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FACTORS DETERMINING DROPOUTS FROM HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract. Based on the experience of Lithuanian and foreign researchers and practitioners, the article theoretically justifies the reasons for dropping out of studies and provides options for reducing them. *The study* aimed to identify the factors determining dropout and their relationship with students' attitudes towards studies. *Research methods:* a quantitative method (questionnaire survey) was used to investigate students' attitudes toward the reasons for withdrawing from their studies; a statistical analysis method was used to process the data collected during the study. Using the Student's t criterion, indicators and differences in attitudes towards the factors determining withdrawal from studies were examined and compared in two groups of subjects: 1) students who had never thought about dropping out of their studies; 2) students who had thought about dropping out of their studies at least once. The study results will have practical implications for improving the quality of organising the study process in higher education by reducing the number of students who intend to discontinue their studies.

Keywords: factors influencing withdrawal from studies; higher education studies; students; attitude to studies

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1. Introduction

Contemporary higher education has been facing challenges related to students' choices to discontinue their studies. An analysis of the scientific literature shows that withdrawal is a relatively different process, which depends on the different motives of each student and even on the period when the choice to withdraw from studies is made. According to Mouton et al. (2020), the latter aspect allows for distinguishing between an early dropout phase and a late dropout phase. Various reasons, not only academic but also non-academic factors (Fourie, 2017, 2020), individual, socioeconomic, academic or institutional determinants of dropout (Guzmán et al., 2021) could be reasons why students decide to discontinue their studies in the early and late phases can be singled out. For example, the authors (Kehm et al., 2019) identify *intrinsic motivation* (e.g. interest in the subject) and associated *personal efforts invested in independent learning*, *extrinsic motivation* related to the possibility of a future job,

student's personal characteristics, for example, younger age of students, as, following Staiculescu and Richiteanu (2018), Adamonienė (2010), Jokštaitė and Pociūtė (2014), such students are characterised by a certain instability, intense self-seeking, lack of vision of the professional environment, lack of self-knowledge, lack of intrinsic motivation, insufficient adaptation efforts or according to the authors Bumbacco and Scharfe (2020), Mostert and Pienaar (2020), Bernardo et al. (2022) – increased burnout and exhaustion between students. *Temporary suspension of studies*, which significantly contributes to dropout, *a socio-demographic environment of the student*, where the educational level and the professional status of the parents contribute to a lower dropout rate, are also seen as reasons for terminating studies in scientific literature. However, refuting this correlation in their work, the authors Behr et al. (2020) argue that students with parents with higher levels of education are more likely to drop out of studies and accept a job offer on the market compared to households with lower levels of education. In contrast, the latter is more likely to be exposed to other factors, such as financial problems, which frequently cause the termination of studies. This is confirmed by the study of the authors Staiculescu and Richiteanu (2018), who attribute to non-payment of tuition fees, i.e., to financial problems, to a frequent reason for dropping out of studies, and Behr et al. (2020) identify it as a personal motive for withdrawing from studies.

In today's context, the problem of dropping out from studies remains relevant and it is a global problem that not only causes significant economic losses at the national level but also affects students' health and career prospects (Nemtcan et al. 2020), reduces a country's productivity and economic competitiveness (Saftaa and Stana, 2020) and encourages leaders and lecturers of higher education institutions to continuously search for ways to reduce the number of dropouts from the study process. To find more effective ways of minimising the problems associated with student withdrawal, it is necessary to delve deeper into the attitudes and dispositions of students towards their studies and to analyse the reasons for terminating studies Lee and Lee (2020) point out that it is important for Higher Education Institutions to identify students who wish to withdraw from their studies in advance, as such information would allow them to develop targeted strategies to stem student attrition. It should be acknowledged that over the past few decades, there has been a rise in research on the phenomenon of student withdrawal from studies, with a particular focus on the causes of dropout. However, in Lithuania, there are few research studies aimed at investigating students' attitudes towards studies. These factors influence withdrawal from studies and their relationships in groups of students who have never intended to terminate studies and have at least once thought about dropping out of studies. The lack of surveys and the uneven implementation of preventive measures in higher education institutions exacerbate the latter problem (State Audit Office's audit report "Is the quality of studies in higher education institutions ensured", 2021). Therefore, it would be essential to identify how the attitudes towards studying differ between students who have never intended to drop out and those who have at least once considered dropping out, and what possible determinants of dropping out and the differences in the relationships between them can. Acevedo (2021), Timbal (2019) and Gairín et al. (2014) believe in the importance of conducting activities to measure dropout rates and analyse related data to use intelligent predictive models for the reduction of dropout. This would provide a better understanding of attitudes toward studies and their relationship with the reasons for dropping out. It would be of long-term value in the academic debate on managing withdrawal from studies to reduce the number of such dropouts. Taking into account the relevance of the topic and the practical significance of the research results, this article reveals the differences in attitudes toward studies and the determinants of dropping out of studies between students who have not intended to dropout and those who have at least once thought about withdrawing, as well as the differences in the factors that determine dropping out of studies and relationships between them.

The research problem is defined by the question: how does the evaluation of the factors that determine the withdrawal from studies and their connections with the attitude of the students differ in the groups of students who do not intend to terminate study and who at least have once thought about dropping out of studies?

The object of the study: the factors that determine dropping out of studies and their relationships with students' attitudes towards studies in groups of students who have no intention of withdrawing and those who have at least once considered dropping out of studies.

The study aims to identify the factors that determine dropping out of studies and their relationships with students' attitudes toward studies.

The objectives of the study:

1. To analyse the factors influencing the termination of studies from a theoretical point of view.
2. To investigate and compare students' attitudes toward studies and possible factors that lead to discontinuation of studies in groups of students with no intention of dropping out of their studies and those who have thought about terminating their studies at least once.
3. To identify the relationships between the factors that predetermine dropping out and students' attitudes towards their studies in the groups of students who do not intend to drop out and those who have at least once thought about withdrawing from studies.

