PRACTICAL ASPECTS OF STUDENTS’ QUALITY OF LIFE

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The study of the scientific literature concerning the concept of quality of life makes it possible to draw conclusions on this concept positioning in different sub-sectors of science, the convergence with its concept of standard of living as well as various approaches to quality of life in quantitative and qualitative evaluation. The author entirely supports the scientific opinion, which emphasises the subjective evaluation of quality of life, i.e., quality of life is subjectively expressed in the form of individual's satisfaction with life in general. It consists of certain elements that are important to the individual or affect his quality of life. The aim of the research is to analyse the students' understanding and interpretation of the concept 'quality of life', as well as gather and interpret the respondents' subjective evaluation of quality of life. Students are the basis of this study. General elements characterising students’ quality of life are available education services, disposable income, health care, cultural and entertainment events, sense of ‘belonging’ to a family, acquaintances and friends. The author's initial assumptions regarding the fact that most respondents would express dissatisfaction with certain elements of quality of life and quality of life in general, were not confirmed by the study.

Keywords: access to services, belonging, quality of life, satisfaction, subjective evaluation.  
JEL codes: I30, A20.

Introduction

Studies on the theoretical aspects of the quality of life and indicators applicable in the evaluation have gained a great impact in global scientific and practical studies. From the basic research carried out in recent years in Latvia, there can be mentioned two, which provide a summary of a complex concept of quality of life. In the monograph (Lavriņenko, 2010) the information on the concept ‘standard of living’ and evolution of the economic theory is summarised. In her turn, A. Pridāne (2009), in her doctoral thesis, reflects the positioning of the concept ‘quality of life’ in different disciplines. The author of this study left the research on theoretical aspects of the quality of life aside because they were provided in the above-mentioned studies. In addition, it should be pointed out that the concept of quality of life has a significant number of definitions in the scientific literature. The significance of a particular economic concept or a phenomenon in the society is grounded by the resonance in the national policy documents.

Accordingly, the author of this research wants to emphasise Latvian National Development Plan, which defines that quality of life is a complex social, economic and political concept that covers a wide, range of inhabitants’ living conditions in the country. It is characterised by a consumer level available to individual, social services and quality, as well as an opportunity to get education, to live long and healthy life and to participate in country’s national political life. Latvian National Development Plan identifies the following components that characterise the quality of life: material
prosperity, stable job and sufficient salary, level of education, health status, quality of housing, infrastructure, environmental quality, cultural environment and cultural heritage.

One of the most popular global researches since 1990 has been the analytical annual edition – Human Development Report of United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which identifies the standard of living of the world's population and also ranks the countries regarding this particular parameter. The Human Development Index is a complex index, which integrates three components (Latvijas...2011):

- person's physical existence and health – anticipated life expectancy for children born in the particular year;
- the level of education and knowledge – combination of two parameters: the level of literacy skills in the adult population (reading / writing skills) and the number of people from all levels of formal education;
- material level of inhabitants – recalculated gross domestic product (GDP) per capita regarding the purchasing power parity.

Quality of life is a broader set of operating rules, which also includes the standard of living, as well as such components that can be related to ecological living environment, social welfare, political climate, and psychological comfort (Myers, 1987). Essentially, the quality of life is the objectively subjective characterization of human existence conditions which is dependent on the development of one’s own needs, one’s subjective perception and life evaluation (Lavriņenko, 2010).

The aim of this research is to analyse students’ understanding and interpretation of the concept ‘quality of life’, as well as to gather and interpret the respondents' subjective evaluation of quality of life.

The object of the research is objectively subjective evaluation of students’ quality of life.

In this research the author used general scientific research methods: information analysis and synthesis, logically constructive, monographic, questionnaires, data grouping and graphical display techniques.

The basis of the investigation is the pilot research done in the framework of the project “Lingvo-Cultural and Socio-Economic Aspects of Territorial Identity in the Development of the Region of Latgale” (Nr. 2009/0227/1DP/1.1.1.2.0/09/APIA/VIAA/071).

The author carried out a survey among the students of the 3rd course of the Faculty of Economics at Rezekne Higher Education Institution in order to work out the practical part of the research (60 respondents).

Results

The study of the scientific literature concerning the concept of quality of life makes it possible to draw conclusions on this concept positioning in different subsectors of science, the convergence with its concept of standard of living as well as various approaches to quality of life in quantitative and qualitative evaluation. The author entirely supports the scientific opinion, which emphasises the subjective asses-
sment of quality of life, i.e., quality of life is subjectively expressed in the form of individual's satisfaction with life in general. It consists of certain elements that are important to an individual or affect his quality of life.

