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# Rethinking Social Action. Core Values in Practice

## Indicators of Motivation and Satisfaction on Students' Activities

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# Indicators of Motivation and Satisfaction on Students' Activities

Simona MINA[1]

*Abstract*

*This paper's main task is to analyse the most important needs of a group of students and, with regard to the didactic activities within universities, in what ways should we correctly report the professors' motivators to those needs to determine satisfaction in learning. The basic premise of this discussion is that students are not sufficiently challenged by the instruction they receive, resulting in lower levels of achievement by many students. By setting more rigorous standards for students, it is hoped that the general level of student achievement will rise, thus better preparing students for post-secondary educational opportunities and employment. By changing the nature of the instruction that students receive, the assumption is that students will not only learn more, but they will be more actively engaged in their learning, thus retaining a higher proportion of what they learn. The research instrument contains a total of 13 items, variable in terms of typology, constructed to investigate satisfaction, perspective and opinion on the appropriateness of the decision to pursue a maritime career. The questionnaire was administered via computer with students from all years of study at Constanta Maritime University. Analysis was conducted on a total of 179 students at Constanta Maritime University. The paper's conclusions, identified from the research, focus on adapting the curricula content to the students' needs.*

**Keywords:** motivation, satisfaction, educational reform, evaluation of students, satisfiers in education.

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## 1. Introduction

A basic premise for possible reform within the academic educational system is that students are not sufficiently challenged by the instruction they receive, resulting in lower levels of achievement by many students. By setting more rigorous standards for students, it is hoped that the general level of student achievement will rise, thus better preparing students for post-secondary educational opportunities and employment. By changing the nature of the instruction that students receive, the assumption is that students will not only learn more, but they will be more actively engaged in their learning, thus retaining a higher proportion of what they have learned.

Another basic premise for possible reform within the higher education system should identify if educational agencies can determine what knowledge students need to know and the skills they need to acquire. Therefore, universities should rise to this challenge and help students accomplish these goals in knowledge and skills. This means that possible reforms to the educational system should not resume by setting standards, assessing these standards, and reporting the accomplishments of students. Instead, special attention will need to be paid to how well educators are prepared and motivated to provide instruction that will help students achieve the standards set by the system. This fact has major implications for governmental educational agencies and the resources they can provide, as well as for local education systems and how they address standards at state and local levels.

Constant changes in today's society can mean students lack attention and quickly lose interest if they are exposed to monotonous activities that do not generate novel emotional experiences. Therefore, activities and tasks coordinated by teachers must connect with the everyday experiences of students to activate emotions that help them generate greater meaning to their knowledge.

## 2. Problem Statement

A recent report published in the United States by the National Academy of Education [1] has captured the spirit of the changes that critics of this minimum skills approach believe are needed at state level:

Much of current instructional practice is based on behavioural learning theory from the early part of this century. According to this theory, learning occurs by reinforcement of low-level skills that the building blocks for more complex understandings. An unfortunate practical consequence of

this approach is that thinking and reasoning about core concepts are postponed, for some students indefinitely. In most recent decades, researchers of learning have demonstrated that memorizing facts does not lead automatically to an ability of analyse and apply what has been learned. Learning requires thinking!

Excellence in academic achievement requires more than setting goals and expecting students to meet them. Exclusive focus on outcomes will prevent the debate about how instruction should be delivered or how learning could be supported by the community, and it could avoid attention to the adequacy of resources, which would be much costly than developing standards.

Below is some advice for aligning European academic standards to American educational standards:

- States need to be encouraged to revise and improve their academic standards.
- States need help to make sure their standards are rigorous and internationally competitive.
- States should draw on the best work of other states.
- States should supplement their standards with curriculum guides or frameworks that provide clearer guidance to districts and schools without sacrificing local control.
- States need to make sure their assessments are based on strong standards.
- States need help determining whether their standards and assessments are aligned.
- States should establish plans for phasing in incentives or consequences, otherwise students will not take the standards seriously.
- States must provide extra help programmes to students who are not meeting the standards [2].

One of the major concerns of managers and teachers is the issue of equity in relation to the distribution of pay and other rewards. Although a number of views regarding the motivating effects of inequity and unfairness have been proposed, the ideas of Stacy Adams at General Electric seem to be the most significant. In Adam's view, the perception of unfairness is one of the most powerful forces in management, and in assessments too. The major motivation force in equity theory is a striving for equity, which emerges only after some inequity or unfairness is perceived.

