



QUALITY OF EDUCATION PROCESS THROUGH THE EYES OF STUDENTS

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Abstract

Improving the quality of higher education is essential for establishment and formation of a new generation of health managers who are able to cope with the challenges of modernizing society.

The study aims to investigate the views of students on the quality of education in subjects taught in the Department of Health Economics.

Material and Methods: The study includes 100 students from the Faculty of Public Health at the Medical University - Sofia of Bachelor degree on specialties "Public Health and Health Management" and "Management of health care."

An anonymous questionnaire method containing 19 closed and open questions is applied. Allegations suggest a few answers that are analyzed and compared. In this communication we present only a part of the study.

The evaluation of the answers to questionnaires shows the positive attitude of the higher proportion of students regarding the quality of education in the concerned disciplines.

Keywords: Quality, learning process, students from the Faculty of Public Health, Department of Health Economics.



INTRODUCTION

“Improvement of education quality is the command of time” (Popov, 2006). What are the specialists to be trained and educated, to what degree they would be capable of satisfying the new requirements and challenges is not just a matter of personal responsibility and capabilities, but it is priority and strategy of the government related to the development of the entire society and people’s well-being.

The European Union keeps at high esteem the educational system and training and is after the ambitious goal of turning into “the most dynamic and competitive economy that is knowledge-based and is capable of maintaining economic growth with more and better workplaces, as well as better social cohesion” according to the Lisbon Strategy. In order to achieve this objective from the beginning of the new century is the consent we arrived to on the need of significant refurbishment of European systems for education and training.

The strategy that was passed in 2000 during the Lisbon meeting on the EU economic growth raised new requirements towards the member-states, one of them being about “innovations and knowledge turning into Europe’s beating heart” (Economic Development Centre - EDC, 2005: 13). This way we will prepare personnel in conformity with the need for improving competitiveness of the European economy. The abovementioned priority found its significant development in Strategy “EU 2020”.

In addition to the higher education system in general, the knowledge economy defines certain requirements towards the subjects of higher education. The need of updating the patterns and quality of tutoring and learning in the area of higher education defines certain requirements towards the lecturers. The global changes in European and global economic space require from the lecturers to be more than just lecturers that define the terms, conditions and methods of training. Instead, they are supposed to introduce more progressively the teamwork training pattern where students learn and work together and the lecturer plays the role of consultant.

Reforms in the system of the Bulgarian higher education take place in the political context of the reforms going on in the European community for higher education. European criteria are being introduced for modernizing higher education in order to ensure the quality of the offered studies. The Ministry of education and science in turn developed several documents related to the tasks of Bulgaria in terms of the strategy “Europe 2020” and the development of the higher education system. The basic programme in this view is the “*Programme for development of education, science and youth policies in the Republic of Bulgaria (2009 – 2013)*”. The programme is directly bound with the understanding of the need of creating economy in the country that is knowledge-based and contains five strategic priority directions, one of them being: *Achievement of European quality of education*. This direction contains 18 different measures for improving quality and current nature of the educational system in our country. In the area of higher education we have two European programmes being administered by the Ministry of Education and Science – axis 3 of Operational programme “Human resources development” and “Erasmus”.

In 2010 we created for the first time in our country rating system of institutions of higher education under operational programme “Human resources development” with which suitable environment was created for activating the processes related to achieving the strategic objective – modernization of higher education with the creation of prerequisites for real competition between institutions of higher education. This system was created by numerous experts of the Ministry of Education and Science, users of educational services, personnel, various specialists of the broadest range, from nongovernment organizations. The national strategic objectives and priorities in line with the European ones provide the guidelines for elaborating and updating the academic plans and curricula. The expected effect from the undertaken reforms is related to: improved quality of education while placing institutions of higher education in real competitive environment at national as well as international level; incentives for the professional motivation of the academic personnel; improvement of the funding model of the institutions of higher education; improvement of capacities for utilizing funding from the European Structural Funds. It is well-known that in the most developed countries worldwide education and



science have always been in the centre of attention of governments and they remain strategic priority. These have been the subject of constant search and investments of high return.