2. Theoretical background

There are various reasons a student decides to drop out, both in the early and late phases of withdrawal. For example, Kehm et al. (2019) identify *intrinsic motivation* (e.g. interest in the subject) and *the associated personal effort for self-directed learning*, and *extrinsic motivation* related to the possibility of getting a job in future. *The student's personal characteristics*, for example, a younger age of students, are also seen as a cause of withdrawal from studies and, according to Staiculescu and Richiteanu (2018), Adamonienė (2010), Jokštaitė and Pociūtė (2014) younger students are characterised by a certain instability, intense self-seeking, lack of vision of the professional environment, lack of self-knowledge, lack of intrinsic motivation, insufficient adaptation efforts. More reasons include *temporary suspension of studies*, which strongly contributes to dropout, *a socio-demographic environment of the student*, where the parents' educational level and professional status contribute to a lower dropout rate. Jia and Maloney (2015), as an important factor in identifying an individual's nationality, argue that international students are more likely to drop out than domestic students, who make up the majority. However, refuting this correlation in their work, the authors Behr et al. (2020) argue that students with parents with a higher educational background are more likely to drop out of school and change to a job offer on the market compared to those in households with lower levels of education, the latter being more likely to face other problems, such as financial difficulties.

As already mentioned, according to Mouton et al. (2020), dropout is measured in two phases: the early dropout phase and the late dropout phase. These phases of attrition are also highlighted by the authors Behr et al. (2020). In contrast, according to Mouton et al. (2020), Stake and Cisneros-Cohernour (2004), Bobrova et al. (2012), Baranauskienė et al. (2011), Putrienė (2017), the early phase of attrition is attributed to a lack of student engagement, overcrowding, and unfulfilled expectations. For example, Alkan (2014), Liobikienė and Bukauskienė (2014), Trowler (2010), Everett (2015), Senior et al. (2018), Messias et al. (2015), Khe et al. (2018) also highlights the importance of active student involvement in the institution's activities, while Behr et al. (2020) associate dropping out of studies with students' false expectations. To eliminate the gap in students' expectations, it is necessary to provide as much information as possible about the different study programmes, the requirements and organisation of studies, and the career and job prospects in the market (Jokštaitė and Pociūtė, 2014; Liobikienė and Bukauskienė, 2014). Both Mouton et al. (2020) identify the burden of excessive study requirements as a reason for dropping out, which may not match students' existing skills and competencies. Other researchers (Behr et al., 2020; Martišauskienė, 2016; Žibėnienė, 2014; Allan and Pileičikienė, 2010; Richard and Joseph, 2008) cite the study and study organisation conditions as another reason for stopping studying, relating this to the support provided by lecturers and the pedagogical skills they possess, while reasons for stopping

studies that are personal in nature may include incompatibility with the programme of study and high occupational pressure. However, Mouton et al. (2020) see these as late-phase conditions for dropping out, including personal and family problems or illness. Behr et al. (2020) separately identify the late phase of dropping out as receiving an exciting job offer, but they believe this can be addressed by working with the employer and facilitating a better work-study balance, while Mouton et al. (2020) list the following reasons for the late phase of the dropout process as the desire to earn money quickly. Kehm et al. (2019) also refer to working while studying, but they argue that allocating more than 20 hours per week to work leads to a higher dropout rate.

For example, Alkan (2014) adds non-traditional factors, such as *a person's sense of humour* and experienced loneliness, to the motives that influence withdrawal from studies. Based on the findings presented by Alkan (2014), it is noted that having and using a sense of humour makes it easier to cope with problems and challenges, while a higher degree of loneliness of the student also appears to correlate with a lower likelihood of dropping out. Similarly, Alkan (2014) points to the level of academic performance of the student as an important factor in predicting the likelihood of their termination of studies, which is supported by a case study conducted by Staiculescu and Richiteanu (2018), in which not having the required number of credits is considered a common reason for dropping out of studies. This relationship is also supported by the authors (Casanova, et al., 2018), who identify the fact that the decision to discontinue studies is significantly influenced by academic performance. In their opinion, the higher the performance, the more likely the student is to continue studies; however, students with high and top grades may decide not to continue their studies and to change institutions if the higher education institution was not their first choice at the time of admission. According to Casanova, et al. (2018), female students with below-average academic performance are more likely to decide to discontinue their studies than male students. Thus, it is essential to identify students' skills and learning difficulties as early as possible and facilitate their access to learning methodologies, participation in professional project activities and provide them with information on employment opportunities in order to improve their motivation (Tolūtienė, 2012, Tolūtienė & Jovarauskaitė, 2011).

The following discussion of the reasons for dropping out identifies the difference between university and college studies. This is noted by Behr et al. (2020), who point out that *poor study organisation* is a more common reason for dropping out of universities than colleges. Thus, according to the data obtained by the Student Associations (SAs) of higher education institutions, the quality of studies and teaching are highlighted in the first positions. The third most important reason is also *learning resources and infrastructure*, while authors Kehm et al. (2019) analyse this area more broadly, ranging from *the study environment to institutional resources (number of students per lecture or seminar, the composition of the student community, staff skill level, research intensity, overall staff-student ratio, academic costs per student, library costs per student, etc.)*, which is a key reason for the increase in the number of students attending the university to the curriculum, the structure of the course and the organisation of examinations and the learning environment and quality (physical environment, quality of teaching, etc.). The assistance provided during the studies in the form of material support, additional seminars, and training, especially in the first year, is also highlighted in the State Audit Office's audit report (2021) by Behr et al. (2020), and by Staiculescu and Richiteanu (2018) and the need for additional individual counselling on career and vocational guidance is seen by Staiculescu and Richiteanu (2018), Pukelis, (2007).

In addition to academic support and the proposal to provide as many additional services to students as possible, thus maximising the assistance provided to students, the document "Description of Actions and Procedures for the Implementation of the Future Economy DNA Plan (Annex 3)" also refers to the reasons for dropping out of studies, which range from the student's readiness for studies to personal characteristics, socio-economic status (of the student and/or family), the specific characteristics of the institution of higher education, factors of a financial nature and the factors and education and employment policies in the country, as well as the labour market situation. However, further results show that dropping out is strongly influenced by insufficient pre-university competences, which is supported by Westrick et al. (2015), Paura and Arhipova (2014) and Kehm et al. (2019),

who argue that better academic preparation and better academic outcomes in higher education institutions are due to the level of academic excellence achieved in the pre-university period and by the results of the study of Kehm et al. (2019), which show that a better academic preparation and academic outcomes in the pre-university period is due to the achievement of a higher level of pre-university academic achievement. Kehm et al. (2019) state that high prior academic achievement is directly related to lower dropout rates unless individuals drop out after a study programme has failed to live up to expectations. Westrick et al. (2015), Paura and Arhipova (2014) and Mouton et al. (2020) integrate the motive of unmet expectations into the early phase of the dropout process, while Behr et al. (2020), Bagdonas and Jankauskienė (2010; 2012), place false expectations related to studies among the leading and most important causes. Another reason mentioned in the document "Description of Actions and Procedures for the Implementation of the Future Economy DNA Plan (Annex 3)" is inadequate information about the studies to be chosen, which is confirmed by Kehm et al. (2019), who also place importance on the availability of information about admission requirements, admission quotas, entrance exams, and other information and its granularity/completeness.

