ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS STUDENTS HAVE TOWARD EDUCATION: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS BETWEEN ARMENIAN AND SOUTH KOREAN STUDENTS

by

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Content

Introduction

"In the knowledge economy, academic discussion on higher

education development moves its focus from enrollment

growth to academic productivity because knowledge is the

source of national competitiveness."

- Jung, *Higher education development in Korea: western*

university ideas, Confucian tradition, and economic development.

National competitiveness in the global market is a goal every nation seeks in order to establish active international cooperation, and knowledge is the source of national competitiveness. Ensuring the nation's competitiveness on the international level requires the government and the national regulatory bodies in the education sphere of the country pay close attention to the education system: to set up a specific agenda tailored to the educational demands of the country, and to supervise with utter scrutiny the process of education ensuring its quality and effectiveness.

Besides the administration of the education process on the governmental level it is also important to see the direct interaction of the two key players of this process: the educator and the student. Gaining education is a two-way process: it depends on the person who acts as a source of knowledge and on the person who receives and interprets the given information. In this process both of the players have key roles and the process is equally dependent on both the educator and the student.

The role of the educator and his or her competence is a very decisive factor in the education process. An educator should not only be a source of information for the student but also a role model. The educator should encourage and inspire the student to learn by promoting critical thinking and ensuring that the student learns the information given and filters it through the frame of his or her knowledge not being limited or restrained in any way. Educators should be aware of the developments in their sphere and the modern approaches and educational methodologies in order to try to help students develop a new worldview and the ability to guide the learning of a student in the most effective way possible.

The student is the so-said raw material which gains shape in the process of being educated. The student should have certain characteristics and be prepared for the process of being educated and not treat the university education similar to middle or high school education. Students should acknowledge the importance of receiving education. However, during the transition from high school to university the student is not always changing his or her learning habits to be better equipped for the new learning environment: the students come to university with the same attitudes and perceptions one has toward school, where they are usually educated in accordance with a fixed schedule and agenda with slight if any variation of the teaching materials and methods at all. When coming to university a student should understand what he or she is taught and what for, how he or she can effectively learn it, how he or she can make the best use of it, and, most importantly, having defined why he or she needs to learn. The why part of this sequence of questions is the one that should be answered the first and is the one that outweighs the other questions in some sense. In order to get the answer for this question we need to know what perception students hold toward education and education system and why they learn: how learning fits into their perception and notion of their further life and career.

University students are expected to have more mature outlook toward life and be more self-aware. If a student studies at a university or at a higher education institution, he or she has made one of the most important decisions a person usually makes in life: the choice of the future profession. In the process of making this decision students are influenced by several factors, such as friends, family, current job demand, etc. Not many young adults make a decision based on their interests and aspirations solely. In a patriarchal society like Armenia it is unavoidable to be influenced by family when making a decision, however, the influence should be more in a form of guidance rather than choosing instead of the person who is going to study that specific sphere. If student makes a decision on his or her own with or without the guidance of his parents and advice of friends later on the students will be more accountable in terms of making education and career-related decisions. Choosing future profession based on his or her own will make the person more self-reliant and responsible.

Important factors influencing the perceptions of students are the culture and societal stereotypes. Some intrinsic cultural and societal features are predetermining what is a suitable profession for a certain person. This may be a reason why there are disproportionately large numbers of female students learning linguistics and male students learning engineering and computational sciences in Armenia.

Other factors that have their influence on the higher education system in Armenia are corruption and academic dishonesty. Instances of obtaining marks through acquaintances or bribes are common. Academic dishonesty is a more institutional problem: only one university in Armenia has a written regulation concerning academic integrity, other universities do not have them and the matter is not regulated thus creating a soil for academic dishonesty (Goroyan et al., 2015). The interesting point here is that together with influencing the education and the education system, corruption also strongly

depends on it. This is in some sense a circular process in that students need to be educated against corruption to avoid using any form of it. We need to be informed about the destructive influence corruption has, and we need to fully acknowledge the reasons why corruption should not be permissible. The perception students hold about corruption is the problem that needs to be changed.

Thus there is a need to learn more about student attitudes and perceptions in regard to education and any phenomena connected to it in order to acquire a better understanding of the students' needs. For this purpose, a comparison was drawn with students of another country, South Korea, whose students have peculiar perception toward education. This helped to illustrate the role of perceptions the students have toward education. South Korea is a recent example of a country which achieved advancement through education. This advancement is based on the national character of Koreans, on their attitudes and perceptions towards education and on the government regulations. The major characteristic of South Korean students' attitudes and perceptions about education is the "education enthusiasm" otherwise called "education fever" or "education mania," a characteristic specific only to them. It is something that Armenian students do not notably display even if they have it and the comparison will help to get a more vivid picture of differences and similarities.

Literature Review

Knowledge is source of national competitiveness in the global market. At the present time human capital is considered the most important product in the international market. For a country with severely limited amount of natural resources and investments like Armenia, it is especially important to make education a priority in order to comply with today's standards and become internationally competitive (Aslanyan, 2005). Aslanyan points out the importance of being

internationally competitive and suggests a solution to reach that: she suggests providing student loans in order to make education more accessible for students in her research "Basic trends in the development of professional higher education in Armenia". However, this represents only one side of the issue. Only providing student loans will not ensure the emergence of the knowledge economy. Government intervention and guidance is another major influencer of this process. But at first student perception about education need to be revealed and based on them further actions should be designed.

A recent study done by Yerevan State University Department of Sociology and Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung Academic Foundation reveals interesting patterns of thinking the current youth in Armenia has. This youth study named *Independence Generation* (2016) examines several aspects of life and the attitudes the Armenian youth has about them. The study touches upon the key issues in the sphere of education, employment, political participation, concerns, aspirations, identity, religiousness, tolerance, family lifestyle, pastimes, and the lifestyle of youth in Armenia. In concern to education specifically the study shows that receiving education does not guarantee having jobs in the field of specialization, and that connections play a vital role in getting a job and building a career. Also the study reveals that income and education are major factors affecting the lives of young people: the lower their income, the higher the levels of their exclusion, dissatisfaction with life, pessimism, and dependency; the lower the education, the higher the level of political activism and the lesser their social inclusion (Balasanyan et al., pg. 10). One of the main findings of the study in the sphere of education is the following: the youth in the study indicated that they attend higher education institutions with pleasure, because there they can socialize and mingle with their peers, as well as make new acquaintances (Balasanyan et al., pg. 22).

Another recent study that reveals some aspects of student perceptions is a study named

Unethical Purchase of Academic Papers in Public Universities of Armenia (Goroyan et al., 2015). This research raises an important issue in the education system in Armenia faces today: the issue of plagiarism and academic dishonesty. Some of the types of academic dishonesty common among Armenian students include: using cheat sheets during exams, using new technologies, such as mobile phones, during exams, dishonestly purchasing academic papers, writing academic papers without proper references, asking the elder students for help (e.g. borrowing ready academic assignments), etc. (Goroyan et al., 2015, pgs. 5-6). This is a very important issue because if academic dishonesty is predominant that means that there is no essential learning taking place and the both the students and the instructors are working in vain. It is just waste of time, effort and money. There is even a website (www.kursayin.am), which offers different services including ordering term papers, BA and MA capstones. One reason for the academic dishonesty Goroyan et al. point out is the lack of regulations on level of university policies and legal acts. Another reason the authors indicate is the lack of motivation: "One of the findings of the interviews with the participants implies that some of the reasons that students unethically purchase academic papers are laziness and low interest towards the programs in which they study. Obtaining a ready-made paper is an easier option for many of them than writing it on their own" (pg. 13). Other reasons include poor social conditions, gender, field of study, availability of resources, modeling the peer behavior, students' awareness of academic writing skills, etc. (pgs. 13-15).

Together with the above mentioned study, the studies done by Aslanyan, Avagyan and Matasyan contribute to the overall representation of the higher education system in Armenia and almost all of them point corruption as an issue of concern.

A comprehensive study was done by a group of students and the Yerevan office of the OSCE on the following topic: Student Perception on Corruption in Armenian Higher Education System (2010). In this study the following questions were asked to the group of students from 6 universities in

Armenia: reasons of corruption in Armenia, assessment of corruption in higher education system, if the surveyed students knew anyone who was involved in corruption, if state authorities fight against corruption, what their response will be if their rights were violated, if they would participate or not in case a protest is organized to protect student rights, etc. The answers to these questions were quite interesting especially because they depicted how little trust there is toward authorities inside the system of higher education. Another interesting point was that students looked for successful precedents for certain actions in order to engage in similar actions, i.e. protests, which shows lack of confidence in oneself and the system in general and lack of critical thinking. It is not surprising that according to public opinion survey of Transparency International on the corruption level in Armenia the sector of education was ranked as the most corrupt sector in the country.

Another analysis on the same topic is Armine Avagyan's research paper on the students' attitudes and perceptions about corruption, which again establishes a scenario similar to the one in the OSCE report. Avagyan's report is an important study because it is a recent study concerning the situation in the education system in Armenia. Corruption exists in most countries and in most spheres of public life and governance. Particularly in higher education corruption is a very important factor. Avagyan mentions that corruption currently goes beyond the "conventional" methods: some lecturers make students buy their lectures or books to receive grades, another form of corruption is giving gifts to the lecturers or his/her relatives and later demanding higher grades. In this study 4 types of corruption behavior are mentioned: blatantly illegal acts of bribery or fraud, actions taken to secure a modest income by people paid too little or too late, the differences in cultural perspective – giving gifts etc., and the incompetence of key actors or the inadequacies of the infrastructure they work in (pgs. 29-30). The main finding concerning student perceptions on corruption in the Armenian Higher Education System is that most of the students from focus group discussions considered that corruption at university level is of systemic nature inherent to the imperfection of the education system and that it is an

unpunished practice in Armenia (pg. 37).