Success and quality of learning activity

“Quality management in its capacity of philosophy, technology and adequate manner of managing recourse turns into string concept of focusing one’s attention on the continuous development and improvement of particular organization. Quality is dynamic matter that functions in the conditions of continuous challenges and has the ability to undergo development and changes all the time” (Chaneva, 2008). The personality of lecturer, his/her scientific, methodological and pedagogic preparation, psychological sustainability and suitability are decisive for the lecturing quality. He/she holds in his/her hands the successful development of students. Lecturer’s task is not only to “share” the scientific facts he/she knows with his/her trainees. He/she should attract them, recruit them for the scientific work. He or she should direct his/her efforts towards the formation of flexible thinking, development of skills for individual acquisition and application of knowledge, development of capacities for adaptation to the rapidly changing conditions of the environment. The success of the learning activity depends on numerous factors, both objective and subjective referring to trainees and trainer. The right choice of training and education for the particular profession that is in line with the personal features, needs and capacities, largely guarantees the educational success. Nevertheless this does not exclude the opportunity, interest and positive attitude to arise during the very process of the learning activity. Great role in such cases is played by lecturers. Gyurova (1998) in the Art of loving adults defines the lecturer as “basic mechanism, motivating factor”.

The role of individual-subjective factor significantly increased. Throughout the learning process it is already necessary for the student to be equal-footed active party, moving force in his or her own development and education. This is to be achieved significantly with the presence of positive motivation towards learning and the readiness to participate in the learning process via his/her active own learning activity. Popov (2006) in the “Student as subject of learning” notes that attitude towards learning, in addition to conscious, has some unconscious components. It is directly related to the readiness for activity, with interest and affiliations. The essence of the learning process is bilateral. Both parties, the participants in education – the lecturer with his/her style, methods and tutoring contents and the students with their way of learning and capacities are the prerequisite for the result of the learning process. Studies are based on the “attitude towards it, whose psychologic expressions are the activity motives... This is the first and structure-forming component of the complex and dynamic system – assimilation of the learning material”, according to L. Desev (1993) in “Psychology of learning process”.

In order to accelerate its economic progress, every country needs institutions that guarantee and multiply this process. This is especially the case when it comes to the institutions in charge of creating and enriching knowledge being the most important production resource of the present epoch. This is in effect for the higher education system. The changes in educational system result in changes of the professional-qualification structure of human resources. The maintenance of high educational and qualification potential of labour resources is important growth factor for the production. The improved quality of the products being manufactured is function of using labour resources of better education and qualification. Basic factor for increasing labour output and incomes of workers/employees is the investment in creating human capital. Accumulation of knowledge and skills during the educational-qualification and professional process creates human capital. Time and funds invested for acquiring better education are investments in human capital (Frantz, 1996).

Studies in the area of public health should be focused on clearly defined competitive advantages. We should focus on market direction of education. In modern times the opportunities for cooperation between the institutions of higher education and the business are versatile – holding scientific researches of applied character, continued training of employees, joint elaboration of curricula, provision of prerequisites for effective practical learning etc.



Faculty of Public Health to the Medical University in Sofia

Education is powerful factor for preparing specialists that will work in all areas of life, including in the area of public health. In this area responsibility for the public operations is even greater, because the work of each and every specialist is related to keeping patient's health, treating the patient, maintaining livelihood of population and health promotion. It is well-known that education in the healthcare area has its traditions and indisputable achievements. The Faculty of Public Health has been operating for already 20 years to the Medical University in Sofia, which achieves great success in the area of educating healthcare specialists, public health specialists and health management specialists (Popov, 2006).

The Faculty of Public Health is among the four faculties in the structure of the Medical University, Sofia – the oldest and most reputable academic organization in the field of medicine and healthcare in the Republic of Bulgaria. It was founded with the support of the Stability and Growth Pact and in partnership with leading institutions in the countries of the European Union and the WHO in 2001 with Decree of the Council of Ministers №160 dated the 20th of June with the transformation of the Faculty "Nurse education" that was created in 1995. During the preparatory period dating back to the beginning of the 90-ies of the XX century, teams for technical assistance from the EU actively participated, projects were implemented under the PHARE programme related to changes in the semi-higher medical education of the majors nurse, obstetrician etc. and creation of higher education for managerial personnel. Globally, these processes cooperate for the preparation and implementation of the reform in the healthcare system in the Republic of Bulgaria, and in particular in the system for preparing new type of medical professionals that would approach the general European requirements and standards in conformity with the particular parameters: - educational degree, competency, qualification and professionalism in the area of public health. All these are determined among the main priorities of the faculty of Public Health (Aleksandrova, 2007).