3. The research methodology

Research design. The study was carried out among Lithuanian university students ($n = 309$): 227 (73.5%) were female respondents, and 82 (26.5%) were male respondents. The most significant number of respondents were first-year students ($n=138$ (44.7%)) and fourth-year students ($n=6$ (1.9%)) made up the smallest number of participants. Almost half ($n=149$ (48%)) of the students who participated in the study had thought about dropping out at least once, while 161 (52%) respondents had never thought about dropping out. The method of distribution of questionnaire form: an online survey. The ethical principle of free choice to participate in the survey was respected. The survey was conducted anonymously, and the results were processed and presented in a summary form. For confidentiality reasons, the name of the higher education institution is not mentioned in the article.

Research methods. The analytical descriptive method was applied in the theoretical aspect of discussing the reasons that can lead to withdrawal from studies and analysing the ways and means of reducing the dropout rate.

Quantitative research method. A questionnaire survey was used to investigate the factors that lead to dropping out of studies and to identify the possibilities of reducing the dropout rate of students. The questionnaire was constructed based on theoretical insights, criteria identified in the scientific literature, which revealed the attitude of the participants to studies, and the identification of the personal and external reasons for dropping out. The validity of the questionnaire was established by calculating Cronbach's alpha values. The results of the statistical analysis of the data show that the overall internal consistency of the questionnaire statements (number of variables = 44) is quite high (Cronbach's alpha = 0.8755) and ranges from 0.8679 to 0.8852. The internal consistency of the variables was also checked for each group of variables in the questionnaire separately. The Cronbach's alpha values for the group of the Attitudes towards studying consisting of 12 statements were calculated and the Cronbach's alpha equalled 0.8652 and it varied from 0.8364 to 0.9261. In defining the main factors that lead to dropping out of studies, the questionnaire identifies several constructs: *personal reasons*, including aspects such as motivation to learn, personality traits, physical health, time management skills, commitment to the chosen profession, etc., and *external reasons*, which are related to the conditions for studying in a higher education institution, the organisation of the study process that also embraces the content of studies, characteristics of teaching, and the role of the surrounding people, and other aspects. The estimated internal consistency of the statements in the group of *Personal Reasons for Dropping Out* (number of variables = 19) has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8807, ranging from 0.8698 to 0.8858, and the estimated internal consistency of the statements in the group *External Reasons for Dropping Out* (number of variables = 13) has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.8752, ranging from 0.8550 to 0.8784. Taking into consideration the fact that internal consistency should be between 0 and 1 and a Cronbach's alpha of 0.60 is considered appropriate for research (Pakalniškienė, 2012), the coefficients of Cronbach's alpha calculated in this study indicate that the groups of questions are consistent with each other and that the variables included in the constructed questionnaire are representative of the part being investigated and are oriented towards the same subject. *Statistical research method.* Statistical analysis methods were used to

process the data collected during the study: the *Student's t-test* (to compare the means of two independent samples) was used to identify differences between several independent populations. Pearson's correlation coefficient was also used to assess the correlation between external factors that lead to dropping out of studies and students' attitudes toward studies. The results obtained are considered statistically significant when they meet the significance level p . Statistical analysis of the data was performed using the SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) software package version 17.

4. Research results and analysis

Meeting students' expectations, engaging and motivating study content that meets the needs of the modern labour market, and creating opportunities to acquire practical skills necessary for professional preparation during the study process are among the factors that determine satisfaction with studies, which can lead to students' interest in the chosen study programme and motivation to study. Therefore, the search for more effective ways to reduce the problems associated with students dropping out of studies should include indicators reflecting the factors such as students' perceptions of their studies, the personal and external reasons that may lead to dropout from studies, etc.

The performed comparative analysis of the opinions of students on studying in the groups of students who had no intention of dropping out from their studies and those who at least once had thoughts of dropping out showed (see. Table 1) that students who had never thought about dropping-out of studies had awarded significantly higher mean scores for the *usefulness* ($M=5.98$, $SD=1.06$) and *interestingness* ($M=5.78$, $SD=1.08$) of their studies than did students who had thought about dropping-out from their studies out at least once (respectively: ($M=4.91$, $SD=1.52$), ($M=4.62$, $SD=1.55$)). Similarly, students who do not intend to drop out from their studies rated them as *engaging* ($M=5.31$, $SD=1.4$), *conducive to career preparation* ($M=5.4$, $SD=1.4$), and *providing a high level of practical skills* ($M=5.48$, $SD=1.4$) at higher levels in these aspects than students who have at least considered to drop out from their studies (see. Table 1). Meanwhile, the latter group has shown lower mean scores, indicating that they are less likely to *experience success during their studies* ($M=5.09$, $SD=1.44$), and are *more passively engaged in the study process* ($M=4.1$, $SD=1.57$), and a higher proportion of them are *already disillusioned with their studies* ($M=3.15$, $SD=1.96$), compared to those who did not intend to drop out from their studies (correspondingly: ($M=5.75$, $SD=1.09$), ($M=5.21$, $SD=1.45$), ($M=1.59$, $SD=1.05$)).

Table 1. Perceptions of studies by students who have no intention of dropping out from their studies ($n=159$) and students who have thought about dropping out from their studies at least once ($n=148$) (averages (M), standard deviations (SD) and level of significance of the differences; $Max=7$)

Indicators reflecting opinion on studies	No intentions to drop out		Thought about dropping out at least once		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Studying at the VK VVF has met my expectations	5.51	1.18	4.47	1.49	6.755	0.001
Studying at the VK VVF is benefitting me	5.98	1.06	4.91	1.52	7.109	0.001
Studying at the VK VVF is interesting to me	5.78	1.08	4.62	1.55	7.587	0.001
I'm doing well in my studies at the VK VVF	5.75	1.09	5.09	1.44	4.529	0.001
I like studying at the VK VVF	5.88	1.16	4.62	1.52	8.047	0.001
The study process at the VK VVF engages and motivates me	5.31	1.4	4.03	1.61	7.396	0.001
I get a lot of practical skills while studying at the VK VVF	5.48	1.4	4.18	1.82	6.956	0.001
Studying at the VK VVF is easier than I expected	4.84	1.78	4.21	1.82	3.051	0.002
I am more actively involved in the study process	5.21	1.45	4.1	1.57	6.43	0.001
Studying at the VK VVF helps me prepare for my professional activities	5.4	1.4	4.32	1.58	6.289	0.001

I would recommend studying at VK VVF to others	5.81	1.34	4.51	1.89	6.813	0.001
I am already disappointed with my choice of studying at VK VVF	1.59	1.05	3.15	1.9	-8,743	0.001

In summary, one can state that satisfaction with the chosen studies and perceptions of their usefulness in preparing for professional life, meeting students' expectations, increased success in the study process and student involvement in the study process are some of the aspects that are likely to increase students' willingness to continue their studies. Meanwhile, a lack of perception of the usefulness of studies and their relevance for the preparation for a professional career, frustration with studies, low levels of satisfaction with studies, and less frequent success in the study process can all contribute to thoughts about dropping out of studies.

