not proved the statistical

dependence between these reasons and the type of completed secondary school (p-value 0.151-0.951). Therefore, H01, the first null hypothesis, has been rejected because the selected identification variables of respondents influence the reason for starting their university studies

Table 1. Reasons for studying at the university (Source: own survey)

	Absolute frequencies*	Relative frequencies*	Dependence on gender (p-value/Cramer's V)	Dependence on age (p-value/Cramer's V)
extending student life	179	61.1	NO (0.183/-)	**YES (0.000/0.242)**
education expectations from the family, friends or colleagues	194	66.2	**YES (0.002/0.203)**	**YES (0.000/0.217)**
gaining a good social status	229	78.2	NO (0.236/-)	**YES (0.002/0.170)**
the possibility of earning more money in the future	260	88.7	**YES (0.001/0.216)**	**YES (0.020/0.141)**
desire to continue studying	210	71.7	NO (0.064/-)	NO (0.094/-)
obtaining a university degree	251	85.7	NO (0.121/-)	**YES (0.000/0.188)**
the possibility of getting a dream job	184	62.8	**YES (0.008/0.182)**	NO (0.099/-)
better career growth prospects	254	86.7	**YES (0.016/0.168)**	NO (0.131/-)

* combining answers of rather yes with certainly yes

A weak dependence has been found between gender and the following statements: the possibility to earn more money in the future ($p = 0.001$; $V = 0.216$), the possibility to get a dream job ($p = 0.008$; $V = 0.182$) and better prospects of career advancement ($p = 0.016$; $V = 0.168$). It can be concluded that women usually rather or fully agree with these reasons. Most men also consider these reasons to be very important, but a substantial proportion of the respondents rather or completely disagrees with the statements. Majority of the interviewed women (66.7%) and men (65.5%) have answered that their family, friends or colleagues expect their university studies. In the context of this question, however, a weak dependence ($p =$

0.002; $V = 0.203$) has been found, as 19 % of women rather or completely disagree with this statement, while only 7.6% of men disagree. These results can be interpreted in the context of the present perception of our society when men in their jobs earn more money on average, and women, unlike men, are disadvantaged, and further discrimination can be seen in the perception of our society that men are those who make a career and should sustain their family, while women are expected to care for their family. Therefore, it can be concluded that women try to gain their competitive advantage by studying at the university.

The highest statistical dependence has been found between the respondents´ age and their

reason for university studies, which is to extend their student life. While 67% of respondents aged 18 to 20 agree with the statement, only 13% of respondents aged over 24 agree with it. A dependence on the age of respondents has further been demonstrated in the following statements: my environment expects me to get a good social status, the possibility of earning more money in the future and obtaining a university degree. In the case of all these reasons, their importance significantly decreases with the growing age

of respondents. On the contrary, students aged over 24 have stated that the three most important reasons for their university studies are the possibility of earning more money (78.3%), career growth prospects (82.6%) and also their desire to continue studying (73.9%).

The predominant reasons leading to the decision to study at a university have further been subjected to the factor analysis, the results of which are presented in Table 2 and 3.

Table 2. Variance explained by factors - reasons for university studies (Source: own survey)

Factor	Total Variance	Total % of Variance	Cumulative % of Variance
1	3.129	39.111	39.111
2	1.486	18.572	57.683

Note: Data were processed only if the value of significant factors was greater than 1 (see Materials and Methods)

Two significant factors combining the analysed variables resulted from the factor analysis. The strength of the first factor is about 39% and of the second one about 18.5%. The first factor can be considered

crucial in the context of students´ preferences, i.e. the reason for university studies. Detailed results of the factor analysis are shown in Table 3.

Table 3. Resultant factors by the Varimax method - reasons for university studies (Source: own survey)

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
extending student life	0.081	**0.667**
education expectations from the family, friends or colleagues	0.102	**0.803**
gaining a good social status	**0.729**	0.268
the possibility of earning more money in the future	**0.813**	0.078
desire to continue studying	**0.424**	-0.462
obtaining a university degree	**0.649**	0.212
the possibility of getting a dream job	**0.792**	-0.197
better career growth prospects	**0.831**	-0.149
Total % of Variance	**39.111**	**18.572**
Name of factor	**Personal preferences**	**Preferences of Environment**