Sona Matasyan's research (2012) discusses the condition of higher education in Armenia after the implementation of Bologna reforms, and aims to examine the Bologna process and find out how it affected the quality of education and the motivation of students. In her study Matasyan examined the attitudes of the supporters of the Bologna process as well as of those who are opposed to it. As a result of her study she found out that there is no coherent attitude toward the implementation of the Bologna process among both students and professors, and the main point of complaint is the ineffective implementation of the process. This may be because not all of them have a comprehensive notion about the process and because of the general lack of information.

South Korea was chosen for the comparison because it is a recent working and tangible example of a knowledge economy: in short amount of time the country has undergone advancements of education and economy by developing the education sector.

It is quite expected of the countries with good education systems and centuries of successful education history to be on the top. Everyone is well aware of the success of the education systems of the Scandinavian countries or the ones in the US, the UK and Europe, where most of the world's top universities are situated. However, it is more noteworthy when a country develops such an effective education system just within 50-60 years, as is the case of South Korea. According to the Times Higher Education Seoul National University ranked 72nd in 2017 World University Ranking and 45th in 2016 World Reputation Rankings. It is important to mention that Seoul National University was established in 1946, right after the Korean liberation from Japanese colonization.

National competitiveness was something the South Korean authorities aimed for ever since the country's liberation in 1945 and especially after end of the Korean War in 1953. However, it might have been considered quite a daring endeavor taking into account the condition South Korea was in at

the time of its liberation. The concept and idea of national competitiveness as such did not formally

enter the agenda of the government for a couple of decades as at the time of liberation South Korea

was in bad condition in all possible aspects, especially economically and politically. Thus concentrating

on education would have not been a strategically wise move taking into account the politically intense

situation of the country. The country was constantly in civil unrest, and even up until 1970 the annual

GDP per capita in South Korea was only about $200 (Top Performing Countries, Center on

International Education Benchmarking, 2012). However, even in this condition the importance of

education was not underestimated and the government undertook policy changes to ensure positive

changes in the sector of education.

Education has always been an inseparable part of the Korean society since ancient times.

Looking into the history we would see that Koreans had a separate university, which was meant to

educate the future government officials of the country. Those who attended university represented a

separate class of nobles. Although education was restricted only to the class of nobles, the practice and

value of education was an integral part of the Korean society for centuries. This tradition went on

until the early 1900s when the Koreans became Japanese colony. "During the almost 50 years of

Japanese occupation, there was a pretty good education system in Korea, but ... only the Japanese were

allowed to teach and only the Japanese were allowed to attend secondary schools and higher education

institutions." In a word the Korean education system was not meant for the Koreans. Consequently,

when the Japanese colonization ended there were no teachers and no one with the required level of

education to become teachers. 78% of the Korean population was illiterate" (Top Performing

Countries, 2012, pg. 56).

In 2012 the picture was quite different both in the sphere of economy and education. In the

2009 PISA assessments, South Korea ranked second in reading, fourth in mathematics and sixth in

science (PISA 2009 Results). The Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) is a triennial international survey which aims to evaluate education systems worldwide by testing the skills and knowledge of 15-year-old students. Students from more than 80 economies have participated in the assessment. The PISA assessment is a program of the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). In 2012 assessment South Korea was one of the top 7 performing countries. "Only five countries in the world have a higher proportion of the world's total number of adults with a tertiary education, and most are far larger than South Korea. So in a few short decades, South Korea has managed to go from massive illiteracy to topping the global charts in both quantity and quality of education" (Top Performing Countries, 2012, pg. 57). So within several decades South Korea has achieved national competitiveness and this success was mostly linked with the advancements of education.

Jeong and Armer discuss the influence and role of the South Korean Government in the process of the development of the Korean education system in their research "State, Class, and Expansion of Education in South Korea: A General Model" (1994). Their research is an analysis of the education system of South Korea and its gradual development under different regimes of government, which provides a detailed insight into the education system, the government regulations, all of which had specific aims tightly interconnected with the economic development and on a larger scale driven for the sake of the development of the economy and the creation of qualified labor market.

Another study which helps to understand the phenomenon of the Korean education development is the research article published in Higher Education by Cheol Shin Jung. Jung pointed out the three key factors that influenced the development of the Korean education system. Those are the Confucian tradition, the model of western universities, and the co-development of economy and

higher education. All three factors played a vital role in this process of development; however, Confucian tradition is the differentiating feature of this development. Jung explains how South Korea is different from other countries in the region which also had the influence of the Confucian traditions. These traditions are also one of the major differences that Armenians and South Koreans have in their approach toward education.

A more elaborated research on this topic is done by Simon Marginson – "Higher education in East Asia and Singapore: rise of the Confucian Model" (2011, May). In his research Marginson states that the East-Asian rise in education is examined only among the countries which have strong Confucian values. "Confucian higher education rests on a long tradition of respect for education and scholarship… Nor is this the splicing of Confucian tradition with Western modernization. It is an organic hybrid of old and new, and East and West: a distinctive Confucian form of modernization in the knowledge economy" (Marginson, pg. 607).

The concept of "education enthusiasm" derives from the Confucian traditions. "The educational system of present-day South Korea does not simply reflect a practical need to train an efficient work force, since it also must respond to students' and parents' demands to provide upward mobility through education" (Sorensen, pg. 6). The study by Sorensen discusses the correlation between success and education in the Korean reality this research provides us with a comprehensive study of the attitudes and perceptions prevalent among the students and their families concerning education. It is not simply a requirement to become an educated individual; rather it goes far beyond that as getting quality education is the only option students have to succeed. The study discusses education in respect to equality, parental pressure, the Korean zeal for education or "education fever (enthusiasm)" and mechanisms for translating that zeal into success.

Research Questions

The core idea of this research is based on comparing the attitudes and perceptions students hold toward education system in Armenia and South Korea. My hypothesis is that perceptions and attitudes that students hold toward education are major influencers in their studies at university and their level of proficiency later when they enter the job market. I intend to concentrate only on the part of what perceptions Armenian students hold about education and education system of Armenia and compare it with the concept of "education enthusiasm" coined specifically to describe the attitudes toward education among South Korean students.

As already mentioned, education is a primary component for creating a knowledge economy, and being a country of this scale and economy it is vital for Armenia to become competitive country in the global market. In order to achieve this Armenia should base its efforts on education. However, this is too broad a topic to discuss and it is not the direct aim of this capstone project. Nevertheless, learning more about student perceptions can be beneficial for many aspects including research concerning national competitiveness. Concentrating specifically on students, by the time of entering university they need to have defined why getting quality education and being educated in general is important for them.

Below are stated the main hypothesis questions, which this research aims to answer.

1. What perceptions do Armenian students hold about the education system in Armenia?

2. How did students make their choice of field of study and what influenced it?

3. What are the main differences and similarities between Armenian and South Korean students?

Methodology

The aim of this capstone project is to find out what attitudes Armenian university students have about education and to compare them to the attitudes South Korean students have. For this purpose, there was a need at first to find out the attitudes and perceptions of Armenian students, second to collect data about the attitudes of students in South Korea, and third to compare them. The necessary information was obtained through several ways: through previous studies done relating to the topic and through qualitative and quantitative research methods such as interviews and surveys.

Target audience

The target audience for this study includes the undergraduate students and university instructors in Armenia. Among the university students a survey was conducted and the instructors were interviewed.

Initially the target audience was thought to include the student population of only 5 universities: Yerevan State University, Armenian State University of Economics, Yerevan Brusov State University of Languages and Social Sciences, Yerevan State Medical University, American University of Armenia. However, limiting the sample to only 5 universities would not provide the data, which will represent the actual student population, and in general it would be very hard to choose a sample of students, which would be representative of the student population of Armenia. For this reason, the target audience for survey was not limited to a range of specific universities and any student could take the survey. In concern to the information about South Korea's students, the information was obtained through previous studies done examining the education system of South Korea, the cultural aspects of influencing the Koreans and their specific characteristics.

Survey

The survey had an online format. Doing a paper-based survey would have not been very effective in this case: it will be too time-consuming and paper will be wasted, also students will be more likely to complete an online survey at a time convenient for them than to complete a survey when being stopped in the street at a time when they most probably rush to classes. Also there is a general avoidance to do something when you were stopped in the street: people generally tend to refer to those people with suspicion. So for these reasons the online format was chosen.

The survey included open-ended and close-ended questions which aimed at measuring the general understanding of the students toward education in Armenia and concepts related to it. The questions covered demographic questions, the choice of field of study, future plans relating continuing the education, job prospects, changing the profession, the university experience, the effectiveness of the education sphere, opinions about the need of reforms in education and corruption in education sphere, the motivation to learn, hours spent on studying and volunteering.

The data obtained by the survey was analyzed by SPSS.

Interviews

Interviews were conducted for the purpose of obtaining information about the students' attitudes and perceptions toward education based on instructor observations. The instructors were chosen based on the following criteria: whether they had an experience of teaching outside of Armenia or not.

These interviews provided information about what specific features instructors noticed about students and how different the attitudes of Armenian students were from those of students in other

countries. The interviews included open-ended questions asking about their experience of teaching outside of Armenia, their observations concerning student attitudes: their learning behaviors and habits, willingness to learn and motivation, etc. The use of open-ended questions allowed the instructors to give their general impressions about students' attitudes and any noticed difference in their behaviors without being confined to any specific point.