When examining the factors that lead to students' dropping out of their studies, attention should be paid to identifying the personal and external causes of dropping out. External factors that may lead to dropping out from studies relate to the organisation of the study process and include aspects such as the content of the studies, the specifics and nature of teaching, the role of those around the student, etc.

The results of the analysis of the differences in the assessment of external reasons for dropping out from studies between the groups of students who did not intend to drop out from their studies and those who had at least once considered dropping out are presented in Table 2. The significantly higher mean scores in the group of students who have at least once considered to dropout from studies indicate that the external reasons for dropping out from studies include an *excess of unnecessary material presented in lectures* ($t=-3.172$, $p=0.002$) and the *boringness of the presentation of material in lectures* ($t=-5.019$, $p=0.001$), compared to the reasons given by the students who do not consider quitting their studies (respectively: ($M=2.4$, $SD=1.33$) and ($M=2.5$, $SD=1.38$)). Students who had at least once had thoughts of dropping out from their studies also rated *inconvenient lecture times and timetables* as one of the reasons for dropping out from their studies at a statistically significant ($t=-2.792$, $p=0.006$) higher score ($M=2.91$, $SD=1.45$) than those who did not have any intention of dropping-out from their studies ($M=2.46$, $SD=1.4$).

Performed comparative analysis of the data showed that there were no statistically significant differences in the assessment of other external reasons for dropping out from studies (see Table 2), suggesting that they are valued at a similar level in the groups of students who have never intended to drop out and those who have at least once considered to drop out from their studies.

Table 2. Assessment of external reasons, which can affect the dropping-out from studies in the groups of students who did not intend to dropout form their studies ($n=159$) and those who had at least once thought about dropping out from studies ($n=148$) (means (M), standard deviations (SD) and significance level of the differences; $Max=5$)

External reasons that may lead to dropping out from studies	No intentions to drop out		Thought about dropping out at least once		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Inconvenient lecture times, timetable	2.46	1.4	2.91	1.45	-2,792	0.006
Influence of surrounding people, relatives and friends	1.63	1.01	1.69	1.09	-0,518	0.605
Too difficult studies/programme	2.42	1.31	2.48	1.49	-0,358	0.72
Too much freedom for students	1.32	0.68	1.33	0.75	-0,175	0.861
Lectures contain a lot of unnecessary material	2.4	1.33	2.9	1.41	-3,172	0.002
Lectures present material in a boring way	2.5	1.38	3.28	1.34	-5,019	0.001
I am not encouraged to be actively involved in the study process	2.01	1.15	2.28	1.31	-1,88	0.061
I do not get the knowledge and skills I need to prepare for my professional career during my studies	2.6	1.46	2.55	1.31	0.307	0.759

The content of studies is outdated and out of step with the needs of today's labour market	2.53	1.47	2.5	1.34	0.213	0.832
Studying at the VK VVF does not provide opportunities to gain valuable experience in preparation for professional activities	2.45	1.44	2.26	1.23	1.251	0.212
The requirements for students are too high	2.37	1.3	2.61	1.4	-1,532	0.126
The evaluation system is unclear	2.25	1.39	2.49	1.35	-1,565	0.119
A part of the people in the group dropped-out	1.43	0.86	1.6	0.95	-1,611	0.108

According to the results, several reasons can be identified for dropping-out from studies: inconvenient lecture times, the peculiarities of the organisation of the study process, where the material is presented in a boring way that is not related to professional activities, and the lack of opportunities for acquiring skills and abilities in the course of studies in preparation for professional career and activities. The latter may be one of the reasons why people think about dropping out of studies.

When looking at the reasons for dropping out from studies, it is important to look beyond the perspective of the higher education institution as an educational institution. It is helpful to look at the problem of dropping out from studies by also specifying personal reasons.

Statistical analysis of the data shows (see. Table 3) that *illness or health problems* ($M=3.24$, $SD=1.62$), *moving to another country* ($M=2.47$, $SD=1.51$), *financial difficulties while studying as a paying student* ($M=3.3$, $SD=1.62$) and *disagreements with lecturers* ($M=2.45$, $SD=1.44$) are among the reasons for dropping-out from studies for students who do not intend to quit, compared to the ratings of such reasons by students who have had at least one thought about dropping-out from studies (respectively: ($M=2.25$, $SD=1.54$), ($M=1.8$, $SD=1.36$), ($M=2.24$, $SD=1.61$) and ($M=2.02$, $SD=1.36$)). On the other hand, *academic debts accumulated during studies that were not cleared on time* ($M=2.24$, $SD=1.48$) and *not knowing where to turn for help with accumulated debts* ($M=2.46$, $SD=1.43$) were ranked significantly higher among students who had never thought about dropping-out from studies, compared to the data of students who had at least thought about it once (respectively: ($M=2.01$, $SD=1.43$) and ($M=1.89$, $SD=1.32$)). Meanwhile, as Table 3 shows, the latter have ranked the personal reasons that may lead to dropping out from studies significantly higher, such as *difficulties in balancing studies and work* ($M=3.09$, $SD=1.58$) and *inability to plan time and activities* ($M=2.74$, $SD=1.47$), as well as *difficulties in adapting to the environment and new demands* ($M=2.79$, $SD=1.47$) and *inability to concentrate and focus while studying* ($M=2.68$, $SD=1.49$), compared to the scores provided by students who have not ever intended to drop out from their studies (respectively: ($M=2.52$, $SD=1.47$), ($M=2.3$, $SD=1.27$), ($M=2.18$, $SD=1.28$) and ($M=2.21$, $SD=1.27$)). On the other hand, using the *Student's t criteria*, it was found that the *lack of motivation to study* ($M=3.55$, $SD=1.37$), the *lack of confidence in their chosen specialisation* ($M=3.14$, $SD=1.54$) or the *laziness to study* ($M=2.46$, $SD=1.39$) have been ranked significantly higher (in a statistically significant way, See. Table 3) by the students who have at least once thought about dropping-out from studies compared to students who did not intend to drop out from the studies (respectively: ($M=2.48$, $SD=1.36$), ($M=2.65$, $SD=1.55$) and ($M=2.02$, $SD=1.33$)).