Undoubtedly, the elements of subjective evaluation of quality of life vary depending on the group of individuals. The author of this article as a basis of this research chose the students of Rezekne Higher Education Institution, who are 20–22 years old, studying economics or entrepreneurship. At the early stage of the study, in order to clarify the view of this group on the key elements making up the quality of life, ‘brainstorming’ activity was organised. Thus it led to the selection of criteria set by the potential respondents as crucial elements characterizing their quality of life. It is worth saying that from the selected elements the students indicated accessibility of health care as an essential characteristic of quality of life. It can be explained by potential health problems of younger generation, as well as because of the location outside their place, concerning also accessibility of a family doctor. Subsequently, the following questions were included into the questionnaire after the brainstorming results had been gathered:

- are you satisfied with the accessibility of health care;
- are you satisfied with available education services;
- are you satisfied with your access to cultural and recreational services;
- are you satisfied with your disposable income;
- do you feel valued in your family;
- do you feel valued among your friends and acquaintances.

The questionnaire included questions characterising the respondent's evaluation regarding the importance of a particular element of quality of life. The overall analysis integrated questions about respondents’ gender, employment (employed / unemployed), which could affect the respondents’ evaluation of disposable income adequacy. The questionnaire represented questions on the overall evaluation of individual's quality of life in general. The survey was conducted in November 2011, i.e. during the period when Latvia is experiencing its downturn in economy. Moreover, the respondents study in the region where, according to the data from the Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia, the rate of unemployment is the highest and income levels are the lowest. Taking into account the objective situation, the author of this study initially put forward the following hypothesis: the majority (2/3) of respondents will provide a negative evaluation concerning certain components of quality of life.

Processing and interpretation of the data obtained in a survey (see Figure 1) show that over 50% of respondents are dissatisfied with the level of their disposable income (78%) and access to cultural and entertainment events (53%).
Exactly half (50%) of respondents were dissatisfied with access to health care. The majority of respondents (90%) are satisfied with available education services. Furthermore, almost all of them (92% and 97%) feel valued in families or among their acquaintances and friends, which is an essential social aspect of quality of life.

Fig. 2. Respondents’ evaluation structure regarding the significance of certain elements of quality of life
Figure 2 summarizes the evaluation of importance given to each of the elements characterising the quality of life. As key elements the majority of respondents (2/3) stated the following:

- availability of education services;
- disposable income;
- assessment in the family.

It should be noted that the majority of respondents gave their positive and subjective evaluation on both education services and assessment in the family.

The majority of respondents indicated the accessibility of health care and cultural and entertainment events as vital ones, however the subjective evaluation was not as high.

It was possible to provide one’s present evaluation on quality of life according to the Likert scale with five possible response options:

- high / completely satisfied;
- high / mostly satisfied;
- average/ mostly dissatisfied;
- below average/ completely dissatisfied;
- difficult to say.

![Fig. 3. Respondents’ grouping according to their present subjective evaluation on the quality of life and gender](image)

Figure 3 interprets the grouping of answers by gender. According to the results it can be concluded that in overall 60% of the respondents are completely or generally satisfied with their current quality of life, which can certainly be evaluated positively, in addition, the proportion of satisfied men and women, in the total number of men and women, is similar. (65% and 72%).
One of the indices, characterising the group of respondents, was the question concerning the paid employment. It can be concluded that approximately 13% of respondents are full-time students who work in parallel to their studies. The fact that a student is employed may affect the evaluation of quality of life in two ways. Increase in income, being employed, can have a positive impact on quality of life, however, combination of work and studies reduces time spent on leisure activities, which, in its turn, may adversely affect the respondents' subjective evaluation of their quality of life. Data collected in Figure 4 shows that the evaluation of the respondents who have paid employment, is structurally the same.

Conclusions

1. The concept ‘quality of life’ and its elements have been paid much attention in scientific and applied studies, in its turn, in order to investigate certain society groups, it is desirable to develop/select the criteria, which describe this particular group taking into consideration individuals’ objectively subjective opinion of the group, concerning the key elements of quality of life.

2. Students are the basis of this study. General elements, characterising students’ quality of life, are available education services, disposable income, health care, cultural and entertainment events, sense of ‘belonging’ to a family, acquaintances and friends.

3. The respondents provided varied evaluation on the importance of each of the elements characterising the quality of life, the overwhelming majority of respondents indicated disposable income as a crucial element, in its turn, only 27% marked availability of cultural and entertainment events as extremely important, basically it reflects the respondents’ applied approach, which from the author’s point of view can be considered as a positive aspect.

4. The results obtained do not show considerable differences in the respondents’ evaluation on the quality of life according to their grouping by gender as well as among the students who are employed in parallel to their studies.

5. The hypothesis initially put forward by the author that the majority of the respondents would express dissatisfaction with certain key elements of quality of life and quality of life in general, was not confirmed by the study.
Literature


PRAKTINIAI STUDENTŲ GYVENIMO KOKYBĖS ASEKTAI

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Summary


Raktiniai žodžiai: paslaugų prieinamumas, priklausomumas, gyvenimo kokybė, pasitenkinimas, subjektyvus gyvenimo kokybės vertinimas.

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