In the healthcare system of our country the Faculty of Public Health and the particular departments undertake tasks of great public-social significance of priority significance in the circumstances of the healthcare reform and in healthcare, and broadly speaking for the rearrangement of public and social life. The mission of the Faculty of Public Health is enriched and versatile at present. It includes: "Firstly – creation and development of modern healthcare policy that is evidence-based. Secondly – creation and development of healthcare business oriented towards health needs of population. Thirdly – health management that is to turn into powerful instrument for the implementation of modern health policy. The Faculty of Public Health needs: 1) Accelerated leadership development. 2) Creation of inspired entrepreneurs with flair for innovations and other quality level of healthcare governance in its capacity of self-organizing system", according to Vodenicharov (2016, January) in magazine "Health policy and management", №1.

The Faculties of Public Health are new reality, new concept and practice in the activity of the medical universities. They signalled the cardinal change in medical science and education. We keep continuously expanding the opportunities for specialists in the area of public health and health management. They participate in networks and programmes at national and international level for exchange of experience and knowledge on current healthcare issues, for integration of efforts aimed at sustainable development of healthcare systems and improvement of public health. The development of the knowledge base that is necessary for the scientific research and activities, as well as good professional qualification in public health, in the new century require width and depth of problems. One of the most important prerequisites for European public health is the academic and professional appearance of new specialists (Petrova-Gotova, 2011).

According to S. Popova (2004) in "Social-ethical dimensions of health management", "public health is perceived as the structures and processes with which the health of population is being studies, maintained and promoted with the organizational efforts made by society". Public health, according to the same author, has "key role in the realization of the perspective idea of sustainable development of medicine". The benefit from public health could be seen in the future and at present.

Public health is among the professional directions where lowest unemployment rate was registered. Almost all students that got education in this direction managed to achieve good realization. The problem about the quality of education in the area of public health and healthcare is pending in the context of the reforms going



on in the healthcare area. The new realities and needs in the circumstances of the healthcare reform necessitate the achievement of quality that is adequate to the continuously increasing requirements on behalf of consumers towards these specialists.

Relevance of studies in “Health economics”

“Health economics” is one of the basic mandatory subjects in the Faculty of Public Health to the Medical University – Sofia. The need for higher medical and paramedical experts to study health economics is expressed in the following theses:

1. With the implementation of market mechanisms in the public-economic life of Bulgaria total economisation is achieved. The use of adequate terminology, as well as certain knowledge in economics make it possible to the knowledgeable person to participate more actively in the public and economic life.
2. In the circumstances of shortage of material resources and financial means and the calling for economies and effectiveness that come from all sides, making each and every managerial decision at all healthcare levels requires in-depth economic analysis and well-reasoned economic decisions.
3. The healthcare development as complex uniform system is not possible without the preparation of strategic and operational plans that are being elaborated, executed, controlled and assessed according to uniform technologies. These technologies should be known and used by the medical and paramedical experts. In the circumstances of social-market economy the elaboration and implementation of effective plans by the healthcare entities is essential because of the strong competition and the danger of financial resource and poor management.
4. The processes of implementing uniform strategy for reform in healthcare accompanied by the accreditation of the healthcare institution, attestation of personnel, binding remuneration with the attestation results, also require economically directed reasoning (Gladilov & Delcheva, 2009).

Purpose

The purpose of this research is about studying students’ opinion on the quality of learning process in view of the subjects being tutored in the Department of Health Economics.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

We implemented anonymous inquiry method that contained 19 closed and open questions related to the process and quality of tutoring in the subjects “Health economics”, “Introduction in economic knowledge”, “Financial management in healthcare” and “Medical statistics and informatics”. A total of 100 inquired students participated, of whom: 79 of the major “Public health and health management” and 21 of the major “Healthcare management”. The statements suggest several answers that were analysed and juxtaposed. In this announcement we present only part of the whole research. The stages of the performed research correspond to the assigned tasks: theoretical research of literature sources; collection of factual material from the Faculty of Public Health in the city of Sofia, and its primary and statistical processing; analysis of the collected material; summarizing the results and conclusions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The Higher Education Act in Bulgaria regulates the regular research of students’ opinion being the adequate mechanism for ensuring quality education in the institutions of higher education. The anonymous group inquiry that was performed in the academic2015-2016 is part of the systematic research of students’ opinion concerning the quality of learning process. The detailed data analysis (answers to individual statements) provide evidence on students’ attitude towards quality of learning process in the subjects being studied in the Department of Health Economics.