The results have shown that the first group of students who decided to study at the university prefers high-quality education when choosing a university because they emphasize gaining a good social status (0.729) with the associated possibility of earning more money in the future (0.813), better career growth prospects (0.831) and the

possibility of getting a dream job (0.792), namely thanks to a university degree (0.649). However, it is necessary to realise that those above cannot be obtained without the person´s desire to further educate themselves and to develop their knowledge and skills (0.424). The first factor, which primarily brings together personal aspirations, may be

A. Fajčíková, H. Urbancová

called "Personal preferences". On the other hand, the second factor brings together the requirements of the environment, i.e. extending one´s student life (0.667) and education expectations from the family, friends or colleagues (0.803). All found variables have a strong influence on decision-making because the values of variables range from 0.424 to 0.831, which infers a strong dependence.

It can be concluded from the results that the positive personal approach to education and the person´s willingness to continuously develop themselves, which is and will always be a priority in the future if one wants to achieve their goals, still prevail in the current students´ motivation for university studies. Only to a lesser extent, future university students are influenced by environmental pressures.

The results have also shown that students consider the demanding character of teaching/chances for successful completion of their studies (78.5%), finding good employment after graduation (68.9%) and the quality of teaching (65.2%) to be the most important criteria when choosing a university. On the other hand, only a quarter of respondents (26.3%) finds the possibility of studying in a foreign language or studying abroad to be important criteria. The second null hypothesis has also been rejected because the results confirmed that the students´ preferences depend on the gender and age of respondents. As in the previous case, the statistical dependence between the criteria for the college/university choice and the type of completed secondary school has not been proved (p-value 0.093-0.978). The results of dependence testing are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Criteria for the university/college choice

	Absolute frequencies*	Relative frequencies*	Dependence on gender (p-value/Cramer's V)	Dependence on age (p-value/Cramer's V)
finding a good job after graduation	202	68.9	**YES (0.001/0.224)**	NO (0.134/-)
quality of teaching	191	65.2	**YES (0.016/0.168)**	NO (0.445/-)
financial demands of study	181	61.8	**YES (0.009/0.180)**	NO (0.150/-)
chances of successful graduation	230	78.5	NO (0.544/-)	**YES (0.011/0.149)**
the flexibility of education according to individual needs	180	61.4	NO (0.925/-)	NO (0.132/-)
accessibility of education	124	42.3	NO (0.132/-)	NO (0.526/-)
the possibility of studying in a foreign language and abroad	77	26.3	**YES (0.040/0.148)**	**YES (0.000/0.193)**
specialization of the university	172	58.7	**YES (0.026/0.158)**	**YES (0.027/0.137)**

combining answers of rather yes with certainly yes

All the criteria for which the statistical dependence was found have been considered more crucial by women than men. On average, one-fifth of men rather or completely disagree with these criteria; in the case of the possibility to study in a foreign language/abroad, it is even 44.5%. A statistically significant dependence has also

been proved between this criterion and the age of respondents. While 35% of respondents aged 18-20 and 39.1% of respondents aged 21-23 do not consider it important, in the case of respondents over 24 it is 78.3%. As the age increases, the importance of the demanding character of teaching (chances of successful graduation)

as well as the specialisation of the university also significantly decreases.

The factor analysis was conducted to obtain more detailed data concerning the key criteria for the college/university choice (see Tables 5 and 6).

Table 5. Variance explained by factors - criteria for college/university choice (Source: own survey)

Factor	Total Variance	Total % of Variance	Cumulative % of Variance
1	2.635	32.940	32.940
2	1.493	18.661	51.600

Note: Data were processed only if the value of significant factors was greater than 1 (see Materials and Methods)

Two significant factors combining the analysed variables resulted from the factor analysis — the first factor weights about 33%, the second one of about 19%. The first factor

can be considered crucial in the perception of criteria that are important to students when choosing a university. Detailed results of the factor analysis are presented in Table 6.