Data Collection

Data collection included research of scholarly articles, reports and scientific researches relating to the topic via journals and search engines, such as Google Scholar, Jstor, Springer, etc. Several capstone projects of AUA alumni were also used. The data also includes the Entering Freshman Student Surveys of AUA for the years of 2013, 2014 and 2015.
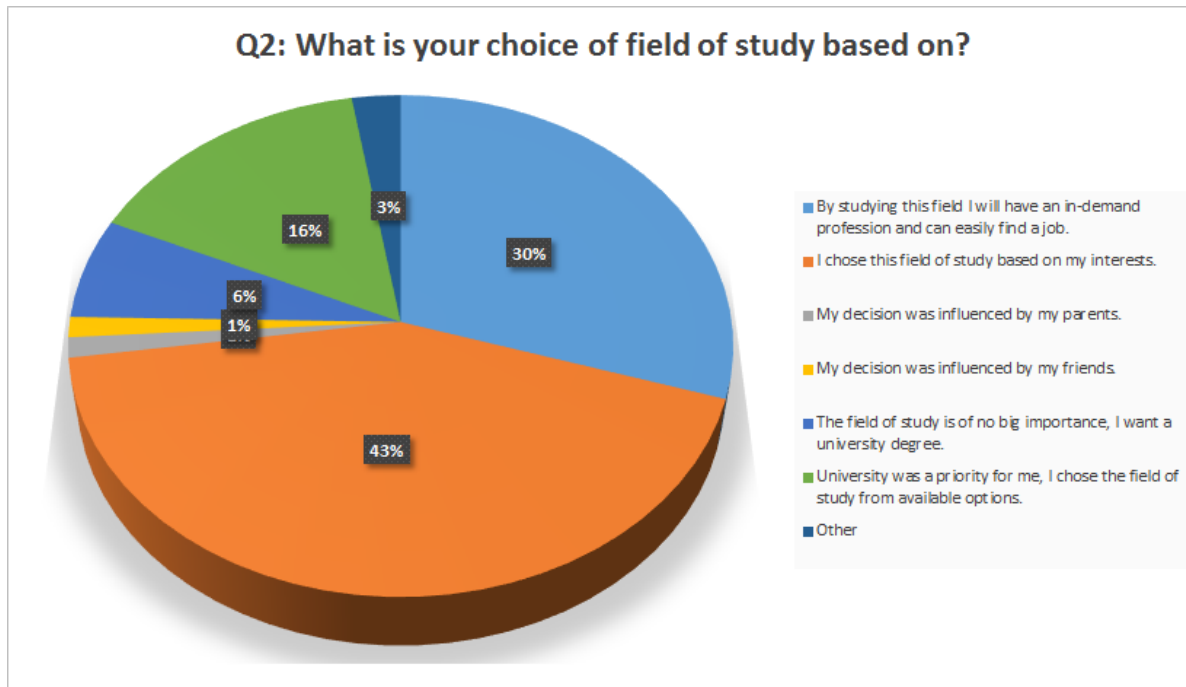
Research Findings and Analysis

1. **Survey Results**

An online survey was conducted among university students relating to their attitudes and perceptions toward education. There were 78 respondents from 6 universities in Armenia and 1 response by Armenian national from another country. 60% of the respondents were female, 37% male, and 3% did not indicate their gender. The age range included students ranging from 16 to 33 years of age.

To the question what their choice of field of study is based on, most of the students answered that they chose that particular field based on their interests. The second most common response was

that by studying that field they would have an in-demand profession. An interesting pattern noticed

was that predominantly females chose their field of study based on their interests, and the majority of

males wanted to have an in-demand profession.

Q2: What is your choice of field of study based on?

30%

43%

16%

3%

6%

1%

- By studying this field I will have an in-demand profession and can easily find a job.
- I chose this field of study based on my interests.
- My decision was influenced by my parents.
- My decision was influenced by my friends.
- The field of study is of no big importance, I want a university degree.
- University was a priority for me, I chose the field of study from available options.
- Other

91% of the respondents found that there is a need for reforms in the education sphere in

Armenia. Almost half of them suggested specific reforms to improve the system, such as

incorporating more practical courses into university programs, making use of new technologies during

the classes, and revising the teaching methodology and practices at universities. Some portion of the

students suggested starting the reforms from schools indicating that the changes should be made

starting from the very bottom of this hierarchy. One of the respondents suggested scattering the

universities in the regions of Armenia to ensure equal development of all the regions inside the

country. Overall the responses show that students are dissatisfied with some aspect of their education

and they want to see changes in the education system.

81% of the respondents think that the education system in Armenia is corrupted, 10% of them think that it is highly corrupted. Only 1 person out of 78 respondents of the survey thinks that the situation is improving. 9% of the respondents think that there is no corruption or they have not encountered any instance of corruption in their universities. So here again we see that students are dissatisfied with their education and feel that there should be changes. Some of the respondents mentioned that witnessing corruption instances or hearing about them discourages those who really

Q7: Corruption and Education system

- No corruption
- I don't know.
- Highly corrupted
- Corrupted
- N/A

5%   9%
5%
10%
71%
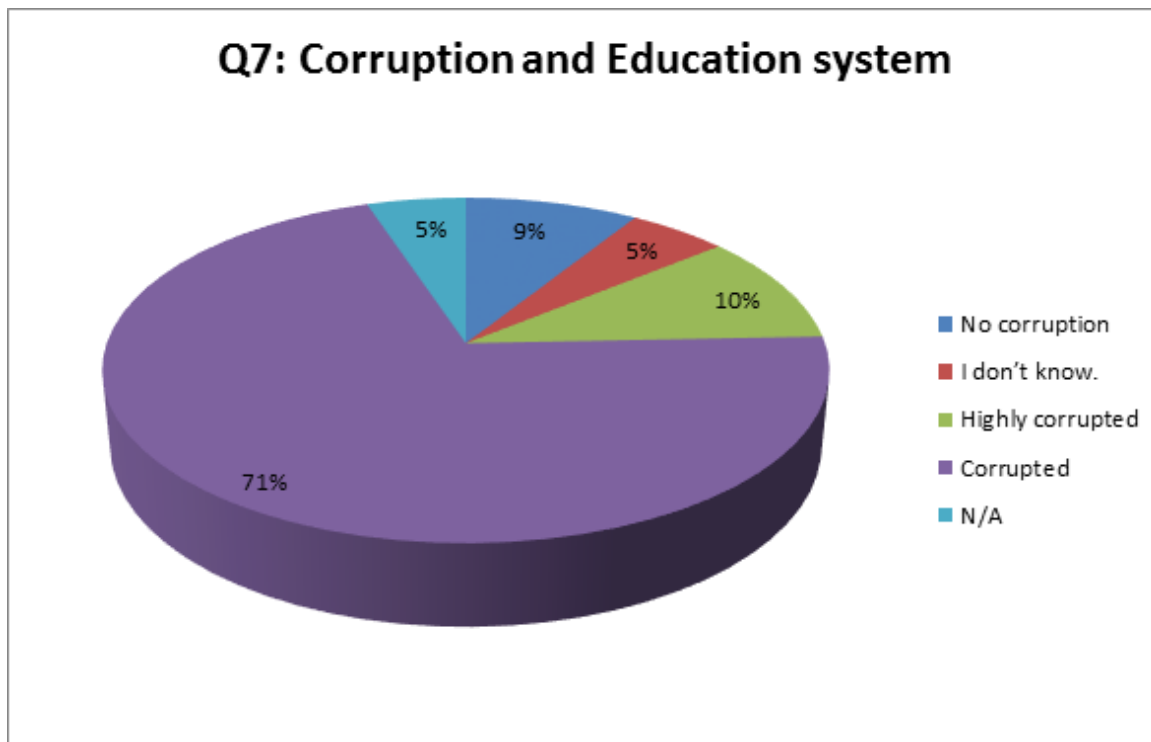
learn as anyone who pays can "achieve" the same as they achieve through hard work. Others noted that on the long run corruption will erode and degrade the whole system of education in Armenia.

Another topic that the survey touched upon was volunteering and engagement in activities not directly required for students' university studies. 54% of the survey respondents are not engaged in volunteering activities. 45% indicated that they are engaged in volunteering activities, but most of them noted that the reason for that is to gain experience and certificates for their CVs. Only small

portion of that 45% indicated that they want to contribute to the public good. So we may conclude that the culture of volunteering is not well established among the Armenian youth. Volunteering is mainly a means to gain practical experience in order to seem a better candidate for future job.

To the question about whether they want to change their field of study 22% of the respondents answered yes and 36% maybe. Only 37% of the total number of the surveyed students were satisfied with their choice of field of study and did not intend to change it. It is interesting, however, that despite not high level of satisfaction with the field of study, 75% of the respondents expect to work in their profession. This may again indicate the aspect practicality in the process of gaining education.

In terms of the quality of education 46% of the respondents rated it as good, 30% as excellent and 18% as adequate. It is interesting that majority of those who rated the education quality at their university as excellent and good are students of AUA. So this indicates that there is a difference between AUA and state universities in Armenia. The same can be said about the correlation between the university and the proficiency of instructor. Taking into account that AUA employs an American style of education and most of the state universities came from a soviet background having a difference between these universities is inevitable. So the survey would give more realistic picture of the Armenian youth if there were more responses from students studying at other state universities.

2. **Interview Results**

In order to find out more about student attitudes and have a clearer representation of the Armenian students' learning behavior, habits, level of interest and willingness to learn, etc. These characteristics could be more easily assessed when compared to students of another nationality analyzed through the same lenses, by the same person. Another point of discussion with the

instructors was the importance of student attitudes in influencing their learning behavior and desire to learn. Five AUA instructors, who have experience of teaching outside of Armenia, were interviewed. The findings of the interviews were quite interesting and not completely similar, which is expected taking into account the diverse background experience of the instructors.