The inquiry card starts with questions thanks to which several demographic data were collected about the respondents, in view of their gender and age. The gender distribution is the following: in absolute amount and relative share 12 men and 88 women. The age distribution is the following: the youngest inquired students were 19-year-old, while the oldest ones were 47. The average age of the students that participated in the

research was 31. In view of the learning pattern - 41 of the respondents were full-time students and 59 were part-time. An important part of the performed inquiry research is the analysis of the various aspects of learning process reviewed through students' eyes.

Analysis of students' opinion concerning the learning process

Almost all students, or a total of 96, were of the opinion that while studying the particular subject the lecturer introduced them to the objectives, contents, literature sources, the learning manner, examinations and grade formation. One of them disagreed with the statement and one could not tell, according to figure 1. Two respondents didn't provide an answer.

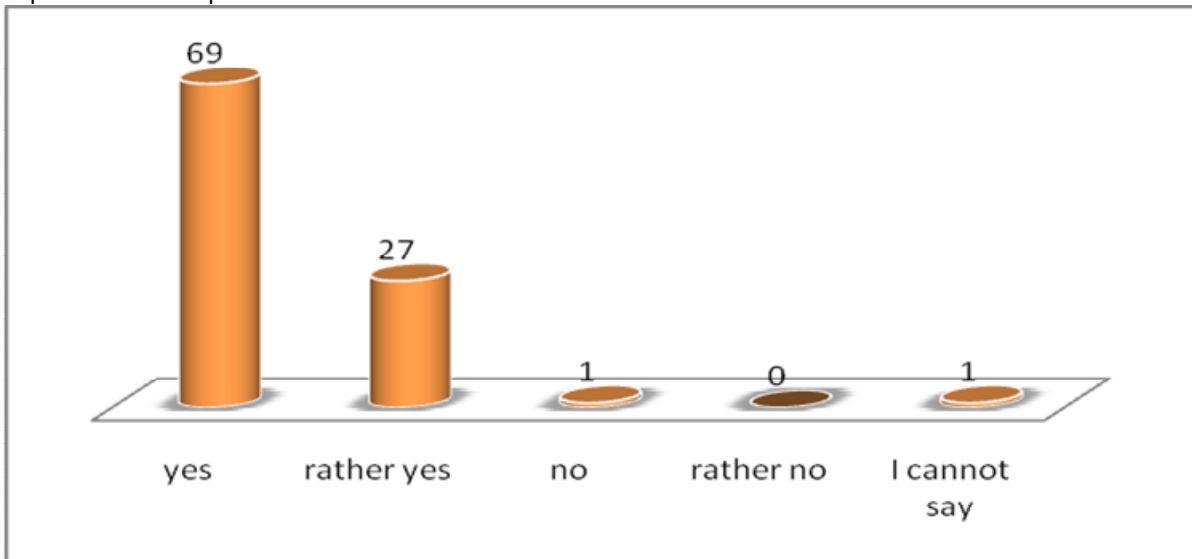


Figure 1: While studying the subject the lecturer introduced us to the objectives, contents, literature sources, study manner, examinations and grade formation related to the subject

The relations between the students and lecturers have great potential for the following:

- increasing students' motivation;
- discovering talents;
- promoting good students;
- promoting every student in finding the field of his/her specific interest;
- deepening the interest in a specific area of the scientific field.

