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MOTIVATIONS FOR THE BESSARABIAN YOUTH TO STUDY IN ROMANIAN UNIVERSITIES

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Abstract

This paper explores the decisions of Bessarabian youth to study in a branch of a Romanian university. We used data collected from individual interviews with 58 students. We find that uncertainty and the material constraints played a major role in their choice. We also identify some factors with relevant influence on the schooling decisions, such as the perceptions about the costs of education, the wage expectations, and the compatibility with the future profession.

Keywords: Schooling decisions, Bessarabian students, Economics high education

JEL Classification: I20, I23, I29

INTRODUCTION

In the last years, the individual schooling decisions became an important subject for the economics of education. Numerous papers focused on the factors influencing the youth choices about their education: the wage expectations, the perceptions about the costs of education, the parental influence and the academic performances self-perceptions (for example: Blank et al., 1990; Wolter, Zbinden, 2001; Quigley, Rubinfeld, 1993; Keane, Wolpin, 2001; Brunello, Lucifora, 2001; Willis Rosen, 1979). Some studies revealed the necessity of understanding the youth expectations regarding the higher education advantages (for example: Manski, 1993; Hoernack, Collins, 1990). Some specific circumstances have also to be taken into consideration in the analysis of schooling decisions (Keane, Wolpin, 1997; Beffy et al., 2009).

In this paper we approach some factors that influenced the choice of Youth from the Republic of Moldova to study Economics in a Romanian university. The political and the cultural relations between the Republic of Moldova and Romania are a sensitive subject. Most of the actual territory of the Republic of Moldova belonged to the medieval principality of Moldavia, which is a precursor of the modern state of Romania. In 1812 the Russian Empire annexed the east half of Moldavia, which was later called Bessarabia. After the Russian Empire had collapsed, Bessarabia united with Romania in April 1918. In June 1940, the Soviet Union annexed Bessarabia. During the Second World War, for almost three years, Romania regained Bessarabia but finally the territory was reincorporated in the Soviet Union. In August 1991, when the Soviet Union disintegrated, the Republic of Moldova declared its independence. Romania offered political and economic support to the new independent state. However, some important political entities from the Republic of Moldova are hostile to the close relations with Romania preferring, instead, the relations with Russia.

Romania's help for the Republic of Moldova included the education financing for a large number of Bessarabian Young people. In this context, a Romanian university, “Dunarea de Jos” from Galati established in Cahul, a town from the Republic of Moldova close to the border with Romania. Some years ago, the worsening relations between the governments of the two countries suspended the activity in Cahul of this branch. However, after parliamentary elections from April 2009, a coalition of the pro European Union parties came to power in the Republic of Moldova and the new government allowed the branch of the Romanian university to resume its activity in Cahul in the autumn of 2010. Our investigation is based on individual interviews with a group of 58 students from Economics programs of this branch. We questioned them about the circumstances in which they chose to study in a Romanian university.

The rest of our paper is organized as follows. The second part describes the data and methodology used in our investigation. The third part presents the investigation results and the fourth part concludes.

DATA AND METHODOLOGY

In our investigation we use a sample of 58 Bessarabian young people which study at three programs from economic fields in the Cahul branch of the “Dunarea de Jos” University. They represent 81.7 percent from the total of 71 students at economics programs of the branch. All of them had to make decisions, in the autumn of 2010, about their high education. In the time period of our investigation their ages were between 18 and 20 years.

From the sample of 58 students 40 (69 percents) are women while the rest of 18 (31 percents) are men. 11 of these students (19 percents) enlisted, in the same time, to a state university from the Republic of Moldova, for other fields than economics.

We collected data from individual interviews which occurred between January and May 2011. In these interviews we questioned the 58 students about the factors that influenced their decision to study Economics in a Romanian university.

EMPIRICAL RESULTS

The interviews revealed some aspects with relevant impact on the schooling decisions of 58 students. We found they took into consideration not only the Republic of Moldova but also Romania as a country where they could find a job. All the students consider that a diploma from a Romanian university will help them to find a job in Romania. In the autumn of 2010 they chose between five fields of high education:

- economics;
- law;
- engineering;
- natural sciences (physics, chemistry or biology);
- philology.

We noticed they considered that most of the graduates in the field of natural sciences would find jobs in education. From the individual interviews we identified five factors with relevant influence on the schooling decisions:

- perceptions about the costs of education;
- wage expectations;
- self-perceptions of the academic performances;
- compatibility with the future profession;
- parental influence.

