

“WHY AM I HERE?” ANALYSES OF THE VALUES AND MEAN- INGS OF HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH THE EYES OF STUDENTS

Ekaterina A. Samorodova

French Language Department,
Moscow State Institute of International Relations
Prospekt Vernadskogo, 76, 119454, Moscow, Russia
E-mail address: samorodova.ekaterina.78@mail.ru
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-0702-0253>

Liubov L. Chitakhova

French Language Department,
Moscow State Institute of International Relations
Prospekt Vernadskogo, 76, 119454, Moscow, Russia
E-mail address: lchitakhova@inno.mgimo.ru
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0009-0006-5074-9070>

Samira Merzouk

University Mohamed Lamine Debaghine
Setif 2, El Hidab, SETIf 19000, Algeria
E-mail address: s.merzouk@univ-setif2.dz
ORCID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-3360-0953>

ABSTRACT

Aim. The question of the value and meaning of higher education in the modern world, in the era of new technologies and opportunities, takes on a new meaning. What do future professionals expect from universities, what do they perceive as their meaning or points, and what kind of values do they respect? This is the primary research question of the current study. The authors analysed the meanings, expectations, and values of students at several humanities universities worldwide, as reflected in questionnaires, in order to answer this very question and identify the main reasons for pursuing higher education.

Methods. The authors used comparative, contrastive, analytical, and systematic research methods. The main basis for obtaining the results were anonymous questionnaires and surveys, in the form of tests and open-ended questions.

Results. The authors conducted an in-depth analysis of students' reflections on the values and meanings of higher education, their main reasons and needs for pursuing it. They also identified the main criteria by which the students' answers and reflections were classified: pragmatic, social-status, and existential.

Conclusions. The authors concluded that actually higher education at a university is not merely an end in itself nor the final milestone on the path to professional mastery by achieving professional competencies. Higher education is generally viewed as a process of self-improvement, self-determination, self-knowledge, and self-development, the primary foundation for developing the necessary competencies and skills needed to adapt to new conditions and create the architecture of one's professional identity.

Keywords: higher education, values and meaning, mentoring, professional identity, self-development

INTRODUCTION

What is the main reason to study at a university today?! What to become nowadays! Millions of young persons, leaving the doors of lyceums, are united by the same dream and preoccupied with the same deal, regardless of nationality, country, skin colour, or native language – the only thought that fills their minds is their future path, the one that lies beyond secondary school. Higher education, as a continuation of secondary, signifies a conscious choice for each person, implying professional growth, personal development, and social benefit. Less than 10 years ago, the question as “Why to go to university?” would not have generated much need for in-depth study, since the goals were absolutely obvious: obtaining a specific specialty in demand in the labour market, one that would meet all the expectations (high salary, social benefits, a high-ranking position, etc.) and the candidate's interests (Esmond et al., 2026).

Due to the rapidly changing paradigm of the labour market, driven by the emergence of new technologies and the development of artificial intelligence, the need for a long-term classical education focused on acquiring a single specialty is not always relevant. More often than not, future specialists choose a complementary profession in addition to their acquired specialty in order to ensure competitiveness and find fulfillment in a constantly changing world.

The arrival and swift ascent of cutting-edge technologies have paved the way for a rich landscape of readily accessible avenues – not only for acquiring needed knowledge and skills one may seek but also for pursuing the journey of self-realisation in all its dimensions.

As an example, online platforms, webinars, conferences, and online courses are in some cases sources of fulfillment primary or secondary and the search for necessary competencies. As recent surveys have shown, nowadays more than half of respon-

dents aged 18–25 acquired a specialty through online platforms in addition to their primary education (Savina, 2024).

In certain instances, the newly acquired area of expertise – often one that diverges entirely from a specialist’s original field – comes to serve not merely as a complementary skill, but constitutes the primary wellspring of income.

For some respondents, the path to their professional calling unfolded entirely outside the walls of a university – forged instead through online classes, webinars, and the boundless resources of the digital space – while for other specialists, meeting the relentless demands of an ever-evolving and changing market necessitated a far more complicated journey: one of multi-stage, multidisciplinary training, where depth and breadth intertwined to shape a truly versatile specialty.