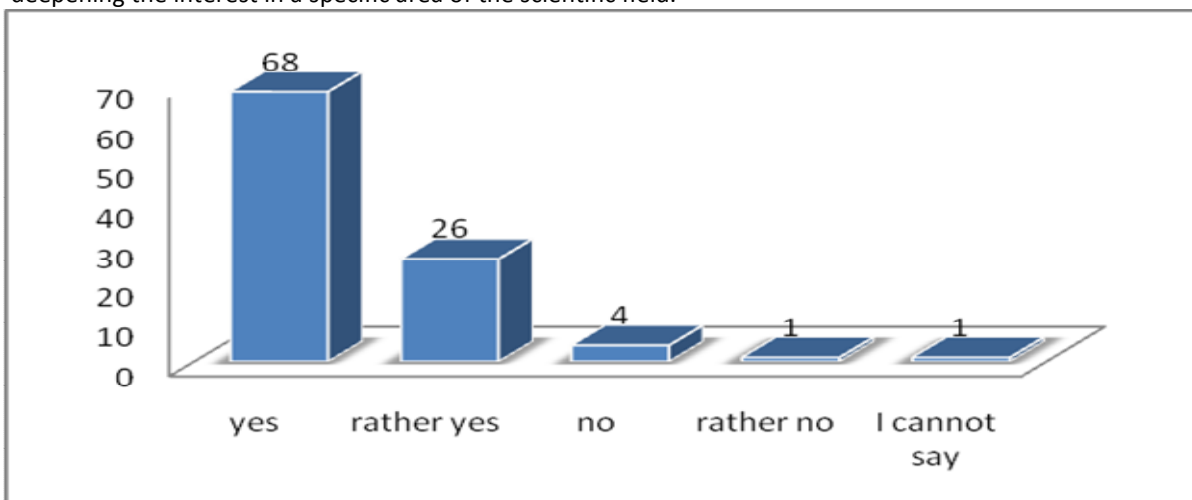


Figure 2: Lectures and exercises were well-organized

Figure 2 reflects students' opinion related to good organization of lectures and exercises. 68% of the students provided fully positive answer, 26% answered with "rather yes" and 5% gave negative answers. Usually students are the ones to decide what they "need" and what interests them. If during the studies their high interest is maintained, they are regular attendees, take active participation in discussions, ask questions.

The majority of the students are satisfied with the learning quality under the studied subjects. Even though the fully satisfied students – 76 of the respondents are times more than those according to whom there is more to require when it comes to the quality, we should look for the reasons to further increase the learning quality (figure 3). The essential factor to the learning quality is the lecturer. He/she should be aware of the work specifics in the learning division, he/she should be capable of organizing, managing and controlling the studies, according to the Rules for learning organization in the Medical University. The lecturer him/herself should have good personal qualities and professional moral which he/she is to suitably tutor. It is essential for the lecturer to have good pedagogic skills and approach when holding current control of the assimilated knowledge and skills.