Equity involves an individual comparing his own performance and the rewards received, with the performance and rewards others receive for doing similar work.

When an employee/student receives compensation from the organization, perceptions of equity are affected by two factors:

- Comparison of the compensation received to such factors such as one's input of the job effort, education, experience, skill, seniority and endurance of adverse working conditions.
- Comparison of the perceived equity of pay and rewards received to those received by other people.

The equity theory holds that the perception of unfairness is a powerful motivating force in the workplace. It depends on comparison of perceiving equity of pay and rewards among employees, and comparison of compensation as related to factors such as education, experience and seniority. If a student has invested important resources in attending courses and seminars, in making a good documentation work, and in preparing for an examination, the student will create his own rapport between this investment and the result. The outcome should be superior. If we reduce our evaluation of students' work to a summative assessment, if we are not involved in a formative assessment, if we do not explain to our students the main reasons for obtaining a grade, and which competences they need to add to improve their performance, next time, an unfair perception will be manifested.

Education is a key factor in explaining economic growth [3]. Students' performance is correlated with the national development of human capital accumulation, and any factor affecting the quality of human production will directly affect future economic growth.

Motivation and engagement are studied complementarily, since the literature considers them as key variables in the learning process and for improving academic results. The interest that arouses as an immediate reaction to a new task is an effective state that involves feelings of excitement, concentration and attention, and it is a very important determinant of academic engagement and academic satisfaction [4].

## 3. Research Questions/Aims of the research

One of the main aims of this research was to establish the level of satisfaction of students at Constanta Maritime University, and to create some instruments applicable to all graduating students in order to measure their level of satisfaction regarding educational services, their level of

motivation for attending courses and seminars, and in preparing for classes, evaluation and research. Is reform within the academic educational system necessary? **How can we motivate students within a correct reaction on the part of professors during classes and evaluations?** Is the process of evaluating students' learning outcomes a proper and a correct one, **or is this generating a lack of motivation, within the perception of unfairness?**

## 4. Research Methods

The research instrument contains a total of 13 items, varying in terms of typology, constructed to investigate perspectives of satisfaction and opinions on the decision to pursue a maritime career. The questionnaire was administered via computer to students from all years of study at Constanta Maritime University, together with graduates who attended training in new areas. Within the current research, only 11 items were analysed that measured the level of students' satisfaction.

### *The research group.*

Analysis was conducted on a total of 179 students and graduates of Constanta Maritime University. In terms of gender, the sample included 165 boys (92.2%) and 14 girls (7.8%) (Figure 1). Considering distribution by region, more than half of the respondents (110 people - 61.5%) were from Dobrogea. A total of 17 individuals (9.5%) were from Muntenia; 12 individuals (6.7%) are Moldovan; 11 individuals (6.1%) were from Transylvania; 11 (6.1%) were from Oltenia; 7 (3.9%) were from Crişana; and 6 (3.4%) were from Banat. The last in terms of the number of respondents is Maramureş with only 5 people (2.8%) (Figure 2). There was a preponderance of urban respondents (155 people - 86.6%) to the detriment of rural areas (24 persons - 13.4%), which is normally predictable, taking into consideration the specific studies and research (Figure 3). In terms of age, the average age is 22.85 years, with a standard error of the mean of 0.10 years and a standard deviation of 1.4 years. Half of the respondents are under 23 years, the other half are over 23 years, **most people with the age of 24,** the amplitude of distribution being four years between the minimum age of 21 years and the maximum age of 25 years.