So why study at a university?

THE ETERNAL QUESTION IN NEW CONDITIONS

Currently, the question of why one should pursue higher education at university requires systematic and thorough analysis, both by candidates themselves and by those organising the educational process.

This study examines key ideas about the value and meaning of modern higher education in a changing world. It analyses students’ reflections on their expectations and search for meaning in pursuing higher education.

The very concept of education – particularly higher education at its fullest, the very literary sense – embodies two intertwined meanings. The first is “education”: that profound and gradual journey through which a person shapes not merely professional knowledge, but personality, worldview, convictions, all within the context of a chosen field. The second is “formation”: the deliberate and clear construction of a professional identity, one whose knowledge, competencies, and intellectual structure are precisely calibrated to the demands of a given reality (Danek, 2019).

“Education” reflects a humanistic, person-centered paradigm and is primarily about discovering one’s uniqueness through the process of education. It facilitates or unleashes a person’s hidden talents (Titova & Puraeva, 2006). In the context of higher education, this process is aimed at the creation and development of professional competencies, knowledge, as well as critical thinking, independence, creativity (in any field), and moral qualities through educational mechanisms and techniques (Green, 2013).

“Education” serves to improve natural intelligence, its growth, development, and application. The famous quote by the great thinker and founder of German philosophy, Immanuel Kant, which became the motto of Enlightenment scholars and humanists (Maria Montessori, John Dewey), perfectly reflects the main idea of education – “Have the courage to use your mind” (in Latin – Sapere aude). Kant calls on people to think independently, to be intellectually bold and independent (Wood, 2024).

This is simultaneously a requirement to take responsibility for one's judgments: your thinking = your decision = your responsibility and freedom (Ryall, 2017).

In the modern context, this also calls for a critical approach to information, fact-checking, and forming one's own reasoned position, as well as the ability to discern and acquire true knowledge and use it to achieve professional goals.

On the other hand, "formation" involves the specific preparation of a future specialist, a professional in their chosen field, with a defined set of necessary competencies and skills that will enable them to develop in their profession, achieve high results, and actively compete with other specialists. In this context, the development of deep personal qualities, as in the case of education, is not at issue. The goals of the educational process are becoming more practical and aimed at training in a specific format.

In recent years, given the rapid development of new technologies, higher education models have been restructured in line with global changes. Increasingly, face-to-face forms of education are being replaced by distance learning, with hybrid inclusions using online resources and digital platforms. Digital universities are no longer a new concept (Tan, 2025).

Artificial intelligence is receiving significant attention from researchers worldwide as a primary, rather than alternative, source of knowledge. Many countries are using robotic assistants to take over routine teacher work, including teaching foreign language reading, practicing algorithms and rules, and so on (Su et al., 2022).

The use of robotic assistants may be associated with many reasons, both political and social, but the essence remains clear: human resources can effectively be replaced by machines if there is such a demand and need (Su & Yang, 2022).

Many researchers believe that digital, artificially intelligent virtual spaces are becoming *de facto* educational space, accessible to anyone who wants to acquire the necessary information in any field of knowledge completely independently (Gkoutis et al., 2025).

Another question is the systematicity of such knowledge and its reliability. Information overload generates knowledge chaos and confusion. Nevertheless, in the context of education, many students find the idea of learning independently using chatbots, AI, and other innovations very appealing. This motivation is supported by the obvious fact that the market is currently replete with various attractive offers for earning money effortlessly using AI, making fundamental university education uninteresting (Montero & Montero, 2026).

Of course, this situation doesn't affect everyone. Higher education has always undergone changes and transformations in its system, yet its primary goal (regardless of its form and type) is the creation of high-level professionals, no matter how utopian this may sound.

There is no doubt that the changes and transformations occurring in the world directly affect the recipients of education and their attitudes toward it (Göçen et al., 2024).

A MOSAIC OF MOTIVATIONS. WHY DO STUDENTS CHOOSE TO STUDY IN UNIVERSITIES?