Table 6. Resultant factors by the Varimax method - criteria for college/university choice (Source: own survey)

Variable	Factor 1	Factor 2
finding a good job after graduation	**0.820**	0.044
quality of teaching	**0.767**	0.196
financial demands of study	0.256	**0.650**
chances of successful graduation	-0.140	**0.774**
the flexibility of education according to individual needs	0.061	**0.723**
accessibility of education	0.343	**0.519**
the possibility of studying in a foreign language and abroad	**0.512**	0.090
the specialisation of the university	**0.732**	0.029
Total % of Variance	**32.940**	**18.661**
Name of factor	**Qualitative aspect of evaluation**	**Quantitative aspect of evaluation**

The results have shown that the first group of students decides which university to study at in the following order: finding a good job after graduation (0.820), the quality of teaching (0.767), the specialisation of the university as such (0.732) and the possibility of studying in a foreign language and abroad (0.512). The first factor, which primarily combines the quality of all processes with the subject evaluation may be called a "Qualitative aspect of evaluation". On the other hand, the second-factor groups together

the demands of students who prefer quantitative indicators (financial demands of study, the chances of successful graduation, flexibility and accessibility of education), so this factor can be called a "Quantitative aspect of evaluation". All the found variables strongly influence students´ decision making as the values of variables ranges from 0.512 to 0.820, which infers a strong dependence. Given the highly competitive environment, very low unemployment and the lack of high-quality workforce, most future students

emphasise the quality of teaching, the quality of teachers, the quality of university facilities and the quality of services offered by the university in general. It is hoped that even in the future this trend will grow stronger and quality will exceed quantity.

Based on the results, it can be summarized that the reasons for university studies can be categorized into "Personal Preferences" and "Preferences of Environment" and at present the personal preferences play a major role in the decision making to continue studying at a university, which is also related to the increasing pressure on the quality of graduates´ competencies by employers. This also increases the emphasis on the qualitative selection criteria before the quantitative ones. However, management of higher education institutions must target their specialisation on that.

5. Discussion

In view of the findings, we can agree with the conclusions of Butt and Rehman (2010), Guilbault (2018) and Orîndaru (2015) that with respect to the increasing market environment in university education it is necessary to use and implement marketing strategies to satisfy the preferences and needs of potential as well as present students. Only such higher education institutions that focus on identifying the students´ preferences and needs and striving to understand what students expect from the university itself have a chance to succeed in today´s highly competitive environment and maintain a high standard of quality.

The results obtained by the primary research at the public university have also confirmed the conclusions of Hoang et al. (2016), El-Hilali et al. (2015) and Chui et al. (2016) that emphasis must be placed on the quality of higher education, for example, by using quality standards - see Aly and Akpovi (2001) and Kluse (2009). However, quality can be understood not only in terms of providing high-quality teaching and knowledge transfer

but also in the perception of the standard of higher education institution by the wide environment.

According to the research results, the most important criteria influencing the choice of a particular higher education institution is the chance of successful graduation (78.5%) and the chance to find a good job after graduation (68.9%). At the same time, the findings are in accordance with Hill and Epps (2010), because in the decision making of students whether to continue studying at the university the factors of material nature prevail, i.e. in the research conducted they were as follows: the possibility of earning more money in the future (88.7%), better career prospects (86.7%) and obtaining a university degree (85.7%). Therefore, it is clear that students continue their studies at the college/university because they assume to get a competitive advantage in the labour market in the form of a university degree and they are willing to adjust the college/university choice to that goal.

Educational institutions should also pursue to have a positive impact on the entire society and to build their reputation primarily with potential employers of their graduates. In terms of unemployment, graduates belong to the risk groups in the labour market and precisely given these reasons it is necessary to adapt the graduates´ skills to corporate practice as much as possible. Successful and problem-free integration into the job process depends on the level of abilities, knowledge and skills of graduates that are acquired during their education and should be in accordance with employers´ requirements and needs in the labour market, which is in line with the conclusions of Chui et al. (2016) and Khosravi et al. (2013).

Given the demographic situation, it is necessary to realise that the labour market in the upcoming years will be increasingly affected by the lack of replacement for retiring staff. The labour market will be influenced by factors such as changes in the preferences of students interested in studying

at a university, different preferences in expectations of the quality of studies, lifestyle and goals, which influence their decision-making on the choice of future profession, as is confirmed by the research of Hitka et al. (2018) or Freud (2006).

The need for continuous education and the continuous development of competencies will continue to play a very important role in the life of every individual. Education is not a one-time matter defined only by the length of formal studies; it is a continuous learning process. Higher education institutions will, therefore, have to focus more on the alignment of graduates´ competences with employers´ needs. Students need to understand that they may willingly change professions during their life but also their careers may change because of the current situation in the labour market. Students after graduation will have to continue in their education both in their field and in general to be more flexible and adaptable to the ongoing technical, technological and social changes. It is about promoting access to education throughout the entire life, which is in line with Moran et al. (2001), and the lifelong learning process is now increasingly influenced by the development of modern educational technologies, which is also confirmed by Sarabdee (2013) and Borges and Stiubiener (2015).