We asked the students to evaluate the impact of these factors using five degrees of importance. From their answers we found that an important part of the group assigned a big or a very big importance to the costs of education, to the compatibility with the future profession and to the wages. Instead, the self-perceptions of academic performances and the parental influence received less importance (Table 1). In order to facilitate the comparison we transposed the five degrees of importance on a rating scale from 1 to 5 (1 for "Very Little Importance" and 5 for "Very Big Importance"). The descriptive statistics resulted indicate that perceptions about the costs of education are the most important factor, followed by the compatibility with the future profession and by the wage expectations (Table 2).

The high score obtained by perceptions about the costs of education could be explained by the poor material situation of most of the students. This fact acted as a constraint denying them the study in a university from another town, as Chisinau, the Republic of Moldova's capital. From this point of view, the "Dunarea de Jos" University branch offered the advantage the studies were entirely financed by the Romanian government which gave also a scholarship for each student.

The compatibility with the future profession played also a major role in the schooling decisions. Many students eliminated from their decisional alternatives some professions considered as incompatible with their skills. We asked students to evaluate their compatibility with the five fields of high education taken into consideration in the autumn of 2010. From their answers resulted an obvious preference for the economics studies (Table 3). We transposed these answers on a rating scale from 1 to 5 (1 for "Very Little Compatibility" and 5 for "Very Big Compatibility"). The descriptive statistics, presented in the Table 4, shows a very low score for the engineering field. Especially women from the group considered the engineering profession was too dangerous and tough for them.

More than a half of students allotted a big or a very big importance to the wage expected from the future profession. However, some of them explained that in the actual circumstances of the crisis it was very hard to predict the remuneration for any profession. We asked them to characterize the wages they expected from the professions associated to the five fields of high education. Since all of them take into consideration the possibilities to find a job in the Republic of Moldova and also in Romania our interviews approached the wages from both countries. Regarding the Republic of Moldova we found that 22 students (37.9%) considered the engineering field would provide big or very big wages, while 21 students (36.2%) associated the natural sciences field with little wages (Table 5). We transposed the five degrees on a rating scale from 1 to 5 (1 for "Very Little Wages" and 5 for "Very Big Wages") and the descriptive statistics obtained proved the biggest expectations about the wages were associated to the economics field (Table 6).

We found that students' expectations about the wages from Romania were formed based on mass media or on the information from friends and relatives who worked or study there. Excepting the engineering field, the expectations about the wages were higher than the similar professions from the Republic of Moldova (Table 7).

The descriptive statistics obtained from transposing the answer on the same rating scale indicated an obvious ????????????? of the wages provided by the economics field (Table 8).

The academic performances self-perceptions received a considerable importance from the group of students. Most of them graduated the high schools with good results that brought them confidence in the schooling decisions.

The students' answers indicated a low parental influence on their decisions. However this aspect is often underestimated by the young people. Only women admitted a big or a very big influence of their parents. We asked the 11 students which enlisted, in the same time, in two universities (the branch of "Dunarea de Jos" University and the state university from the Republic of Moldova) about the reasons of their options. In their opinions, in the actual context of uncertainty, the graduation in multiple fields could be very important in finding a job. Some of them are also worried that, in the case of a new change of the political regime, the studies in a Romanian university will not be recognized.

CONCLUSIONS

In this paper we approached the circumstances in which the Bessarabian young people chose to study Economics in a Romanian university. In our investigation we used a sample of 58 students from the Republic of Moldova. We found that in their schooling decisions some characteristics of the future professions and some aspects of the fields of high education counted.

The interviews revealed the students took into consideration not only the Republic of Moldova but also Romania as countries where they could find jobs. The labor markets from both countries experienced complex evolutions in the last decades. The economic situation aggravation from 1990s led to significant immigration from these countries to richer countries. However, Romania, although among the European Union poorest members, is richer than the Republic of Moldova, so it was aimed by many Bessarabian workers. The common language and the facilities in gaining the Romanian citizenship influenced significantly their decisions. Some years before the actual global crisis, when the Romanian economy experienced a spectacular growth, some of its branches confronted with deficits of the labor force. In this period of time, the Bessarabian citizens' inflows were seen as a solution to attenuate these deficits. Although the global crisis changed dramatically this situation, it is expected that on long term the linkages between the labor markets from the two countries to strengthen. From this perspective the schooling decisions of Youth from the Republic of Moldova represent an important aspect.

We found five relevant factors for the students' choices among the high education fields: perceptions about the costs of education, compatibility with the future profession, wage expectations, self-perceptions of the academic performances and parental influence. It was revealed the preponderance of the three factors for most of the students. Such findings could be explained by some specific characteristics of the students' situation. The poor material situation of many students' families is responsible for the considerable importance allotted to the perceptions about the costs of education. The uncertainty played also a major role in the schooling decisions. In the context of the actual crisis it is very difficult to predict the wages evolution. There is also a significant uncertainty about the political situation from the Republic of Moldova and some students are worried that a new change of the government could affect the activity of the Romanian university branch from Cahul.