Elham Shayegh is an assistant professor at AUA. Her previous teaching experiences were in the US and in Iraq. When addressing the differences between the Armenian and foreign students, professor Shayegh noted that the US students have clearer vision of what they are doing and are more job and career oriented. Ever since their undergraduate studies they prepare for applying to graduate schools. The students in Armenia and Iraq, however, are a little unclear of what they want to do. One reason she brought up for this is the different cultural background of Armenian students and their unfamiliarity with the liberal arts education. Professor Shayegh noted that there seems to be a gap between high school and university education. In US university seems to be the continuation of their high school. In Armenia and Iraq, however, students don't have a very good understanding of liberal arts education and the philosophy behind it. Professor Shayegh also added that she notices a clear lack of the merging of the high school and university experiences. Some of her students still seem to be in their high school experience, extending their practices to university.

The next instructor is Shushan Avagyan, who has taught in the US as a PhD candidate at Illinois University. Overall professor Avagyan noted that the undergraduate students here in Armenia and in the US do not differ much in sense of their enthusiasm and motivation toward classes. However, she also noted that demographics of the two groups of students are different: in Armenia her teaching experience is in the capital city, while in the US the students were predominantly from rural areas. Speaking about the importance of cultural aspects professor Avagyan pointed that the US

students she taught were less enthusiastic and eager to learn because they did not perceive education as something special, it was more mundane for them.

Another important aspect she pointed is the difference between graduate and undergraduate students. When comparing her graduate and undergraduate students she noted that graduate students generally display more interest and are more mature in concern to their studies. Undergraduate studies are seen as something required and the engagement of students on the undergraduate level is different.

Addressing student attitudes Avagyan emphasized their importance and noted that on the undergraduate level students seem to be on a race to receive degree to work, and this observation was the same in her teaching experience in both countries. Students mainly seek skills and want to be trained for future jobs. They are very much oriented by skills. More abstract and political studies are not perceived as something instructional which expands your mind, because it does not give them skills to achieve employment. Whereas on the graduate level students discover the different layers of education and realize that they will never graduate from library because learning is a lifelong process, they read a lot to expand their mind and knowledge.

Vahram Ter-Matevosyan is another instructor at AUA. His prior teaching experiences were in Norway and in the US. Besides teaching at AUA he has also taught in other Armenian universities. Professor Ter-Matevosyan considers that motivation is very important in learning process and he noted that his students abroad had a clearer motivation and objectives. He also finds difference between AUA and other Armenian universities based on his teaching experience. AUA seems to be in the middle of the local state universities and the universities abroad. Not having a very long history AUA constructs an emerging pattern in the Armenian education system, the AUA pattern as he calls it, which is more similar to the teaching practices of abroad.

Professor also recalled the recent study done by the Yerevan State University Sociology department and Friedich-Ebert-Stiftung foundation, one of the main findings of which was that the youth in Armenia attend universities mainly to socialize with peers. Also touching upon the concept of student culture as another difference, professor Ter-Matevosyan noted that abroad students stay within university almost all day, and this is the right approach to learning in his opinion because learning takes place within the university walls.

Another characteristic of foreign students, which was already noted above, is that they do not consider education as something extraordinary. In Armenia, however, university education is considered as socially constructed necessity. Students strive to prove something to their family and make their parents proud. Professor Ter-Matevosyan notes that this is not the case in Europe: there students are more self-sustained and learn to become individuals from an early stage of their lives. In the Armenian society the social supervision constrains young people. A major difference is that local students do not see university education as part of a life-long learning but rather a something as a transition point to becoming rich and successful. Mainly the reason for this tendency are the social values: Armenia is a more patriarchal society with elements of conservatism in this aspect, while abroad the social values so-said coexist with individualism - they do not dictate the behavior of individuals.

The other instructor is Mica Hilson, who has an extensive experience of teaching in the US at Indiana University and two other smaller private universities in the US. Most of his students in the US were from rural areas and the demographic characteristics are different from that of his Armenian students. In concern to student motivation and enthusiasm professor Hilson thinks that almost everywhere there is a mix of different students, where some of them are more motivated and some

less. But the proportionality is different. His experience in Armenia is limited only to AUA, which is a little different than other Armenian universities in that it has a more American style of teaching, so his observations may not be representative for all Armenian students. What he has noticed at AUA is that there is a high percentage of those who want to learn more and do extra work.

Relying on his prior experience he notes that the age again plays a big role in the level of interest of students. Comparing his continuing students, who return to education after several years of work experience, to the younger students, professor Hilson notes that it is hard for the younger students to see higher education as something precious and know that they have only limited time for learning; and they lack internal motivation, which is not the case with continuing students.

Another aspect he brings up is connected with grades. Students generally are highly motivated by grades and to some extent even obsessed by them. They have the attitude as if the grades determine their self-worth. For a teacher, however, the grades act as a psychological motivating tool. They use it to make the students do more and grow. Professor Hilson considers this grade-drivenness a characteristic of selective schools like AUA. To professor Hilson that attitude will change together with academic maturation.

The last interviewed instructor is Arto Vaun. Professor Vaun has previously taught at University of Massachusetts Boston and at University of Glasgow in Scotland. Talking about student attitudes professor pointed that there are many aspects concerning it, such as cultural and socioeconomic aspects. An interesting observation about the Armenian students he shared is that almost 99% of his students who are most passionate, smart, articulate and mature are women, which is a serious problem that stems from the Armenian culture. During his experience of teaching abroad he has not encountered a similar gender-based division. In general students seem to be eager to learn,

maybe they are not the best students but they are trying to do their best and they are excited about learning and much focused on it.

Another difference he noted is that Armenian students are used to being in a community, while abroad students grow into themselves as individuals. Armenians are more in a community by living in their families, and there is a custom to stay close to those people who are in the same class with you. The negative aspect of this phenomenon is that it creates a sense of a high school and indicates that it is hard to break away from high school experience. It is a characteristic specific to Armenian culture and society. When being in a community like that it is hard for people to display their individuality and be an individual.

Professor Vaun also spoke about the grade-obsession which is common in many countries, and it is something that creates unhealthy learning environment. In concern to Armenian learning environment he also pointed that when coming to AUA students encounter a completely different environment than the one they got used to during the 12 years of school education, which is a cultural shock for them. The teaching methods used at schools are very important because when coming to university students are not well-equipped in terms of critical thinking, individualism, hard work and merit. There are even instances of paying to get a degree. Generally speaking, schools do not prepare students for university. Outside of Armenia during the 12 years of rigorous education students acquire a good basis and foundation for their education. In Armenia this seems to be a national issue: students want things to improve without working hard.

Professor Vaun also noticed that most of his Armenian students are not clear about why they chose their major, they just have ideas of a professional they want to become, however their choice is not backed by the desire to become a better person, to have more wisdom, to become more mature. Many students are focused on earning money. The good liberal arts education prepares a person for

life and making money is something you do based on your overall intelligence, maturity, imagination, ability to think on your feet, to be confident and open-minded individual. Earning money seems to be merely the side effect of being an educated and insightful individual.

3. AUA Entering Freshman Student Surveys

Starting from 2013 AUA staff annually conduct Entering Freshman Student Surveys in order to collect information about entering students' background, high school experiences and expected first-year experiences. These surveys reveal interesting data about the undergraduate student population of AUA for the years of 2013, 2014 and 2015, specifically about working with private tutors and students' habits concerning learning process.

In 2013 Entering Freshman Student Survey the total number of the respondents was 192, in 2014 - 243, and in 2015 - 275. Respectively in 2013 65% of the total number of respondents indicated that they have worked with a tutor in the last two years of high school. In 2014 the percentage was 66.8%, and in 2015 it was 78.1%. So we can notice a steady increase in these numbers, which indicates that without working with a tutor few students have the chance to get admitted to university, in this case to AUA. In general, working with a tutor indicates that students do not get the necessary knowledge during their regular classes at school and for that reason they seek preparatory courses outside of school. This indicates one or both of the following options: either the schools, particularly high schools, do not function as they generally are expected to function in other countries, or the university entrance exams are too sophisticated to be handled only by education received at high school.

In 2013 survey answering the questions about their high school experience 44.4% of the respondents indicated that they often used data to understand or examine a real-world problem such

as unemployment, environmental issue, public health. In 2014 survey 40.9% indicated doing this. In

2015 41.3% of the respondents indicated this. This is one difference between school and university

learning experience. At universities, at least at AUA, instructors work with real-life situations and case-

studies. At schools, however, there is not much freedom of choice in relation to this aspect and

students learn according to a fixed agenda, which is almost the same for every school.

In 2013 survey 55.7 % indicated that they often reviewed their notes after class by themselves

or with a classmate. In 2014 and in 2015 the percentage of students indicating this was 60.9% and

58.5% respectively. And 61% (2013 survey) of students indicated that they often revised writing

assignments before submission. In 2014 and 2015 the numbers were 66.8% and 59.5%. The numbers

are approximately the same in case of these two questions. So nearly 40% of the admitted students

were engaged in the above-mentioned activities on the regular bases. And in 2013 survey 7.3% of the

respondents indicated that they often did not do homework. In 2014 and 2015 the numbers were

4.6% and 6.6%, respectively.

Judging from these results we may see there is a lack of mature approach toward classes at

high school, in general, because nearly 40% of the students do not often prepare for homework.

Students working with a private tutor tend to focus only on 2-3 courses and not pay the same amount

of attention to the rest of them. Also working with a tutor indicates that the students do not get

enough knowledge by only attending the classes at high school. So when entering the university, the

students are in the state of mind when they need to seek out-of-school courses in order to succeed

during their classes. This may indicate that students are not ready for the independent work required at

university when they enter it. And as mentioned of the interviewed instructors students experience

cultural shock in this aspect when enter AUA after high school.