Why do students study – and what is it that they truly study – in a world that never ceases to change? What is the deeper meaning of this pursuit, and towards what end does it ultimately strive? Should they conduct research themselves, and why, when artificial intelligence can do it faster or better? This paper aims to identify and examine the motivations of 250 fourth-year students (20–21 years old) from selected humanities universities in Russia and Algeria in their choice of higher education, as well as to analyse their expectations and values.

The primary motivations of today's young people worldwide for enrolling in universities are undoubtedly linked to the characteristics, conditions, and cultural background of their societies, their inner world, and the global climate.

Young people's motivations for enrolling in university can be roughly divided into three broad categories: Pragmatic, existential, and social-status motivations. Pragmatic motivation was found in over 40% (100) of the students participating in the study. In most cases, the main reason for choosing a university after secondary education is the desire to meet a certain standard, fulfill the minimum requirements for a progressive individual, and gain relevant knowledge in a specific area of human relations.

The development of new technologies, economic growth, the emergence of new types of activity, and, with them, new challenges and threats, necessitate the training of specialists in new industries, "specialists of the future".

State orders for certain new specialisations are emerging, in accordance with needs. This factor also determines the choice of future specialty. The role and image of the diploma itself is very multifaceted and symbolic.

In many countries and societies, the diploma was always regarded as the guarantor of a successful career – even in fields unrelated to the discipline it represented. For the majority, however, it has always been, and continues to be, far more than that: a source of personal pride and self-respect, a gesture of reverence for tradition, as well as a form of social security, a gateway to privileges and advantages.

Particularly within family dynasties continuing and developing the family business, following in the footsteps of parents, represents one of the most strong motivations for enrolling in the appropriate university. Statistics underscore that the past ten years have marked a pivotal breakthrough in the advancement of family-founded private enterprises – a big difference from earlier decades.

A stable business that generates income for the entire family, opportunities for growth, some autonomy and independence from the rest of the world and employers, and a fairly clear future guarantee stability for a young professional.

Furthermore, early immersion in a professional environment, as is often the case in working families (assisting a father during a legal consultation, or helping

in the fields during the harvest, or in a private dental clinic), contributes to the formation of an early professional identity in the future specialist and the successful acquisition of a specialty.

A pragmatic approach in this case most clearly answers the question: why and where to go to school, and is closer to solving life's problems and self-realisation. At the same time, a diploma, as a coveted proof of social and professional readiness, often becomes the subject of pressure from the family. Expectations and demands on students to graduate from university inevitably lead to disagreements and conflicts within the family, which in turn inevitably lead to aversion to the future profession. It was precisely this circumstance that dictated the students' decision to leave the university walls.

The social-status, social-pragmatic approach to higher education reflects a candidate's desire to realise themselves within a particular social circle. The choice of university is based not only on its specialisation but also on the environment and the student body present there. A university's prestige and reputation are determined by the number of successful graduates it has produced, the popularity and relevance of its programmes, the opportunities for successful employment, and, of course, the community that studies there ("I found myself in an engineering environment (medical, military, diplomatic, etc)"). The latter factor is one of the most important, as it facilitates finding the right people, building a team, and, among other things, promotes the assimilation of a certain cultural code, tastes, traditions, and behavioural patterns and codes.

Furthermore, the choice is also linked to personal motives, such as realising a long-held dream of social advancement, starting a family with someone from a certain social circle, and others. The social-pragmatic or social-status approach accounts for 28% (70) of the students surveyed.

An existential approach to the decision to pursue higher education is present in the choice of 32% (80) of the students surveyed. A thirst for new knowledge, self-discovery, a desire to understand one's abilities, understand one's purpose in life, and test one's strengths in various fields or in a specific one – all of this is a powerful motivation for young people choosing higher education. For many, this is a time of trial and error, as well as invaluable experience in self-realisation and self-discovery. The existential approach affirms a person's inner freedom, expressed in independent decisions to determine their own future without regard for the opinions of others or the particularities of their environment.