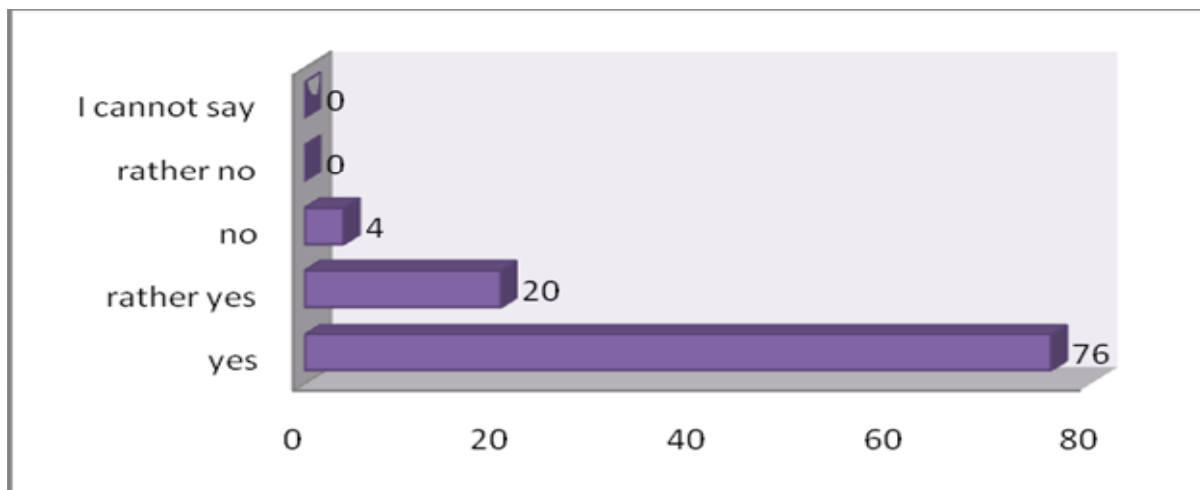


Figure 3: In general I am satisfied with the quality of the tutored subject

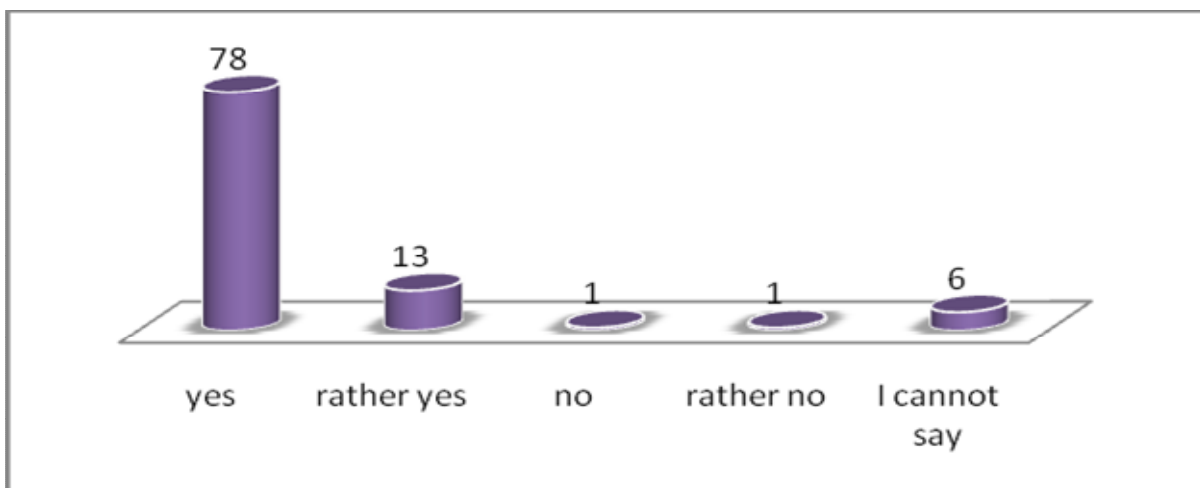


Figure 4: The assessment methods are in conformity with the subject contents

The problem related to control and assessment of knowledge, skills and habits is tightly related to improving the learning quality. On the grounds of results from the control procedures, corrections could be made in the activity of lecturer and student, make further pedagogic decisions. In recent years the object of docimology was curricula and learning methods, as well as the comprehensive activity of lecturers, in order to improve their quality. 91% of the inquired students were of the opinion that the assessment methods correspond to

the subject contents tutored in the Department of Health Economics, and only two of them were of the opposite opinion.

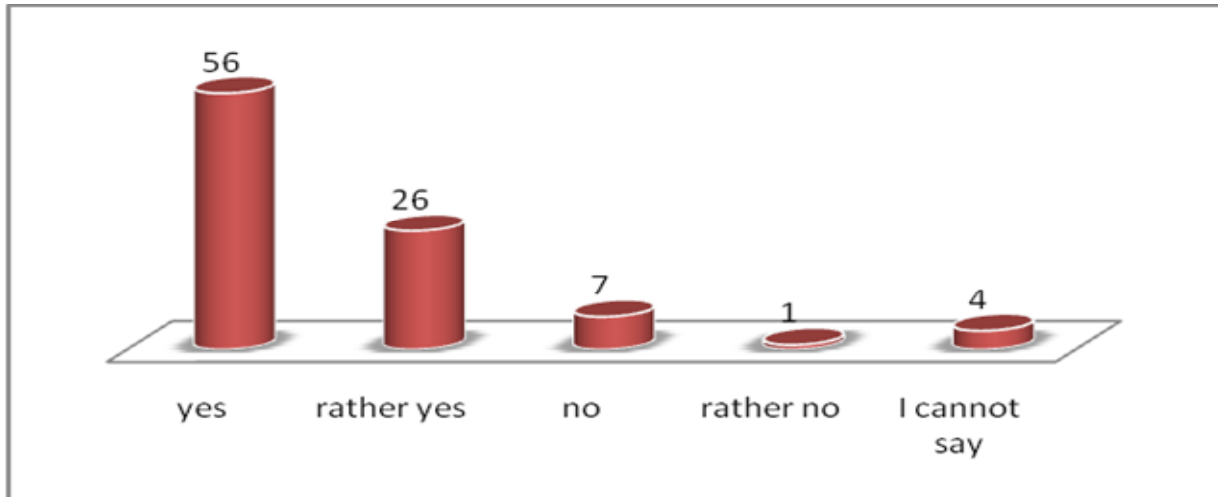


Figure 5: The lecturers motivated the students to study and work actively for their preparation

An issue of great significance is the establishment and improvement of students' motivation for high learning results. Many factors contribute for this, among which we could mention – follow-up of students' satisfaction from studies, achievement of high effectiveness of their pedagogic interaction, incentives for students to master knowledge and practical skills. In order to get detailed assessment of learning process quality was necessary to note the satisfaction level from the following statement: "Lecturers motivated students to study and work actively for their preparation". The answers once again showed that the majority of students (or a total of 82%) were satisfied with the assimilated knowledge, 8 stated negative attitude and 4 could not tell.