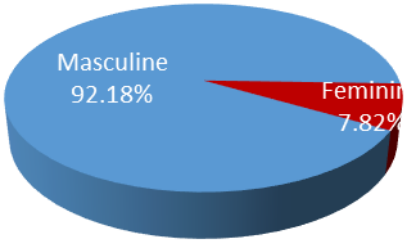



Figure 1 – Structure of the research sample by gender

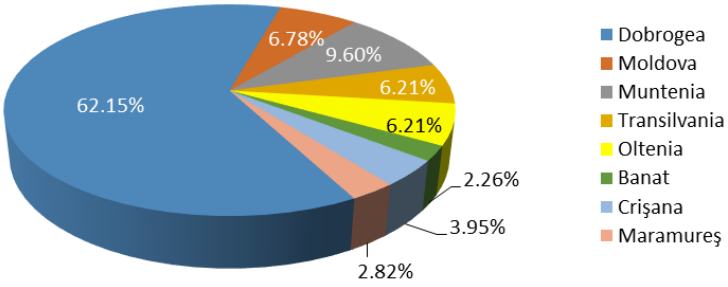



Figure 2 - Structure of research group by region of origin

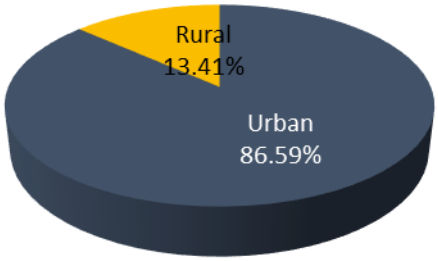



Figure 3 – Structure of research group by area of origin

In this chapter, the author should present and discuss the research methods used to obtain data/results. We suggest detailing the research methods, the period of application, the means of application, the sample, methods, etc.

## 5. Findings

### *Analysis of responses*

On a scale from 1 (very little) to 5 (very much), how satisfied are you with the quality of courses offered by Constanta Maritime University?

The question concerns the general assessment of satisfaction with the quality of courses offered by Constanta Maritime University.

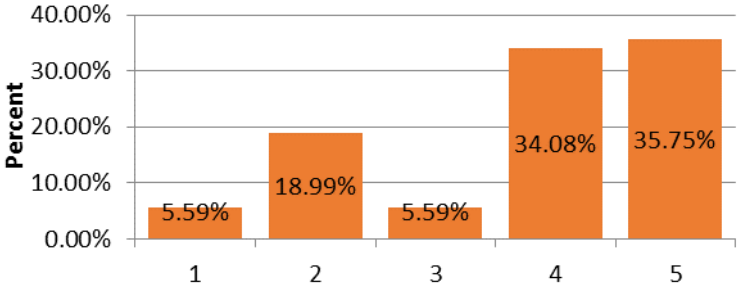



Figure 4 - Evaluation of the quality of classes

The analysis indicates a median located on the lead 4, the most frequent response is a score of 5. Almost 70% of students consider the quality of courses as good and very good, less than 25% consider the courses to be below average.

Which of the following areas of navigation attract you most?

The question aims to investigate students' professional career paths. The response options are represented by careers in maritime and river, and the neutral option "do not know".

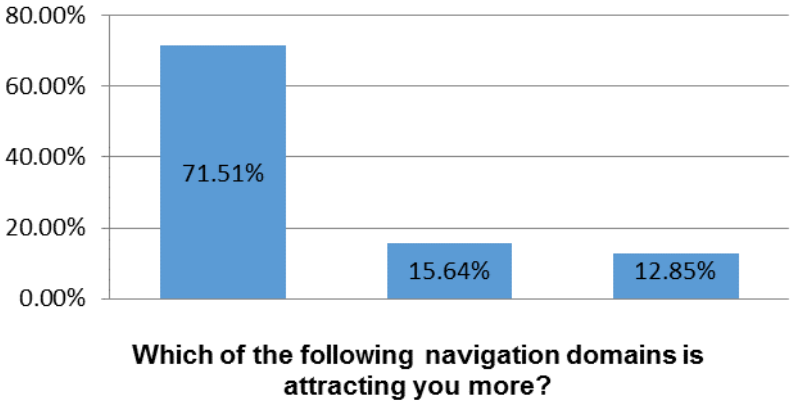



Figure 5 - preference to professional fields

There is a clear preference for maritime navigation (71.51%), which is mush preferred to river navigation (15.64%), the latter being close to the undecided (12.85%).

If this was the moment to choose, where would you prefer to study?

This question is about the students' preference with regard to a particular locality, **the most representative of this field of studies.** The

responses were "Constanta", "Galati", "Braila" and the neutral version "I do not know".