4. Research on South Korean students and comparison with Armenian students

Together with the economic development South Korea has developed in the sphere of education as well. Currently it is in the top charts with other developed countries which have decades' history of quality education as mentioned in the literature review.

The education enthusiasm of South Korean students is the final result of several national and cultural factors acting as the base for the country's success in education. The documentary made by Journeyman Pictures on South Korean education and its impact on students creates a very impressive picture of the situation in the country. The average student's day in South Korea starts at 7:30 am with going to school, right after the classes end the students head to cram schools, which are private institutions specializing in preparing students for examinations, most common in East Asia (Oxford Dictionaries), after the classes at this special tutoring schools students spend hours at library studying and go home at approximately 11 pm. On average they spend 15 hours a day studying. The only time to socialize with friends is during the lunch break. At South Korean schools there is a practice of creating student rankings which are basically the charts showing the list of students based on their grades. This creates a high competition among students and they often say that for them the best results are not yet good enough. There is a lot of psychological pressure on students to succeed academically and to achieve high marks in exams because it is the only way for them to ensure upward mobility on the social ladder and to have good prospects in job and marriage. And the result of this pressure is the high suicide rate among the young people in South Korea. With the high pressure to succeed it is unavoidable for the students not to be subject to stress and psychological pressure. The documentary also presents some rehabilitation centers designated for the young adults who have not managed to cope with this amount of stress and pressure and in most of the cases ended with suicide attempts.

As indicate the results of the AUA freshman entry surveys working with tutors is quite common among the Armenian students, however, it is not as institutionalized as it is in South Korea. In Armenia students attend private classes alone or in a small group. Nevertheless, this phenomenon exists in both societies. In Korea it emerged due to the difficulty of the exams and high competition for admission. As mentioned one of the interviewed students in the documentary making even one mistake during the exam may be crucial. In Armenia the difficulty of exams is not the only reason for tutoring: another reason is that schools often do not ensure the quality of education and students do not get enough to avoid working with a tutor.

Another difference is the pressure on the students to succeed: Armenian students are not under so much pressure as Korean students are. And accordingly there are not such serious consequences, which would require rehabilitation centers designed to help the students who attempted suicide. In Armenian society students are admitted to universities if they ensure the minimal required scores in the entrance exams and earning the best grades is not a priority for most students.

Another major difference between South Korean and Armenian students is the education enthusiasm, and one of the reasons for this strive for excellence and self-development of Korean students is the Confucian tradition. "From the beginning of the Choson Kingdom, Confucianism was regarded not only as a national religion and ideology, which cultivated bureaucrats who lead the people but also as a measure by which to judge socio-political affairs and individual ethics and values."(Lee, 2005, pg. 5) The Choson Kingdom was founded in 1392 and ever since that period and to some extent even before that the Confucianism was present in the lives of Koreans. So the central ideologies of the Confucian tradition are long rooted in the Korean nation. "The excessive educational zeal in the present South Korean society mainly derives its origin from academic attainments oriented doctrines and elitism based on the tradition of Confucian education." (Lee, 2005, pg. 6) Among them

is the idea of constant self-improvement: according to Confucianism if a person fails in doing something that means he/she did not try hard enough to achieve that. "In the Confucian universe self-formation via learning is an act of filial piety, an aspect of the child's duty to his/her parents and duty of parents to the ancestral lineage of the family. An educated child brings honor to the family and better protects continuity with the ancestors, thereby locating the family both in and beyond time. For most humans there is no greater aspiration, whether it is expressed in the code of honor or the code of career and wealth. This is what Confucian education offers." (Marginson, 2011). Judging from this it is evident that academic achievement and success has an important part in their lives and is a crucial factor for many aspects determining their later life and career.

Another difference can be found in the motives for learning. As mentioned above Armenian students mainly attend university to socialize and acquire new acquaintances (*Independence Generation,* 2016), and as the survey results suggest students want to acquire practical skills necessary for the job market. In South Korea it is more similar to a competition between the students. Having high grades and attending high ranking university is what predetermines their success in life. In Armenia student does not attend university to acquire more knowledge, become more insightful person and develop own mental abilities, but to become equipped with skills required for the future job. This may be a similarity between Armenian and South Korean students together with the grade-obsession of Armenians, only with a slight difference: in the Armenian context there is not that much stress on the academic achievements and excellence as it is in Korea.

5. **Conclusion**

Trying to create the profile of the Armenian student based on the research done we will get the following picture: the Armenian female student is hardworking, and the choice of her field of

study is based on her interests, while male student is less hardworking, and chose his field of study in order to have an in-demand profession later in life; the students are dissatisfied with the education system, they think that the education system is corrupted, they do not volunteer and if they do it is mainly to get experience to have better CVs, students are dissatisfied with their field of study, however, they expect to work in that field, students are practice oriented and mainly want to take courses that would equip them with the necessary skills for job market, they are not as self-reliant and individual as students abroad, and they are dependent on their families and friend "communities", they lack clear notion of why they want to learn that specific field, also students are obsessed with grades and want to get high grades not necessarily through hard work; students do not have coherent learning habits and they need to work out of school with tutors to succeed. The overall difference with a Korean student is that Armenian student does not spend as many hours studying as the Korean student does, and Armenian students often do not pursue academic excellence as much as Korean students do.

Limitations and Avenues for Future Research

This study has several limitations. First, the number of the survey respondents is 78, which is a very small number compared to the total number of student population in Armenia. According to the National Statistical Service of Armenia the total number of students in higher educational institutions in 2015 was 96502, which includes students engaged in undergraduate, graduate and doctoral studies. Although only undergraduate students were of concern for this study, the difference between the surveyed students and the total number of undergraduate students would still be great.

Second limitation is that the research may seem to be centered around AUA because most of the respondents of the survey were students of AUA, the interviewed instructors were from AUA, and

the Entering Freshman Student Surveys of AUA were used. So this again limits the scope of inclusion

of the research. As mentioned one of the interviewed instructors, professor Vahram Ter-Matevosyan,

the situation in AUA is quite different from the one in other universities of Armenia as AUA uses

mostly an American approach to education, which is not similar to the one employed in other

Armenian universities.

Third limitation is that the study does not include any official report or data from the Ministry

of Education of Armenia.

For future research on this topic, a more sophisticated survey with a wider inclusion would help to

obtain relevant data in order to have a clear understanding about student views, attitudes and

perceptions. The results of the survey might be most helpful for the Ministry of Education as it will

provide guidelines for the Ministry of what the students want and expect to learn, and how the

learning process can be made more effective and suitable for the student needs and expectations based

on the data. Depending on the results of a survey with a wider inclusion there may be a need to create

special campaigns in order to shift the student perceptions and make students more system-aware:

help the students know how the education system operates, what their role is in this process, and so

on.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Interview Questions for Instructors

1) Do you have experience of teaching outside of Armenia? If yes, where specifically?

2) What are your observations concerning student attitudes toward education inside and outside of Armenia?

    a) Any differences in learning behaviors and habits,

    b) Level of interest and willingness to learn, motivations,

    c) And any differences in general.

3) How important do you think student attitudes are in influencing their learning behaviors and overall desire to learn?