Table 3. Assessment of personal reasons, which can affect the dropping-out from studies in the groups of students who did not intend to drop out from their studies (n=159) and those who had at least once thought about dropping out from studies (n=148) (means (M), standard deviations (SD) and significance level of the differences; Max=5)

Personal reasons that may lead to dropping out from studies	No intentions to drop out		Thought about dropping out at least once		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
Case of Illness, physical health	3.24	1.62	2.25	1.54	5.511	0.001
Hard to combine studies and work	2.52	1.47	3.09	1.58	-3,269	0.001
Lack of motivation to study	2.48	1.36	3.55	1.37	-6,876	0.001
Failure to plan your time and activities	2.3	1.27	2.74	1.47	-2,8	0.005
Doubts about your chosen specialisation	2.65	1.55	3.14	1.54	-2,739	0.007
Difficulties adapting to the environment, requirements	2.18	1.28	2.79	1.47	-3,87	0.001
Laziness to study	2.02	1.33	2.46	1.39	-2,852	0.005
Inability to concentrate and focus while studying	2.21	1.27	2.68	1.49	-2,94	0.004
Lack of interest in the subjects being taught	2.4	1.43	2.73	1.45	-1,992	0.047
Failure to complete tasks on time	2.39	1.34	2.53	1.44	-0,86	0.39
Disagreements with lecturers	2.45	1.44	2.02	1.36	2.667	0.008
Disagreements with course mates	1.8	1.21	1.66	1.11	1.101	0.272
Paid studies during a period of financial hardship	3.3	1.62	2.24	1.61	5.76	0.001
Failure to clear academic debts accumulated during studies	2.86	1.48	2.01	1.43	5.129	0.001
Not knowing where to go for help with academic debt	2.46	1.43	1.89	1.32	3.667	0.001
Lack of understanding of what to do, when and how to do it, lack of clear instructions and deadlines for tasks	2.73	1.47	2.96	1.49	-1,343	0.18
The modular system is unacceptable	2.17	1.35	2.15	1.32	0.125	0.901
Departure to another country	2.47	1.51	1.8	1.36	4.098	0.001
Distance learning(s) not acceptable	1.78	1.23	1.67	1.25	0.805	0.421

In summary, the results of the study suggest that the personal reasons that may affect students who do not intend to drop out from their studies are more likely to be related to factors outside the individual's control and the ones that are more difficult to control, such as illness, health problems, financial difficulties, change of residence, etc. Meanwhile, the personal reasons for possible dropping out from studies for students who have at least once thought about dropping out from their studies include a lack of motivation, difficulties adapting to a new environment and requirements, lack of interest in the subjects taught, uncertainty about their chosen career path, or laziness to study.

Correlation connections between external reasons might influence the dropping-out from studies and the evaluation of the studies by students who did not intend to drop out from their studies and those who thought about dropping out at least once. The study investigated how students' attitudes towards their studies and external factors that may lead to dropping out from studies are interrelated. To this end, a Pearson correlation analysis was carried out between the groups of students who did not intend to drop out from their studies and those who had at least once thought about it, the results of which are shown in Table 4.

The relatively strong negative correlations found between external reasons that may influence dropping out from studies and the evaluation of studies show that students who have at least once had thoughts of dropping out from studies perceive their studies as *less valuable* and *less interesting with lectures containing a lot of unnecessary material* (respectively: (r=-0.361, p=0.001) and (r=-0.303, p=0.001)) and *it is presented in a boring way* (respectively: (r=-0.334, p=0.001) and (r=-0.346, p=0.001)). Statistical analysis of the data also shows that for

students who have at least once thought about dropping out of studies suffer from *the presentation of unnecessary material* in lectures ($r=-0.282$, $p=0.001$) and from the *boringness of the presentation of the material* ($r=-0.79$, $p=0.001$) are negatively associated with the perception of *studies that have failed to meet student expectations*. Similar but weaker associations were found between external reasons for dropping out from studies and the evaluation of studies in the group of students who had never considered dropping out (see Table 4).

Quite significant results observed after finding sufficiently strong negative associations in the group of students who have at least once considered to dropout from studies indicate that external reasons that may lead to dropping out from studies, such as *not being encouraged to actively engage in the study process* ($r=-0.285$, $p=0.001$), the *content of studies, which is outdated and does not meet the needs of the contemporary labour market* ($r=-0.331$, $p=0.001$), the *lack of knowledge and skills acquired during the study process, which are necessary to prepare for professional activity* ($r=-0.318$, $p=0.001$), as well as the *lack of opportunities for gaining valuable experience* ($r=-0.316$, $p=0.001$), are related to the assessment of *studies as not having met the expectations of students*. On the other hand, the correlation analysis revealed a negative relationship, indicating that participants perceive studying as *less rewarding* and *less interesting* when they are *not encouraged to actively engage in the study process* (respectively ($r=-0.215$, $p=0.009$) and ($r=-0.227$, $p=0.006$)). In addition, the *content of studies is outdated and does not meet the needs of the contemporary labour market* (($r=-0.327$, $p=0.001$) and ($r=-0.355$, $p=0.001$), respectively), and the *lack of opportunities in the study process for gaining valuable experience in preparation for professional activities*)($r=-0.256$, $p=0.002$) and ($r=-0.316$, $p=0.001$) respectively) and the *lack of knowledge and skills needed to prepare for professional activities* (($r=-0.322$, $p=0.001$) and ($r=-0.338$, $p=0.001$)) are among the external causes of the perception of studies as *unuseful* and *uninteresting*. The slightly weaker, but also statistically significant, negative correlations are found in the group of students who did not intend to drop out from their studies, indicate a *lack of encouragement to actively engage in the study process* ($r=-0.206$, $p=0.01$), the *lack of opportunities to gain valuable experience in preparation for a career* ($r=-0.203$, $p=0.01$) and the *lack of skills and knowledge needed to prepare for future professional activities* ($r=-0.194$, $p=0.015$) are associated with perceiving studies as *less interesting*.