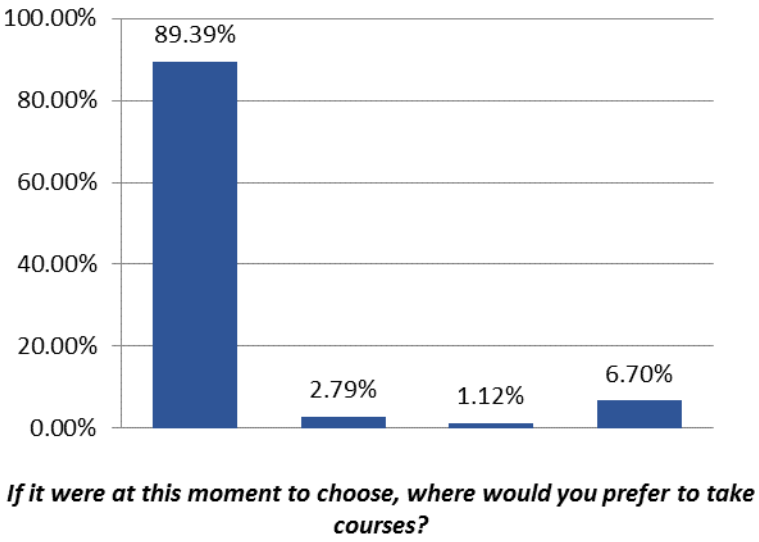



Figure 6 - Preferences regarding where to study.

Undoubtedly, the city where most students prefer to study is Constanța (89.39%). Few opt for Galati (2.79%), and fewer still for Braila (1.12%), with 6.7% of UMC students not having an opinion in this regard.

After completing your studies, in which field do you want to build your career?

The question's aim is to identify the main field to which the students intend to orientate, the chosen answers are between the navigational and the non-navigational domains.

Certainly, most of the students are geared towards navigation (77.09%), while there is a relatively small number with a clear choice to the unscientific field (13.41%).

We find, at the same time, that about 9% of respondents do not have a strong opinion in relation to the main field which they wish to pursue in their careers (see Figure 7).

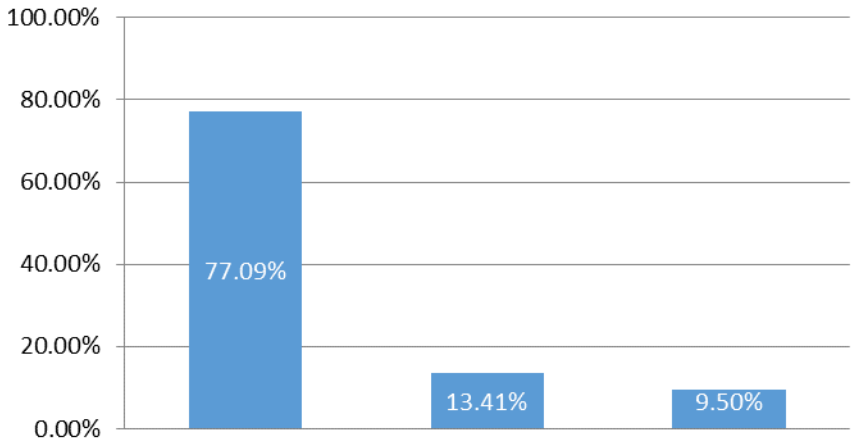



Figure 7 - Students preferences towards a particular professional field

If you could choose, would you prefer to attend a faculty at a university with a specific type of navigation?

The question is related to the degree of satisfaction with a seafaring career, and investigates whether, in the circumstances already known, seafarers would make the same choice. This indicator is very important in measuring the level of satisfaction and motivation for students from Constanta Maritime University.

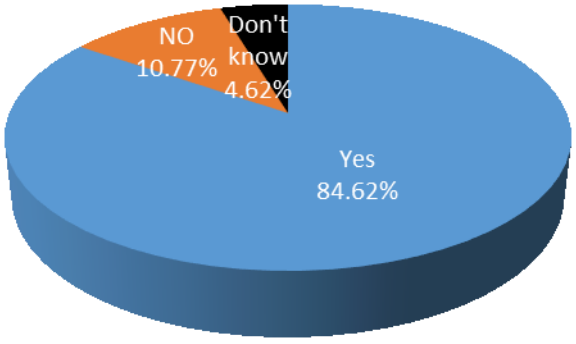



Figure 8 - Re-election of the university as an indicator of satisfaction

About 85% of respondents (84.62%) answered positively, only 10.77%, if they were to choose, would turn to something else.


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A total of 4.62% were un-decided if the steps they had taken in a maritime career were good or not.