The primary focus is one's own desire and choice. The other side of the existential approach is complete trust in the university, without any criticism or analysis, and with elements of delegating responsibility for one's future – "they'll teach me something". Table 1 combines all three approaches, three blocks, reflected in the students' answers to the corresponding question – Why did you enter the university?

Table 1*Results of Survey – Why Did You Enter The University?*

Approach	Pragmatic	Socialstatus	Existential
Response	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • You have to do something in life • I was interested in a specific profession that was needed at the time, and I wanted to learn it. • I come from a family work dynasty. • I need the profession to earn a living, support my family, and achieve personal goals. • That's what my parents decided. • A diploma guarantees employment. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I decided to get an education first and then figure out what I'd do afterwards. The main thing is people and connections. • It's prestigious. • I really wanted to become part of that institute's community. • I need the profession to be part of society, to be useful to others, to my loved ones, and to myself. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • I wanted to grow intellectually and acquire new skills that would be useful in life regardless of my chosen profession. • I want to find myself and develop my abilities. • I am a creative person and I love learning something new. • It was a challenge I needed to overcome and prove my strength to myself. • I really wanted to apply my skills and abilities in a new field, to find my calling.
Result	40%	28%	32%

Note. The table contains survey of students.

Source. Own research.

The majority of students surveyed (40%) consider the achievement of their pragmatic goals to be the primary objective of entering university. Professional factors, traditions and customs of working families, social demands for certain professions, and the desire to achieve a specific practical goal largely determine the choice of students. 28% of students supported the decision to find themselves, test their abilities, and demonstrate their talents in a particular field. Education, or simply the student environment, as a way to resolve their social issues and obtain the desired diploma, is chosen by 24% of students as a prerequisite for gaining entry into other fields. To varying degrees, the goals of entering university are clear. Do they align with the expectations students have?

EXPECTATIONS AND VALUES. WHAT DO I EXPECT FROM HIGHER EDUCATION AND WHAT IS ITS VALUE?

Students were asked to answer the question: What were and are your expectations of studying at university? The study authors analysed all the respondents' responses and combined frequently repeated ones into three main categories: pragmatic, existential, and social status.

Table 2*Results of Survey – What Were and Are Your Expectations of Studying at University?*

Pragmatic	Existential	Socialstatus
To become a specialist in my field, to be interesting to employers, and to make new acquaintances.	I wanted to become the best version of myself, to learn to function independently in a new environment.	To immerse myself in the interesting atmosphere of the institute, to become part of a certain circle of people.
Gaining the necessary knowledge to continue the family business.	I love to study and learn something interesting. I was looking for interesting issues.	I wanted to make new and useful connections and later find an interesting job.
This specialisation is currently in demand and well-paid.	I really wanted to fulfill myself as a person in a new field of knowledge, to cultivate new qualities in myself.	There were expectations related to building a personal life.
There were no particular expectations. My parents insisted, so I went.	It was a challenge to myself – whether I could handle a new test, to test my abilities.	
I expected to gain universal knowledge that could be applied anywhere.		
41.5%	33.6%	24.9%
100%		

Note. The table contains survey of students.

Source. Own research.

A greater number of respondents expect to acquire the necessary knowledge to achieve pragmatic goals, while almost the majority of students believe that universal knowledge and skills that allow them to be applied beyond their chosen profession are important. This most often applies to interdisciplinary specialisations that combine a wide range of subjects. Many students come to university seeking a specific set of subjects integrated into the core specialisation programme. For example, a foreign language and higher mathematics within the International Economics specialisation. Very often, the “required universal discipline” becomes a key guideline in finding and securing a job or further study for a master’s degree in a new field.

For example, many graduates of international law departments become teachers of foreign languages in their specialisation (foreign language is a key subject in this spe-

cialisation and requires a significant amount of academic hours, allowing for a high level of proficiency). Alternatively, graduates of economics departments become specialists in mathematical analysis at banks, using their knowledge of higher mathematics. 33.6% of students surveyed perceive their studies at the institute as a platform for self-development and the discovery of their talents and abilities.