Table 2: Gender division
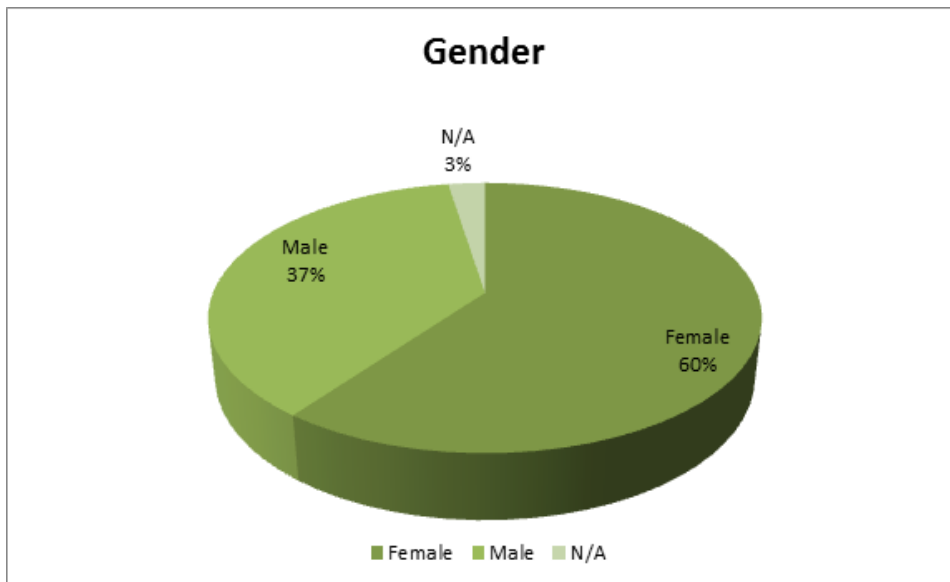
Table 3: Age Range
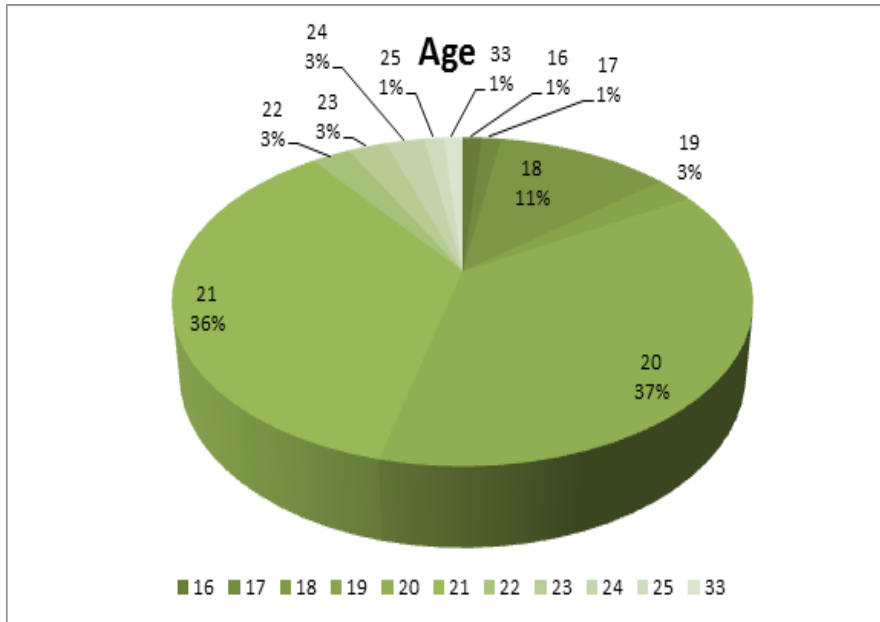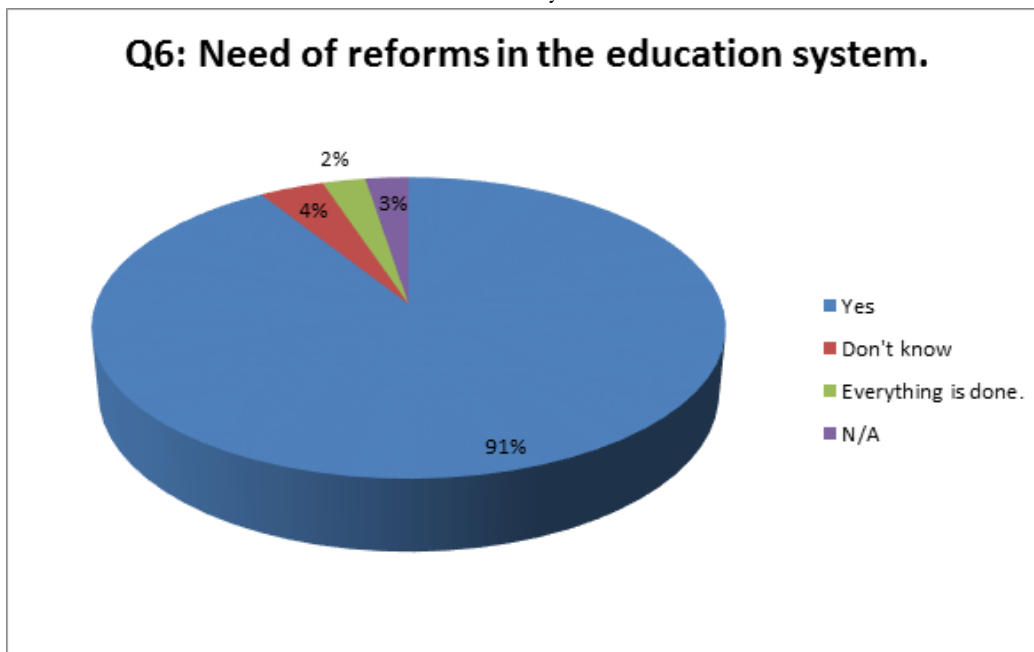

Table 4: Need of reforms in the education system

Table 5: Corruption and Education System

Q7: Corruption and Education system

9%	No corruption
5%	I don't know.
10%	Highly corrupted
71%	Corrupted
5%	N/A
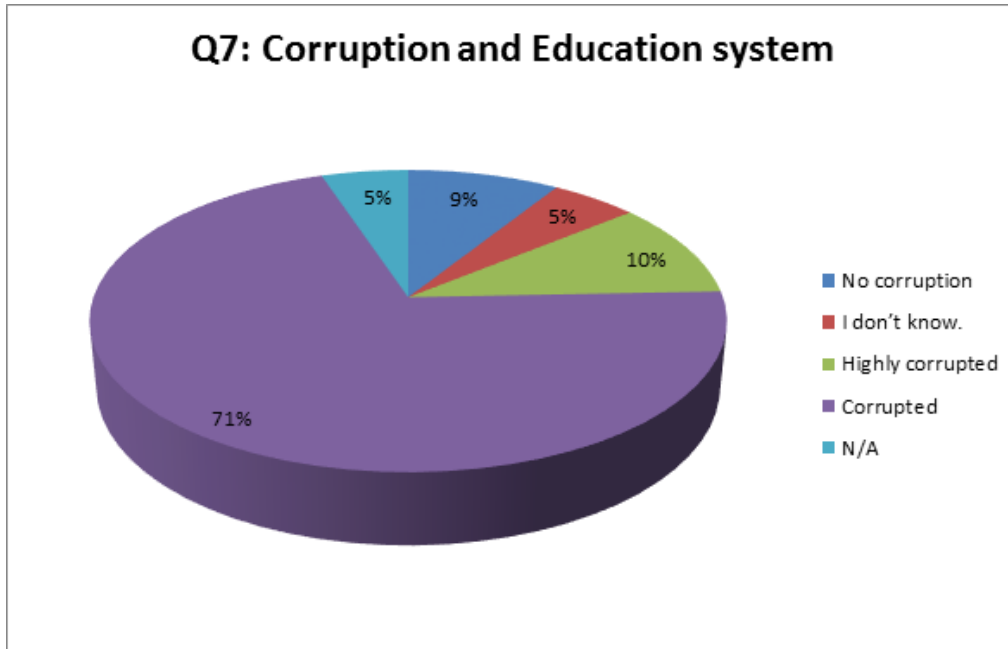
Table 6: Are you engaged in volunteering or other activities not directly required for your studies?

Q10: Are you engaged in volunteering or other activities not directly required for your studies?

54%	No
45%	Yes
1%	N/A
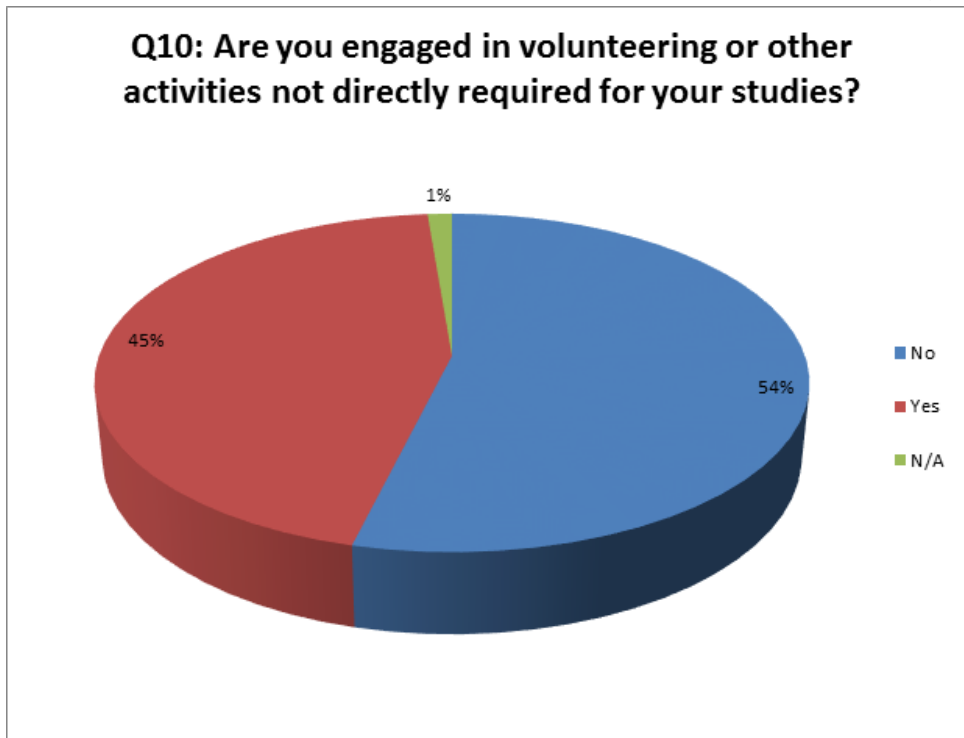
Table 7: What is your choice of field of study based on?
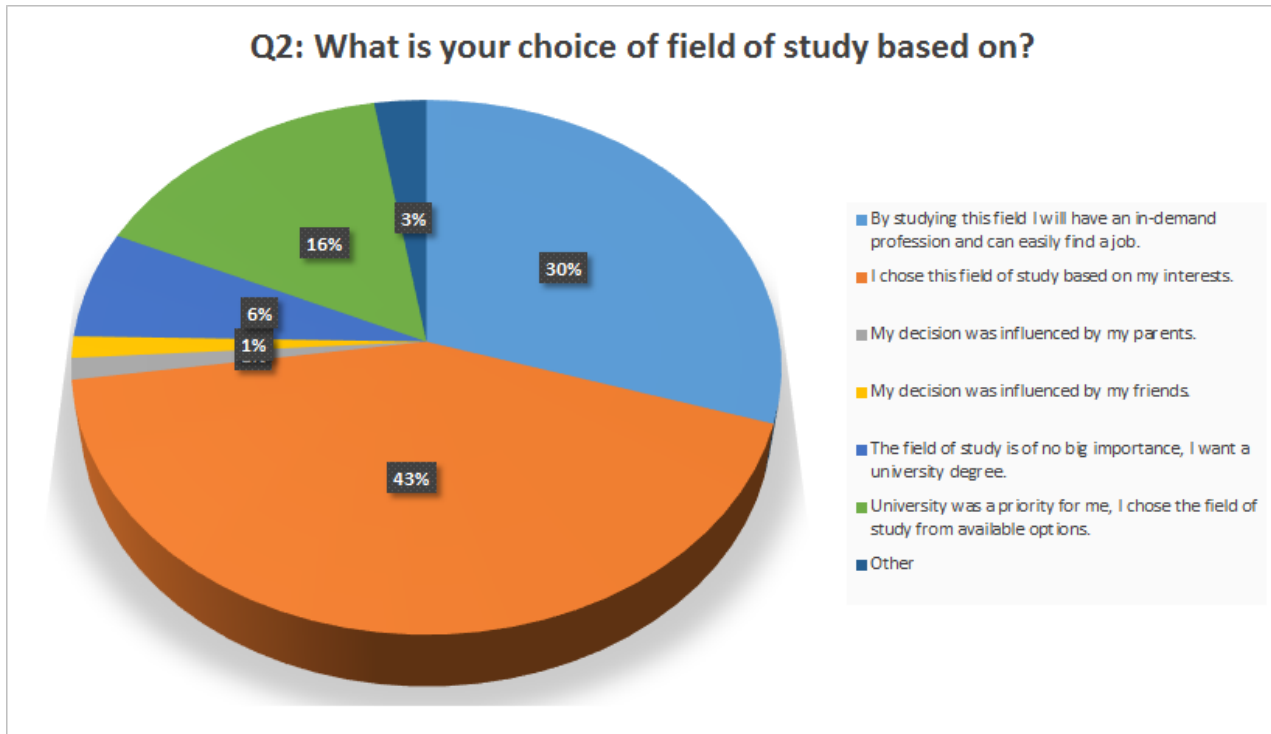