This investigation could be extended by including the Bessarabian students from other Romanian universities. It could also approach the influence of the global crisis on the schooling decisions.

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APPENDIX

Table 1 - The importance allotted to the factors that influenced the schooling decisions

Factor Degree of importance	Perceptions about the costs of education	Wage expectations	Self-perceptions of academic performances	Compatibility with the future profession	Parental influence
Very Big Importance	24	19	8	21	4
Big Importance	17	16	12	15	7
Medium Importance	9	12	28	11	10
Little Importance	6	7	7	6	16
Very Little Importance	2	4	3	5	21
Total	58	58	58	58	58

Table 2 - Descriptive statistics of the importance allotted to the factors that influenced schooling decisions

Factor Indicator	Perceptions about the costs of education	Wage expectations	Self-perceptions of academic performances	Compatibility with the future profession	Parental influence
Mean	3.948	3.672	3.259	3.707	2.259
Standard Error	0.150	0.164	0.134	0.170	0.166
Median	4.000	4.000	3.000	4.000	2.000
Standard Deviation	1.146	1.248	1.018	1.298	1.264
Sample Variance	1.313	1.557	1.037	1.685	1.599
Kurtosis	-0.065	-0.590	-0.031	-0.548	-0.525
Skewness	-0.910	-0.633	-0.032	-0.724	0.731
Count	58	58	58	58	58

Table 3 – Student perceptions about the compatibility with the future profession

Factor Degree of Compatibility	Economics	Law	Engineering	Natural Sciences	Philology

Very Big Compatibility	38	6	2	7	8
Big Compatibility	14	12	4	11	15
Medium Compatibility	6	19	7	24	17
Little Compatibility	0	17	16	12	13
Very Little Compatibility	0	4	29	4	5
Total	58	58	58	58	58

Table 4 - Descriptive statistics of the compatibility with the future profession

Factor					
Indicator	Economics	Law	Engineering	Natural Sciences	Philology
Mean	4.552	2.983	1.862	3.086	3.138
Standard Error	0.089	0.144	0.144	0.142	0.154
Median	5.000	3.000	1.500	3.000	3.000
Standard Deviation	0.680	1.100	1.099	1.081	1.176
Sample Variance	0.462	1.210	1.209	1.168	1.384
Kurtosis	0.268	-0.638	0.908	-0.391	-0.817
Skewness	-1.234	0.199	1.267	0.083	-0.076
Count	58	58	58	58	58

Table 5 – Wage expectations for some fields of education in Republic of Moldova

Factor					
Expectation	Economics	Law	Engineering	Natural Sciences	Philology
Very Big Wages	4	4	5	0	2
Big Wages	19	15	17	6	7
Medium Wages	29	31	28	22	24
Little Wages	5	6	5	19	17
Very Little Wages	1	2	3	11	8
Total	58	58	58	58	58

Table 6 - Descriptive statistics of the wage expectations for some fields of education in Republic of Moldova

Factor					
Indicator	Economics	Law	Engineering	Natural Sciences	Philology
Mean	3.345	3.224	3.276	2.397	2.621
Standard Error	0.0	0.113	0.122	0.120	0.130
Median	3.000	3.000	3.000	2.000	3.000
Standard Deviation	0.807	0.859	0.933	0.917	0.988
Sample Variance	0.651	0.738	0.870	0.840	0.976
Kurtosis	0.539	0.686	0.512	-0.819	-0.146
Skewness	-0.096	-0.113	-0.319	-0.037	0.160
Count	58	58	58	58	58

Table 7 – Wage expectations for some fields of education in Romania

Factor					
Expectation	Economics	Law	Engineering	Natural Sciences	Philology

Very Big Wages	12	7	3	3	5
Big Wages	20	17	11	8	14
Medium Wages	25	29	32	25	28
Little Wages	1	4	8	21	11
Very Little Wages	0	1	4	1	0
Total	58	58	58	58	58

Table 8 - Descriptive statistics of the Wage expectations for some fields of education in Romania

Factor					
Indicator	Economics	Law	Engineering	Natural Sciences	Philology
Mean	3.741	3.431	3.017	2.845	3.224
Standard Error	0.106	0.113	0.119	0.115	0.113
Median	4.000	3.000	3.000	3.000	3.000
Standard Deviation	0.807	0.861	0.908	0.875	0.859
Sample Variance	0.651	0.741	0.824	0.765	0.738
Kurtosis	-1.007	0.277	0.606	0.208	-0.320
Skewness	0.304	0.050	-0.180	0.639	0.402
Count	58	58	58	58	58