The opportunity to develop their creative and interdisciplinary abilities, their personal talents, and to challenge themselves in a new role is a priority, rather than acquiring a specialty. Students focus on developing their cultural and emotional intelligence, cross-cultural skills and empathy, and developing soft skills that can be applied to any profession and in any team.

Many people come to university seeking a mentor who will teach them the wisdom of their profession and help them to develop their professional identity. Mentoring programmes have become part of national educational plans for universities across various specialisations, from pedagogical and medical (to develop new social professionals) to technical and research (to advance scientific knowledge). Scientific research is almost impossible without a mentor. “If you don’t know which path to take, find a mentor who will show you the way”, goes the ancient saying. Victor Hugo beautifully compared a mentor to a wet nurse, emphasizing their exceptional role: There is a great similarity between a wet nurse who nourishes with her milk and a mentor who nourishes with his mind. Often a mentor is more precious than a father, just as a wet nurse is more precious than a mother.

The great educator Konstantin Ushinsky formulated the fundamental principle of education: “Only personality can influence the development and definition of personality; only character can shape character” (Zakiryanova, 2023). A mentor is not only a model of success in science but also a guarantor of their student’s scientific sovereignty and future professional success.

In a survey on the values and meanings of higher education, students were asked to select five statements and rank them in priority order from a list of experimental answer options. Almost all respondents (85%) – 250 people – highly valued the teacher’s contribution to their future.

Table 3

Results of Survey – What Is The Main Value Of Studying at a Higher Education Institution For You?

№	Affirmations	100/100%
1	A state-recognised diploma, pride that I undertook this path, as well as the prestige and name of my university on my resume when applying for a job (like also a gift for my parents so they can be proud).	80/100
2	Deep professional knowledge in my specialty as the main goal, becoming a professional.	79/100
3	Getting to know future colleagues and team building (networking), gaining experience working in a team.	40/100

№	Affirmations	100/100%
4	Friends I communicate with outside of studies, the pleasure of communicating with them, parties, get-togethers. These are memories that will last a lifetime.	75/100
5	The opportunity to receive a deferment from the army for 4–6 years.	34/100
6	The opportunity to engage in science and research under the guidance of a supervisor, access to libraries and knowledge bases, to modern equipment and laboratories.	80/100
7	Meeting wonderful teachers and mentors, their respect, the love for the profession that they revealed to me.	85/100
8	The opportunity for internships in large companies, practice under the guidance of professional mentors, the opportunity to learn from practicing teachers from the industry, specialists who are gurus in the profession, the opportunity for mistakes and experiments (without damaging your career) and gaining incredible experience.	84/100
9	Personal development, the formation of the necessary skills for the development of my professional personality.	45/100
10	The opportunity to participate in international volunteer projects, to complete an internship abroad, the opportunity to go on an exchange programme abroad.	35/100
11	The opportunity to be in couple, to get married later.	35/100
12	The formation of work discipline. The ability to learn independently and determine my own development plan, using the rich university scientific base.	47/100
13	An atmosphere of creativity and inspiration, endless opportunities to express myself, to reveal my own talents and potential.	35/100
14	A sense of belonging to a community (Alma Mater), to a new circle of people, finding a family.	50/100
15	The opportunity to understand what I DO NOT want to do.	23/100

Note. The table contains survey of students.

Source. Own research.

The table shows that, as stated above, one of the most important values of higher education is meeting and working with a teacher or mentor (85%), emphasising its incredibly powerful role in the professional life of a future specialist. A mentor serves as a guide into the profession, support, and even a guarantee of success. Higher education – as a status, a diploma as a goal in itself – was chosen by 80% of students, with 79% considering becoming a professional in their field by acquiring the necessary knowledge as the most sought-after goal. Personal development, as the main value of higher education, is the most important aspect of learning for 45%, while only 35% of students surveyed believe that the university atmosphere promotes the development of their talents and self-expression. The university is also a key condition for developing personal work discipline and self-organisation.