On the other hand, the expectations of students who do not intend to drop out from their studies *are unjustified* when they *do not provide opportunities to gain valuable experience in preparation for professional activities* ($r=-0.174$, $p=0.028$). Thus, the quality of teaching and content, the possibilities of the practical application of theoretical knowledge in professional activities, the constantly updated content of studies in line with the needs of the modern labour market, and the opportunities provided during studies to gain valuable experience in preparation for professional activities are some of the factors that determine the positive attitude of students towards studies, which in turn leads to the formation of a positive attitude of the latter towards studies. Therefore, to reduce the number of students wishing to drop out from their studies, the focus should be on organising the study process in such a way as to provide students with opportunities to gain valuable experience in preparation for their professional careers. Modern, innovation-driven study content that responds to labour market needs and focuses on the practical applicability of acquired knowledge are also among the indicators that reduce dropout rates.

The correlation analysis showed that the group of students who had at least one thought about dropping out from their studies had a relatively strong negative connection, indicating that they perceived their studies as *less enjoyable* when the *lectures cover a lot of unnecessary materials* ($r=-0.294$, $p=0.001$), when they are *presented in a boring way* ($r=-0.363$, $p=0.001$), and when the *lectures do not provide enough knowledge needed to prepare for future professional activities* ($r=-0.283$, $p=0.001$), the *content of studies, which is outdated and does not meet the needs of the contemporary labour market and us outdated* ($r=-0.204$, $p=0.014$) and when the *study process does not provide sufficient opportunities for students to gain valuable experience in preparing for professional activities* ($r=-0.268$, $p=0.001$) and *students are not actively encouraged to participate in the study process* ($r=-0.21$, $p=0.011$). Pearson correlation coefficients were also calculated and significant negative relationships were

observed, showing that when *lectures provide a lot of unnecessary material* ($r=-0.225$, $p=0.006$), when *lectures are performed in a boring way* ($r=-0.31$, $p=0.001$) and when *lectures do not provide enough knowledge to prepare for professional activities* ($r=-0.283$, $p=0.001$), the *content of studies does not meet the needs of the contemporary labour market and is outdated* ($r=-0.218$, $p=0.008$), and the *study process does not sufficiently provide students with opportunities to gain valuable experience in preparation for professional activities* ($r=-0.287$, $p=0.001$) and *students are not encouraged to actively participate in the study process* ($r=-0.233$, $p=0.005$), studies are perceived as *less conducive to the students' acquisition of practical skills*. Therefore, while knowing that activities are an important factor in preparing for professional activities (career), where skills and competencies are only developed through the active participation of a person himself in a range of activities, it is particularly important for the study process to make use of opportunities for activities that broaden and improve skills and competences of its participant, enhance knowledge and provide opportunities for valuable experience, which is likely to reduce the number of students wishing to drop out from their studies.

The performed correlation analysis of the group of students who had at least one dropout thought showed negative correlations with the excess of unnecessary material ($r=-0.276$, $p=0.001$) and *boring material* ($r=-0.313$, $p=0.001$), as well as with the lack of knowledge ($r=-0.262$, $p=0.001$) that was imparted in *lectures* and that *was necessary to prepare for a career in the profession, outdated and out-of-date study content that does not meet the needs of the contemporary labour market* ($r=-0.253$, $p=0.002$), and *insufficient opportunities for students to gain valuable experience in the process of preparing for their professional career* ($r=-0.224$, $p=0.006$), and the *lack of encouragement for students to actively engage in the study process* ($r=-0.2$, $p=0.015$), which *makes students less engaged in the study process and less motivated to study*. Thus, the lack of a motivating environment and the lack of encouragement for students to actively engage in the study process may be among the factors that lead to withdrawal from studies and dropping out. Slightly weaker, but also statistically significant, connections found in the group of students who have had at least one thought about dropping-out from studies suggest that *lectures with the material being presented in a boring way* ($r=-0.218$, $p=0.002$) and *content that is outdated and irrelevant to the needs of the modern labour market* ($r=-0.181$, $p=0.029$) *reduce students' engagement in the study process*. Meanwhile, stronger negative correlations are found between the *abundance of unnecessary information presented during lections* ($r=-0.357$, $p=0.001$) and the *lectures with the material being presented in a boring way* ($r=-0.364$, $p=0.001$), as well as the *lack of knowledge and skills needed to prepare for professional activities* ($r=-0.294$, $p=0.001$), *outdated studies content* ($r=-0.276$, $p=0.001$), *lack of opportunities to gain valuable experience in preparation for professional activities* ($r=-0.316$, $p=0.001$) and *lack of encouragement for students to be actively involved in the study process* ($r=-0.291$, $p=0.001$), *does not create opportunities for students to prepare themselves for professional activities*. This means that preparation for professional activities is linked to a clearly managed study process, which provides up-to-date information relevant to the needs of the modern labour market, and enables students to acquire practical skills and apply their knowledge in their professional activities. Meanwhile, the lack of practical training in preparation for professional activities, where the organisation of the study process does not allow students to link theory with practice and gain more experience, and where the content of studies is outdated and is presented in a boring way, may make it difficult for students to successfully prepare for professional activity, which could be one of the reasons for their dropping-out from studies.

On the other hand, after calculating Pearson correlation coefficients, the negative correlations observed indicate that students who have had at least one thought about dropping out from studies evaluate studies that present a *lot of irrelevant material* ($r=-0.253$, $p=0.002$) *when the material is presented in a boring way* ($r=-0.312$, $p=0.001$) or materials that are *outdated and not in line with the needs of the contemporary labour market* ($r=-0.24$, $p=0.004$), as well as when the *study process does not provide opportunities to acquire knowledge and skills in preparation for professional activities* ($r=-0.218$, $p=0.008$) and/or to *acquire valuable experience* ($r=-0.323$, $p=0.001$) and *students are not involved in the study process* ($r=-0.219$, $p=0.008$), *would not recommend the studies to others*. Meanwhile, in the group of students who did not intend to drop out from their studies, weaker but also statistically significant negative correlations were found, indicating that they *would not recommend their studies to others*