Do you intend to continue your professional training?

The question is intended to investigate the tendency of seafarers to invest further in their career progression. This indicates the level of satisfaction with the quality of studies.

A total of 80% of seafarers plan to pursue other courses to progress their career.

A total of 13.85% respondents stated they were not interested in this, while 6.15% have not yet determined what they will do next.

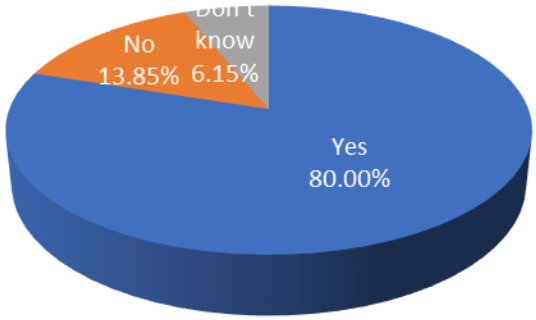



Figure 9 - Intention to continue professional training for career progression

Do you consider that the training system and the quality of training courses are compatible with what is required at an international level?

The question concerns students' views on the quality of training courses in the field of navigation, and their compatibility at an international level, and with the actual requirements of the work.

A total of 78.46% of respondents claimed that Romanian studies are of a quality compatible with international requirements, however 12.31% do not appreciate this. Finally, a fairly high percentage (9.23%) have no opinion on this.

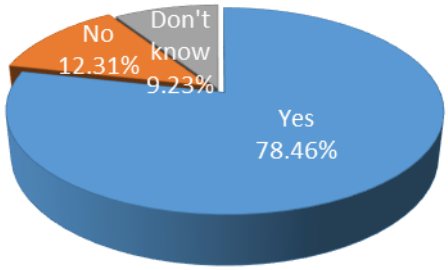



Figure 10 - Opinion on the quality of the courses

On a scale from 1 (a few) to 5 (lots), how many of your current trainers or evaluators are teachers who taught you at Constanta Maritime University?

The question seeks to capture whether didactic staff at Constanta Maritime University are involved in training during their careers, and if satisfaction is generated by those didactic activities.

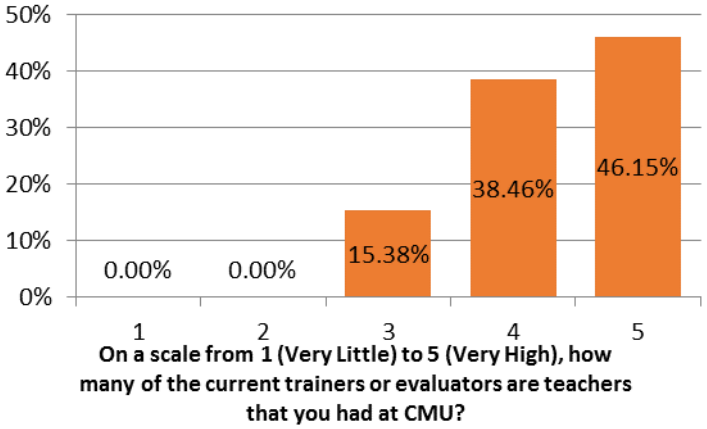



Figure 11 - Involvement of UMC teaching staff in career-specific activities

It is obvious that most of the respondents appreciate that there are many (very high - 46.15%; high - 38.46%) teachers with whom they have had contact within the curriculum during the training programmes. Only 15.38% of respondents state the presence of university teachers at the level of professional training programmes as being average. This indicator is very important in proving the formative aspects of teaching activities within Constanta Maritime University, which usually generate a good level of satisfaction for students.

On a scale of 1 (very rare) to 5 (very often), how often do you keep in touch with your former faculty colleagues?

The question's purpose is to investigate the cohesion of Constanta Maritime University graduates after completing their studies and starting a career. This could also be an important indicator for evaluating the level of student satisfaction and relationships established with members of the academic community.

We can observe a high and very high levels of professional cohesion. Almost 90% of those interviewed claim that they often keep in touch with their former colleagues.

The percentage of those who say they are not in touch with their former colleagues is very small, at about 6%.