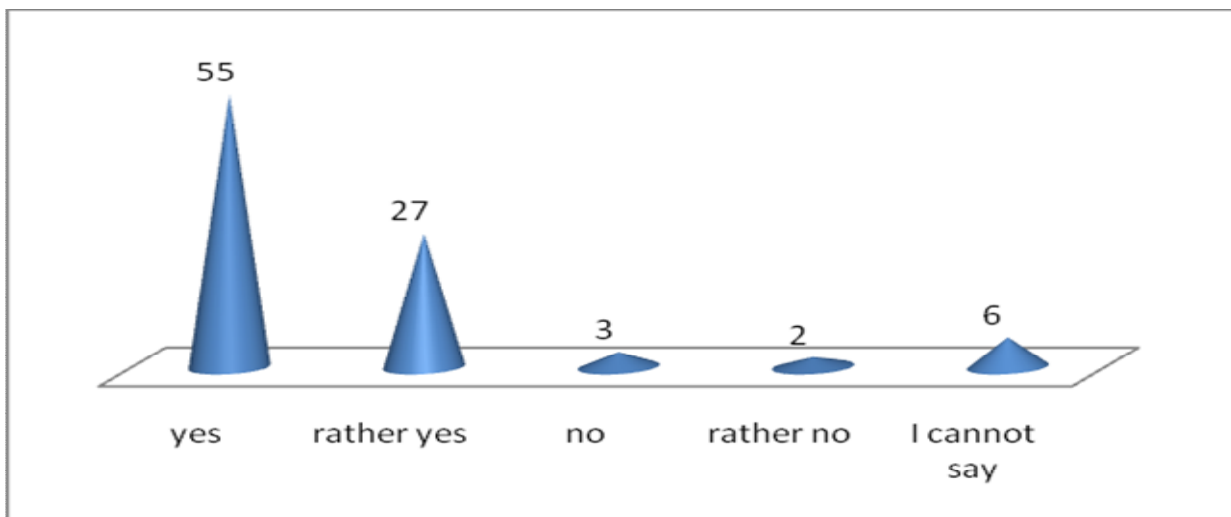


Figure 6: While studying the subject I got significant knowledge and skills that would be of use during my professional realization

The important question is related to the further realization of students that study the majors "Public health and health management" and "Healthcare management". The prerequisite is to maintain and expand students' interest in the particular profession they study. We should point out the knowledge and skills that are necessary for its successful practicing, they will get while studying the particular subject. In this light the fully positive answers were provided by 55% of the respondents, "rather yes" was provided by 27%. The students with negative attitude according to which while studying the subjects they got significant knowledge and skills that would be of great use during their professional realization were only 5%, and 6% could not say.



CONCLUSION

The conclusions we could make on the grounds of this presentation are that students' attitude towards studies is decisive for their success, emotional wellbeing, and peace of mind. Students are critical towards the educational work and lecturers. They provided various recommendations. Nevertheless, it is worth saying that *they do not perceive themselves as active subject of studies*, as active participant in the learning process and they look for the reasons behind some misfortunes outside themselves. In order to enhance the interest in learning activity and students' initiative during the learning process it is suitable to envision attractive tutoring methods and active inclusion of students in the learning process thanks to discussions, solving cases, conversations devoted to various topics, business games etc.

The positive attitude is prerequisite for positive learning results. Attitude towards studies is related to the comprehensive personality of the individual, with his/her comprehensive attitude towards reality, towards oneself. It is related to his/her value system, interests and inclinations. The attitude towards studies, in addition to conscious character, has some unconscious components. It is directly related to readiness for actions, interests and likes.

The analysis of data from the held research provides the opportunity for elaborating recommendations aimed at optimizing the learning process in the Faculty of Public Health, improving the quality of professional preparation and satisfaction from the chosen profession of specialists in the public health area.

Despite the achievements in innovative work of some medical universities, students' studies in them are performed in the established manner and tutoring methods. Introduction of new methods and learning technologies with proven quality and effectiveness in numerous medical universities, is stock for improving the learning quality in Bulgaria. The successful implementation of innovative didactic technologies is related to numerous hardships but overcoming them is challenge for every person that devotes his or her efforts to the profession of lecturer to health professionals.

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