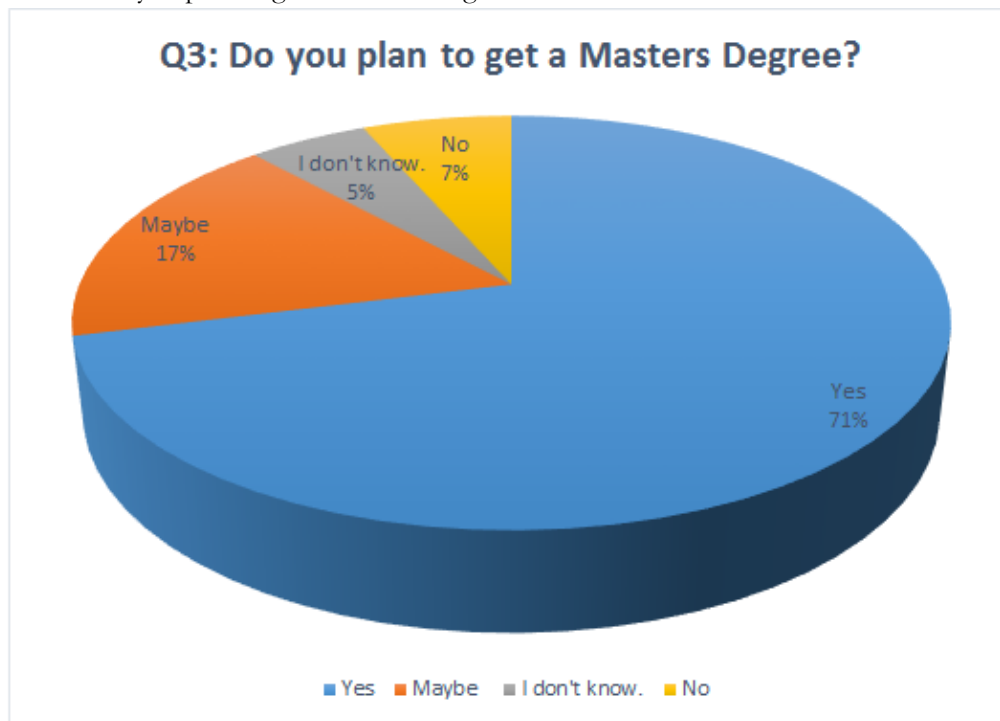Table 8: Do you plan to get a Masters Degree?

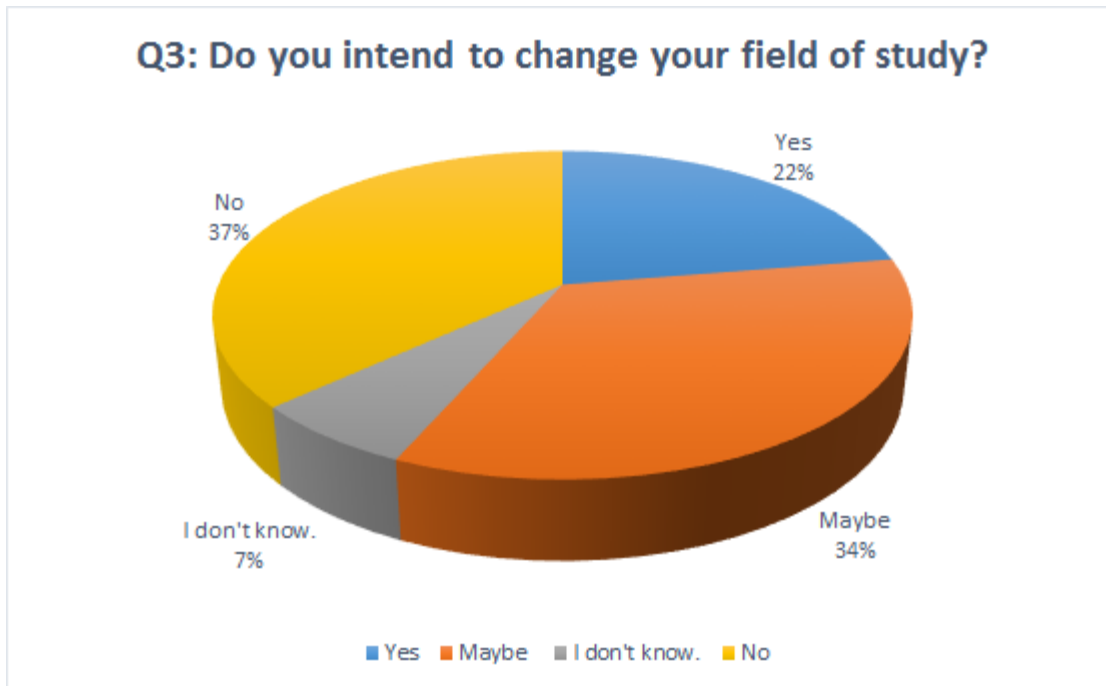Table 9: Do you intend to change your field of study?

Table 10: Do you expect to work in your profession after your graduation?
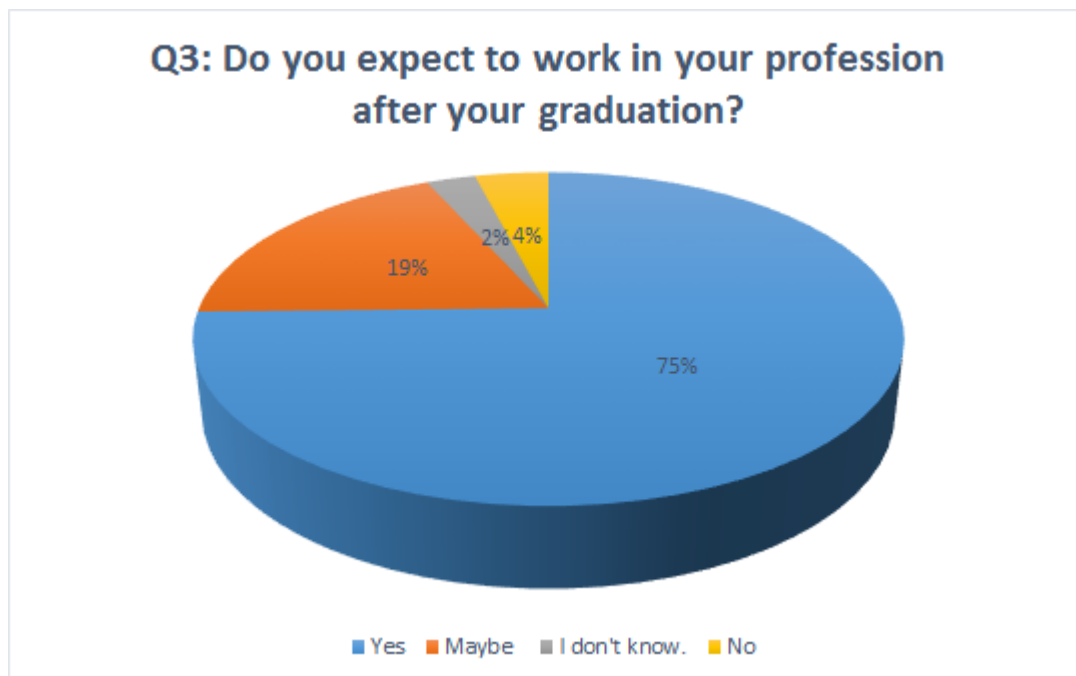
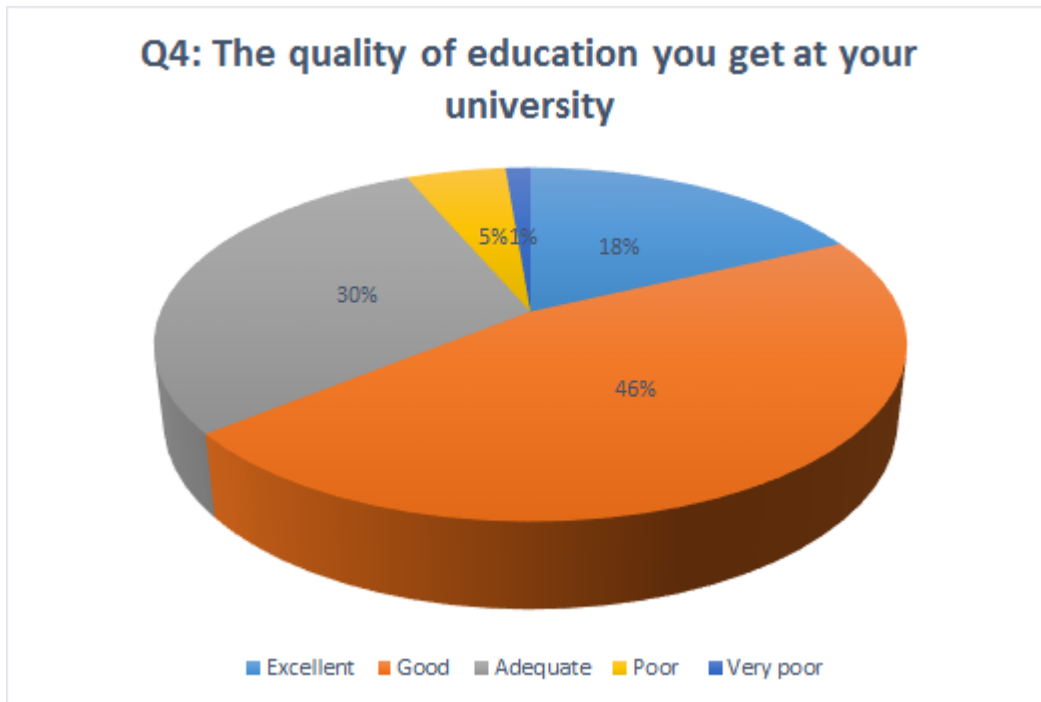Table 11: The quality of education you get at your university