8 variables to identify students´ reasons for choosing a university were tested in the research, and all of them were found to be important. It can be summarised that universities must focus on a wide range of variables in defining their development strategies in order to be able to adapt to their students' preferences which is in accordance with Negricea et al. (2014), Prisacariu (2015) or Hitka et al. (2018).

Based on the findings, the following may be recommended to higher education institutions:

- To focus their communication with potential students on highlighting the fact of always finding a good job after finishing their studies, while ensuring high-quality education and promising better prospects after successful graduation. Within this communication, it is advisable to present statistics on the employment of their graduates and their average earnings, which is also in line with the results of this research, where one of the main reasons for university studies is the possibility of future better earnings and career growth prospects. To present stories of successful graduates is another suitable tool.

- To make use of all available opportunities to reach out to prospective students, e.g. through the media, presentation of a higher education institution at secondary schools, or organizing open days, which, according to the Ming´s research (2010), are the most significant factors that influence students´ decision to study at the respective university.

- To establish cooperation between higher education institutions and companies to enable students to obtain work experience already during their studies. Thus, graduates can gain a competitive advantage in the labour market, and a good reputation of a university can be built among employers.

The main contribution of the presented article consists of the identified students´ preferences and criteria that are crucial for college/university choice. Age and gender of the students were also involved into examination of the preferences (as they have proved to be statistically significant factors), which can help higher education institutions to adapt their marketing activities to attract potential students as well as to retain the existing ones and to better understand their customers´ needs. A practical benefit of this article is the presentation of the results of a case study that can aid the further direction of

the analysed faculty, as well as other economic faculties during the recruitment and selection of students for their student programs and help improve the implementation of internal training processes.

The article may be limited by its research focus on just one selected faculty of the public university; however, given the relatively large sample, the results are relevant and can help as the best practice for other faculties. It would, therefore, be appropriate to conduct a similar survey at other public and private higher education institutions and to compare findings. This survey has found that the quality of teaching is the third most important criterion that students find crucial when choosing their university. However, the survey has not further examined in what the quality of teaching lies and which factors have the greatest influence on the quality of teaching according to students. The forthcoming research will, therefore, deal with the perception of the quality of teaching at universities both from the students and teachers´ points of views.

6. Conclusion

The current situation in university education can be characterised as competitive, but so far it is focused on traditional structures and requirements. At present, however, it is necessary to target the strategies and individual steps of universities in such a way so that they correspond with the preferences of students using the education system and to place emphasis on quality over quantity. Using well-defined and effective strategies will ensure universities enough students who will be interested in studying at their higher education institutions. According to the research findings, the main reasons for university studies are the possibility of earning more money in the future, better career prospects and obtaining a university degree. It has also been found that the most important criteria for students when choosing

a higher education institution are the chances of successful graduation, finding a good job as the university graduate and the quality of teaching. However, a statistical dependence on the respondents´ gender and especially on their age has been found between the individual reasons and criteria. It can be summarised, the older the students are, the bigger is their intrinsic motivation to study and they more realise their need for personal development. Two factors influencing the decision whether to study at a university (personal preference - 0.424 to 0.831, preference of environment - 0.667 - 0.803) have also been identified in the research. In terms of the selection criteria, two factors have been identified (the qualitative aspect of evaluation - 0.512 to 0.820, the quantitative aspect of evaluation 0.519 - 0.774). Identifying these two factors, and therefore groups of students according to their preferences can help the university management not only in choosing appropriate marketing communication tools to attract and retain students but also in designing and choosing strategies for the direction of the university or in creating and innovating a study programme linked to the practice The upcoming research will focus further on effective marketing communication of the university as a part of marketing strategy and will deal with perception of the quality of teaching both from the students and teachers´ points of views.

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Adéla Fajčíková
Department of Management,
Faculty of Economics and
Management, Czech
University of Life Sciences
Prague,
Prague,
Czech Republic
fajcikova@pef.czu.cz

Hana Urbancová
Department of
Management, Faculty of
Economics and
Management, Czech
University of Life Sciences
Prague,
Prague,
Czech Republic
urbancova@pef.czu.cz