The university serves as a platform for the formation of future professional unions and teams (40%), providing an opportunity to work in a team and gain experience in making collective decisions. It's important to note the important role of universities, noted by 84% of students in the opportunity to acquire practical knowledge through internships and work placements at large companies. In terms of emotional attachments, 50% of respondents

felt a sense of family and connection with a certain circle of people, as well as the creation of a new family. Particular attention should also be paid to the characterisation of higher education as a poor choice, as 23% of students surveyed only realised what they shouldn't do at university. As the data shows, students perceive different values in studying at university. Overall, the picture is positive, with the exception of a few points that were highlighted in another stage of the study. The goal was to answer the question "Why shouldn't you study to university and obtain a higher education?" and provide only one answer. The study's authors analysed all respondents' responses, synthesised them, and combined them according to their meaning, classifying them according to three previous criteria.

Table 4

Results of Survey – Why Not Study at a Higher Education Institution

1. Pragmatic criterion (focus on profit, career, money, practical utility)	2. Socialstatus criterion (focus on status, environment, connections, societal expectations)	3. Existential criterion (focus on selfrealisation, personal growth, mean- ing, challenge, autonomy)	No answer
24%	25%	27%	24%
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The institute did not provide real skills for my future job. Everything you actually need is taught on the job, and the diploma is just a formality." • "Too many subjects irrelevant to my profession; they take up too much time and prevent me from working." • "The specialty I chose is no longer in demand." • "Nowadays employers look at portfolios and experience, not at a diploma. And the university gives me nothing in that regard." • "Too much unnecessary theory and almost no practice." • "There were no real meetings or interactions with professionals in my field." • "Basically, everything can be learned on your own online; today all the important and necessary things for growth are available on the Internet." 	<p style="text-align: center;">100% (250 students)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "The university social scene turned out to be an illusion for me. I did not find a cool environment or 'useful connections' there." • "I thought that being a student would give me extra privileges, opportunities to travel, and to do interesting internships. But things turned out completely differently." • "I dreamed of a special environment of likeminded people, intelligent and ambitious individuals, but instead I ended up in an ordinary indifferent group." • "I entered the institute at my parents' request; they believe a diploma guarantees respect and recognition from society. In reality, it did not help me become a respected person either in my family's eyes or in the eyes of others." 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "I had expectations that the university would help me become better and discover myself. In the end, I simply spent a few years, lost interest in studying, and did not figure out what I want." • "The test of my character during my university years led to burnout and a feeling of emptiness instead of development." • "I dreamed of finding my calling, not disappointment in the education system." • "I wanted to gain independence and autonomy, but that did not happen." • "The university aggravated my inner complexes instead of helping me cope with them." • "Bureaucracy and formalism kill the desire to study and hinder development." • "I never found a kindred spirit or a mentor who would support my ideas." 	

Note. The table contains survey of students.

Source. Own research.

The study revealed that the majority of students surveyed (76%) had various negative experiences during their time at university. However, most disappointments stem from missed opportunities to prove themselves, develop as individuals, discover new potential and abilities, and find their calling. The role of a mentor, teacher, or inspirational figure who could support and guide future professionals can be a major loss and disappointment for potential graduates, especially since most modern educational programmes and systems increasingly envision autonomous pursuits in science, aided by new technologies. Academic advisors act as supervisors rather than guides. A significant number of students surveyed (25%) were disillusioned with the university environment they had been dreaming of upon enrolling, as well as with their new status as students. For many, university is primarily associated with the environment that surrounds them, the atmosphere in which they study, and the emotions they experience. These experiences often become the primary conduits for acquiring knowledge, a prerequisite. Without them, the educational process itself and everything associated with it becomes meaningless. Many lament the absence of a university community as a way to bring people together. The lack of fulfillment of this need, as well as the need for student interaction itself, is often linked to various issues, ranging from complex and overloaded curricula that lack space for face-to-face meetings, to the format of the interaction itself (today's youth often communicate virtually or digitally, where it's easier to text, meet, or call).