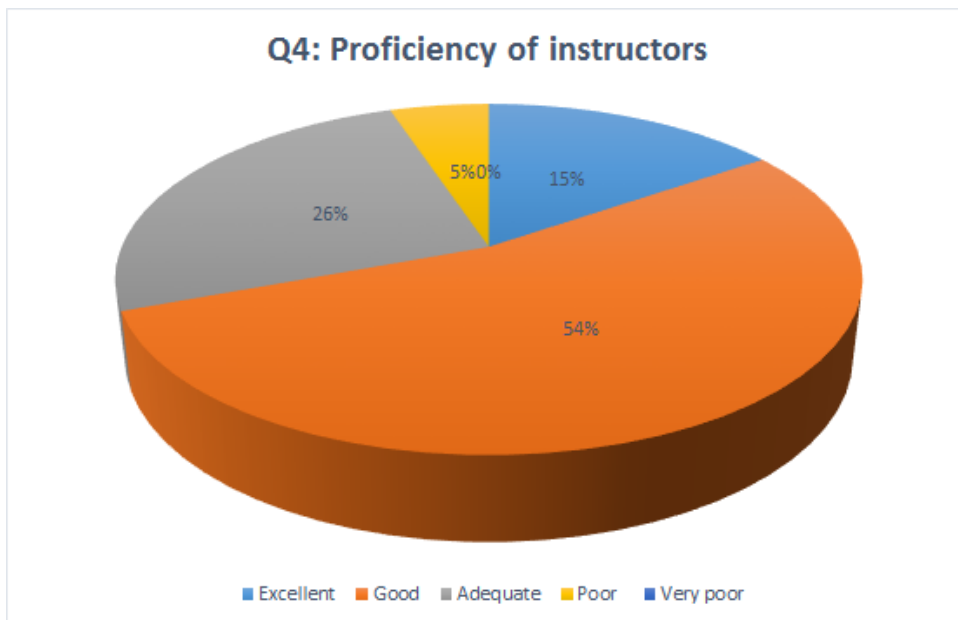
Table 12: Proficiency of instructors

Table 13: Correlation between University and evaluation of the proficiency of instructors

University * Proficiency of instructors Crosstabulation

Count

		Proficiency of instructors				Total
		Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	
University	AUA	8	20	9	0	37
	YSU	2	9	3	3	17
	YSLU	0	8	0	0	8
	ASUE	1	3	6	1	11
	Gavar State University	1	0	0	0	1
	Bauman Moscow State Technical University	0	1	0	0	1
	Armenian National Agrarian University	0	1	1	0	2
	Not mentioned	0	0	1	0	1
Total		12	42	20	4	78

Table 14: Correlation between University and evaluation of the quality of education received

University * The quality of education you get at your university Crosstabulation

Count

		The quality of education you get at your university					Total
		Excellent	Good	Adequate	Poor	Very Poor	
University	AUA	11	18	6	2	0	37
	YSU	0	8	7	1	1	17
	YSLU	0	4	4	0	0	8
	ASUE	1	4	5	1	0	11
	Gavar State University	1	0	0	0	0	1
	Bauman Moscow State Technical University	0	0	1	0	0	1
	Armenian National Agrarian University	0	2	0	0	0	2
	Not mentioned	1	0	0	0	0	1
Total		14	36	23	4	1	78

Table 15: What motivates you to learn?

Q8: What motivates you to learn?

7%
6%
19%
14%
54%

- I have paid for this education, I have no other choice.
- I learn in order not to fail the course.
- I am eager to learn new things.
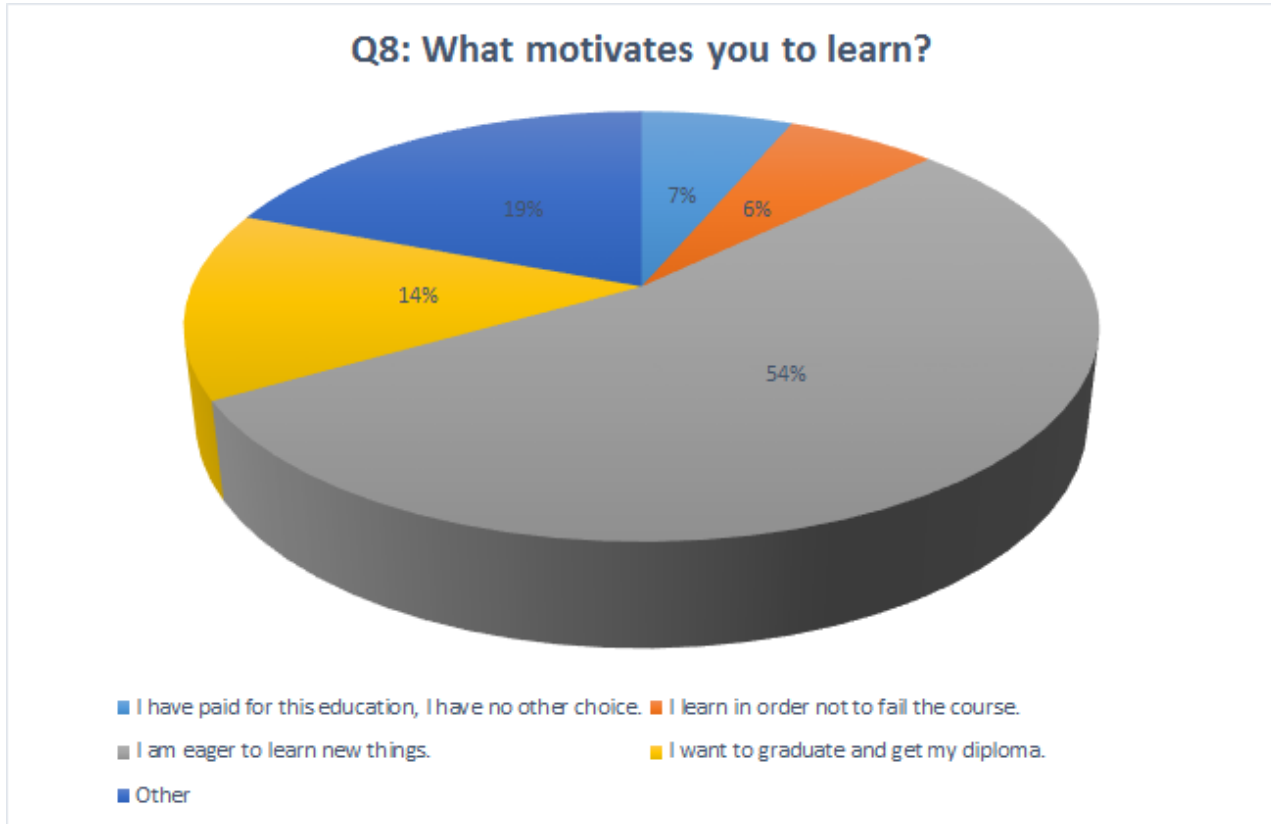- I want to graduate and get my diploma.
- Other

Table 16: AUA 2015 Entering Freshman Student Survey: High School experiences

During your last two years of high school, how often did you do the following?									
Description	Entering Freshman Student Survey								
	2013			2014			2015		
	N	%	Mean	N	%	Mean	N	%	Mean
Acknowledge different perspectives in class discussions or assignments	139	74.7	2.97	142	60.9	2.80	166	64.3	2.83
Revise writing assignments before submission	114	61.0	2.77	155	66.8	2.92	153	59.5	2.74
Review your notes after class by yourself or with a classmate	107	55.7	2.67	145	60.9	2.74	149	58.5	2.68
Prepare outlines of readings or other assignments	110	58.2	2.66	116	49.6	2.57	123	48.1	2.53
Use data to understand or examine a real-world problem such as unemployment, environmental issue, public health	84	44.4	2.46	96	40.9	2.39	106	41.3	2.40
Not do your homework	14	7.3	1.76	11	4.6	1.66	17	6.6	1.73