when *students are not encouraged to actively engage in the study process* ($r=-0.173$, $p=0.029$), *are given too much freedom* ($r=-0.185$, $p=0.02$) and *are provided with lecture material in a boring way* ($r=-0.19$, $p=0.016$). Consequently, the lack of opportunities for students to prepare for their careers (professional activities), whereas the organisation of the study process is boring, and students are not actively encouraged to engage in their studies, where the teaching material is not clearly laid out, where theory is not linked to the needs of the contemporary labour market, and where students are not given the opportunity to gain valuable experience in their preparation for professional activities (career), or where they are given too much leeway, reduces the dissemination and publicity of the recommendations for the studies. Meanwhile, weaker but positive correlation connections indicate an *excess of irrelevant material presented during lectures* ($r=0.215$, $p=0.009$) and its *boring presentation* ($r=0.254$, $p=0.002$), and a *lack of knowledge and skills needed for preparation for professional activities* ($r=0.175$, $p=0.035$) and the *lack of relevance of the content of studies to the needs of the contemporary labour market* ($r=0.191$, $p=0.021$) and the *lack of involvement of students in the study process* ($r=0.194$, $p=0.019$) are some of the *factors contributing to the disillusionment* of students who have at least once thought about dropping-out from their studies. Similar results were obtained when Pearson correlation coefficients were calculated for the group of students who did not intend to drop out from their studies (see Table 4). The positive correlations found indicate that it is not only the *overabundance of unnecessary material presented in lectures* ($r=0.263$, $p=0.001$) or its *boring presentation* ($r=0.248$, $p=0.002$), the *lack of the knowledge and skills required for preparing for professional activities* ($r=0.161$, $p=0.044$), and the *lack of involvement of students in the study process* ($r=0.239$, $p=0.002$) but also *too much freedom given to students* ($r=0.216$, $p=0.006$) and the *lack of opportunities for students to gain valuable experience during their studies* ($r=0.208$, $p=0.009$) that may lead to students *becoming disillusioned with their chosen studies*, which could be one of the reasons for dropping-out from studies. The negative correlations also indicate that the *lack of a clear evaluation system* ($r=-0.198$, $p=0.016$) and *excessive demands on students* ($r=-0.351$, $p=0.001$) are associated with the *perception of the studies as challenging*, which can certainly be one of the reasons for dropping-out from studies. Therefore, in order to reduce the rate of students dropping out from their studies, it is necessary to increase the focus on improving the system for assessing student achievement. On the other hand, rating *studies as less enjoyable* ($r=-0.188$, $p=0.023$) and *more challenging than expected* ($r=-0.175$, $p=0.034$) is associated with the *reason behind group mates dropping out from studies*, while *convenient lecture times and schedules* are positively related to rating the *study process as motivating and engaging* ($r=0.188$, $p=0.022$).

The results of the correlation analysis in the group of students who did not intend to drop out from their studies showed a statistically significant negative relationship (see. Table 4), indicating that *an excess of unnecessary material presented during lectures decreases students' satisfaction with their studies* ($r=-0.165$, $p=0.038$), as well as their *motivation and active involvement in the study process* ($r=-0.202$, $p=0.011$) and *does not provide opportunities to acquire practical skills* ($r=-0.268$, $p=0.001$), while *lecturing material presented in a boring way* related to the evaluation of *the study process as unmotivating* ($r=-0.17$, $p=0.033$) and *one that does not provide opportunities to acquire practical skills* ($r=-0.235$, $p=0.033$). On the other hand, the negative correlation found in the latter group indicates that *too much freedom for students* is related to their perception of their *studies as less enjoyable* ($r=-0.196$, $p=0.014$), which could certainly be one of the reasons for dropping out of studies. *Lack of knowledge and skills needed to prepare for professional activities* ($r=-0.177$, $p=0.026$) and *outdated content that does not meet the needs of the contemporary labour market* ($r=-0.179$, $p=0.024$) are among the factors that contribute to *passivity and reluctance to engage in the study process*, while *excessive demands placed on students* during the study process are related to the perception of the study process as *more difficult than anticipated* ($r=-0.191$, $p=0.017$). Consequently, the lack of learning material that is relevant to the interests of students and meets the needs of the modern labour market, and the lack of opportunities for students to acquire practical skills, leads to a lack of motivation and passivity of students to engage in the study process, which can be one of the reasons for students dropping-out from their studies. Therefore, a created learning environment that encourages students to actively engage in the study process, lecture content that is relevant to the needs of the modern labour market, and opportunities provided for students to develop and improve their skills and abilities, deepen their knowledge,

and gain valuable experience in preparation for their professional career and its activities would be one of the ways to reduce the number of students dropping out or withdrawing from their studies.

The summarised results of the correlation analysis show that, regardless of the group of subjects, certain external reasons that may lead to dropping out from studies are related to students' opinions about studies, which indicates that external factors such as the organisation of the study process, the content of the studies, the opportunities provided by the studies to gain valuable experience in preparation for the professional activities, the requirements presented and the evaluation system, etc., have a significant impact on the formation of the students' attitudes to studies. Discovered statistically significant relationships indicate that students, regardless of whether they had thoughts of dropping-out out from studies or not, when facing an overload of unnecessary material in lectures and the boring organisation of the study process, have a stronger negative attitude towards their studies, perceiving them to be less useful, uninteresting and not fulfilling their expectations of studying. On the other hand, the excess of unnecessary material and its boring presentation reduce students' sense of satisfaction with their studies, their motivation to learn and their active involvement in the study process, and the lack of practical skills they could acquire. In addition, the lack of knowledge and skills needed to prepare for professional activities and to gain valuable experience in the study process reduces students' interest and active involvement in their studies. The correlation analysis also suggests that external factors such as excess material presented during lectures and/or such material being presented in a boring way, as well as the lack of effort to encourage students to actively engage in the study process, and lack of knowledge and skills needed to prepare for professional activities, increase the sense of frustration with the chosen studies, which may be one of the factors that lead to students dropping-out from their studies.

Table 4. Correlation connections between external reasons that might influence the dropping-out from studies and evaluation of the studies by students who did not intend to drop out from their studies (n=159) and those who thought about dropping out from their studies at least once (n=148)

	A-1	B-2	C-3	D-4	E-5	F-6	G-7	H-8	I-9	J-10	K-11	L-12
A						0.188*						
B												
C												
D												
E												
F												
G												
H												
I												
J												
K												
L												
M												

Note: Above the diagonal is the group of students who have at least once thought about dropping out from their studies; below the diagonal is the group of students who have had no intention of dropping out from their studies

A Inconvenient lecture times, timetable

B Influence of surrounding people, relatives and friends

Too difficult studies/programme

D Too much freedom for students

E Lectures contain a lot of unnecessary material

A-1 The studies met my expectations

B-2 I benefit from my studies

C -3 Studying is interesting to me

D -4 I'm good at studying

E-5 I like studying

F Lectures present material in a boring way
I am not encouraged to be actively involved in the study process
H I do not get the knowledge and skills I need to prepare for my professional career during my studies
I The content of studies is outdated and out of step with the needs of today's labour market
J Studying at the VK VVF does not provide opportunities to gain valuable experience in preparation for professional activities
K The requirements for students are too high
L The evaluation system is unclear
M A part of the people in the group dropped-out