Disappointment with university, related to an incomplete education that doesn't provide practical knowledge and skills but rather a vast amount of theory, was expressed by 24% of students surveyed. University is considered a waste of time, as young professionals are forced to relearn in the workplace; a university education is very different from a real job. Another major disappointment is the lack of opportunities to gain work experience during their studies, as most employers are only willing to hire graduates who have proof of such experience in their portfolios. It's also important to note that many students consider it entirely possible to independently acquire education and knowledge outside of college, through online platforms, webinars, and online courses. Most often, the primary motivation for leaving college or not enrolling in a university at all and forgoing a fundamental education is the experience of some successful individuals who once made such a decision in pursuit of an idea and successfully realised it. However, such cases are not common and are more likely the exception than the rule.

The final stage of this study was an analysis of students' responses to the question: "What was and is the main meaning of higher education for you?" The authors synthesised the responses and categorised them by three previous criteria.

Table 5*Result of Survey – What is the Main Meaning of Higher Education*

Pragmatic (career, money, skills)	Socialstatus (belonging, connections, social standing)	Existential (selfdiscovery, meaning of life, coming of age)	No points
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning is to get a diploma that will open the door to a good company. It's a ticket to the labour market. • Gaining highlevel knowledge and professional competencies. I can continue the family business. • Acquiring work experience at an enterprise as part of my studies. • Acquiring skills that I can use in any area of life, not only in my profession. • The fact of having a higher education is highly valued in my environment. • My specialty is very much in demand; I won't be left without a job. <p>100%</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning lies in a network of useful contacts. • Meeting practitio- nerteachers who will later help me in my career. • Entering the right social circle and the atmosphere of the right university. • Being able to use student status and privileges for five years, travel, meet interesting people. • The meaning is in acquiring opportunities, not knowledge. • My friends are my future team with whom I will enter the profession. • The meaning is to meet my soulmate. <p>25%</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The meaning is to understand who I am. To shape my own worldview, the ability to ask questions to the world and receive answers. • Building character, the ability to overcome difficulties – my character was born thanks to the university. • Strengthening soft skills: patience, work ethic, multitasking, versatility. I can do anything. • Developing my creative abilities, the hidden potential I didn't even know about. • I fell in love with my profession. • The meaning is to overcome myself; it's a challenge to myself. It proves to me that I can handle anything. <p>35%</p>	<p>(No statements)</p> <p>12%</p>

Note. The table contains survey of students.

Source. Own research.

The survey showed that the main criteria were more or less equal. For the vast majority of students, the primary purpose of attending university and receiving higher education is linked to existential values. However, a significant portion of respondents also focus on achieving practical goals, while also considering social status goals.

RECONSTRUCTING MEANINGS AND CONCLUSION

So why study at a university today? In the modern world, higher education, in addition to its previous values, is acquiring new meanings in the eyes of its direct recipients. New opportunities and conditions dictate their own rules and impose new requirements

on the organisation of the modern educational process. As research shows, students no longer want and cannot simply be passive “recipients of knowledge”, listeners to theories and patterns. They become active developers of their competencies. During university education, a meaningful transformation of the learner’s personality occurs, provided they are engaged in the process. Doubts, concerns, and disappointments about studying at a university, reflected in the questionnaires, testify to this engagement and interest. A new person sees things differently and makes decisions accordingly. The correctness of his choice is determined not only by the university he attends, but also by what he does there and the extent to which he realises his plans. Modern higher education is very multidimensional. It combines pragmatic goals related to obtaining the desired specialty, and with personal search and growth, and with social tasks. Therefore, the main question can be transformed from “Why am I studying at a university?” to the question “What do I want to create with...”.

“By the power of what I learn?” A diploma in a single specialisation has long ceased to be the sole and final stage in a modern person’s educational career. Higher education today serves as a mandatory foundation for developing competencies. It can be diversified with various additional platforms, online courses with internships, courses, and personal projects and the most important value of education today, based on an analysis of the thoughts of its primary recipients, is not the assimilation of a finite amount of intelligent and useful information, but rather the development of the ability to learn, adapt, and find meaning in a constantly changing world.

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