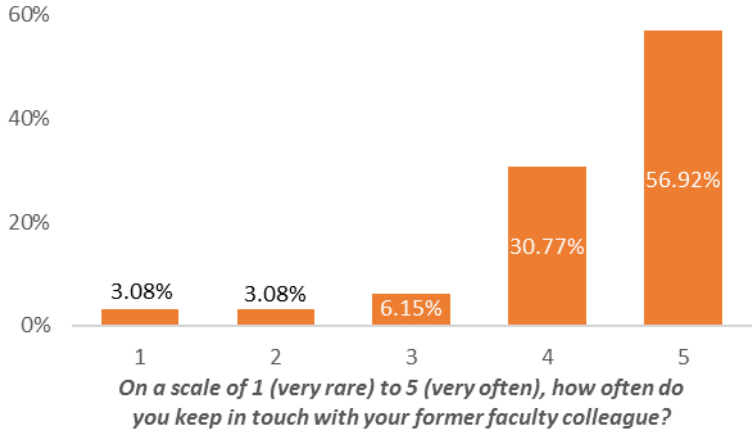



Figure 12 – Level of keeping in touch with your former colleagues

On a scale from 1 (very rare) to 5 (very often), how often do you keep in touch with former college teachers?

The question's aim is to investigate the cohesion of Constanta Maritime University graduates with their ex-teachers, after completing their studies and starting a career. This is an important indicator for measuring the level of motivation and satisfaction of students.

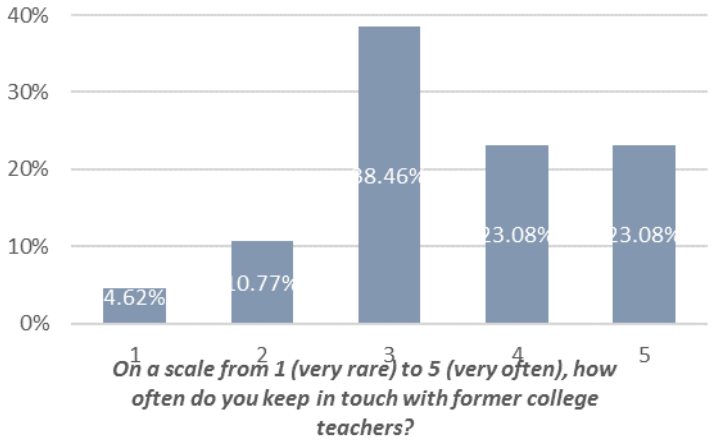



Figure 13 - Keeping in touch with teachers

The degree to which UMC graduates keep in touch with former teachers is medium (38%), with a positive trend towards frequent communication (23.08%) and very common (23.08%). Responses in the sense of reduced communication are around 15%.

## 6. Discussions

The main limitations of the study are due to the inability to find out the correct instruments for increasing the level of challenge and the level of affiliation of students to the reality of the university (in our case, Constanta Maritime University). Are the students proud and very content in that they are part of the university and will they agree to change this reality, and to choose, for example, similar courses within the University of Galați? In future, the paper should review the importance of emotional intelligence in determining students' commitment in the learning process. When academic activities generate satisfaction, happiness, hope and pride, students will feel more motivated before a task. They pay greater attention and show increased self-control in their own learning process, and will feel more academically engaged and tend to make greater academic effort.

## 7. Conclusions

The analysis clearly indicates that the city of Constanta is the preferred locality for pursuing a career in the field of navigation (89.78% of

respondents). **Missing opinions** amount to 5.38%, while Galati Municipality was chosen by 3.76% of respondents. The final place is occupied by Braila Municipality, chosen by only 1.06% of respondents.

The results are significant in terms of passing on a clear collective perception of the main human resources provider in the field of Marine Science, by associating it with the importance of regional development at Constanta Maritime Port. Also, the conclusions are very significant for the perception of the quality of studies within Constanta Maritime University, and for the students' level of satisfaction. The public perception of maritime studies in Constanta is also helped by the impact of tradition, and cultural and historical evolution. A total of 62.9% of students/graduates in other university specialties chose to undertake a new specialization in the field of navigational studies; the frequently encountered explanations are: 35.48% financial incentives and 24.19% employment facilities (the two main motivators).

## Acknowledgement

The ethical evaluation of the research tools was conducted by the Ethics Committee of the LUMEN Research Center in Social and Humanistic Sciences, based on the documents submitted on request. The reality of respecting the confidentiality, the information on the right of the participants in the research is guaranteed on its own responsibility by the author.

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