F -6 The study process engages and motivates me
G-7 I learn a lot of practical skills during my studies
H-8 Studying is easier than I expected
I-9 I am more actively involved in the study process
J -10 My studies help me prepare for my professional activities
K-11 I would recommend the studies to others
L-12 I'm already disappointed with my choice of these studies

Correlation analyses between the groups of students who did not intend to drop out from their studies and those who had thought about dropping out from their studies at least once revealed markedly different differences in the strength and abundance of the relationships between the external causes of dropping out and the indicators of opinion on studies. The findings show that, for the group of students who have had at least once thought about dropping out from their studies, external reasons for dropping out have a statistically significantly stronger relationship with the participants' expressed views about their studies than for the group of students who have not had any thoughts about dropping out. The results of the correlation analysis showed that the group of students who had at least once had thoughts of dropping out from their studies had a higher number (total of 60 statistically significant) and stronger (0.364 to 0.175) connections, while the group of students who had not thought about dropping-out from their studies had only 28 statistically significant and relatively weak (0.282 to 0.161) connections. The latter results show that for students who have had at least once thought of dropping out from their studies, external reasons are more strongly and more broadly associated with a more pronounced negative attitude towards studies, which may be one of the reasons for dropping out. However, although the results of the study showed that external reasons that may influence dropping out from the studies are correlated and may influence the formation of opinions about studies, the relationships found only represent a more or less probable statistical trend, allowing only a rough prediction of the factors that lead to the dropping-out from studies. Therefore, in the perspective of further research, it would be appropriate to conduct a regression analysis study and to investigate in a regression equation which factors have a statistically significant prognostic value for withdrawal from or dropping out from studies.

Research on the factors that influence the students' decision to drop out and the correlation between dropouts and students' attitudes toward studies has both theoretical and practical value. In this study, the theoretical and empirical arguments have been used to identify the factors that lead to dropping out, the correlation between dropouts and students' attitudes has been established, a comparison between the groups of students who have never considered dropping out and those who have considered dropping out at least once has been drawn, the problematic areas that may be a precondition for reducing the number of students who are thinking of dropping out of their studies have been identified. The study showed that for students who have thought of dropping out at least once, external reasons are more strongly and broadly related to a more negative attitude toward their studies than for students who have never thought of dropping out. Therefore, the findings of this study enable improvements in the quality of the organisation of the study process in higher education institutions by working out methods for managing dropouts and reducing the problems associated therewith. A limitation of the study is that the Pearson correlation coefficient, used to correlate the external factors that lead to dropping out of studies with the students' attitudes towards their studies, only expresses a more or less probable statistical trend, which only allows for a rough prediction of the factors that lead to dropping out of studies. Therefore, it would be useful to carry out a regression analysis study in the future to find out which factors have a statistically significant prognostic value for dropouts or termination of studies. It is also appropriate to complement the study's results

with a qualitative research approach in the future when analysing the factors that lead to dropping out of studies and determining the preconditions for reducing the number of students who intend to drop out.

Conclusions

1. Dropping out from studies among higher education students is identified as a highly topical issue in higher education. It is perceived as a complex and multifaceted phenomenon related to both intrinsic and extrinsic student motivation. In addition, insufficient competencies acquired prior to studying, a student's readiness for studying, and personal qualities majorly impact the situation. The authors also highlight the need to distinguish between the early and late stages of dropping out to understand better and master the factors and causes of dropping out from studies. Lack of student engagement, overcrowded groups/audiences, unfulfilled expectations, excessive study requirements, study organisation conditions (more relevant for universities than for colleges) are some of the most frequently cited reasons for dropping out from studies at an early stage. In contrast, personal and family problems or illness, the desire to earn money quickly, and working while studying are the most common reasons for dropping out of studies in the late stage. In principle, although it is difficult to predict the likely volume of dropping out from studies, a student's level of academic performance and achievement is a factor that weighs heavily in the decision to quit or continue. However, when analysing the data, the most frequent common reasons for dropping out are the quality of studies, the quality of teaching, and the infrastructure and resources for learning. Therefore, to reduce and manage the process of dropping out from studies more effectively, it is necessary to provide as much academic assistance and support as possible, additional individual career and professional guidance counselling, training to increase student engagement, improving access to information, creating a supportive and comfortable environment for studying, and it is recommended to pay particular attention to the first year of study when the dropping-out rate is highest.

2. The specified study investigated the factors leading to dropping out from studies and the differences in their assessment between the groups of students who had no intention to drop out from their studies and those who had at least once considered dropping out:

2.1. The performance of statistical data analysis has made it clear that the students who never thought about dropping out from their studies have evaluated their studies a lot higher as more useful, interesting, engaging and motivating, as well as being more to their liking, easier, helping to prepare for professional activities, as studies during which success is experienced and a lot of practical skills are being acquired, in comparison to the students who have at least thought about dropping-out from their studies; in the latter group, it was discovered that the mean scores are significantly lower, showing that they are already disappointed with their chosen studies that did not fulfil their expectations and that they would not recommend them to others.

2.2. Recorded statistically significantly higher mean scores indicate that, for the group of students who have thought about dropping out from studies at least once, inconvenient timing and timetable of lectures, excess of unnecessary material presented during lectures, and the material being presented in a boring way during lectures are among the external reasons that could lead to them dropping-out from studies, compared to the scores of the students who have not had any thoughts about dropping-out from studies.

2.3. Performed comparative analysis of the data showed that students who had never thought about dropping out from their studies cited personal reasons for dropping out, such as illness or health problems, moving to another country, financial difficulties while studying in a fee-paying position, and disagreements with lecturers, as well as academic debts accumulated during studies that were not cleared in time and not knowing where to turn for help with accumulated academical debts, such were rated

significantly higher than by students in the study who had at least once thought about dropping-out from their studies. Meanwhile, the latter attribute dropping out from their studies to personal reasons that can lead to dropping-out from studies, such as lack of motivation to study, lack of confidence in one's chosen specialisation or laziness to study, as well as difficulties in reconciling studies with work and adapting to the environment and new demands, inability to concentrate and focus while studying, and inability to plan time and activities.

3. The study found correlations and differences between the groups of students who have never considered dropping out from their studies and those who have thought about dropping out from their studies: students who have thought about dropping out from their studies at least once have a stronger and broader range of external reasons for dropping-out from their studies and a more negative attitude towards studies than students who have not thought about dropping-out from their studies.

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