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Students' Motives and Preparedness for University: A First Year Social Science Student Perspective

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***Abstract*— This study investigates students' motives and preparedness for their program of study in a university. The purpose of this study is to establish what motivates students to pursue higher education, their preparedness for higher education as well as what motivates them to study social science. Understanding why students choose to study social science is important not only for enhancing social science education but also for educators to become more knowledgeable about students' motivations for their program. Analyzing a sample of first year students offers novel insights and a current understanding of these students' experiences, as well as the challenges they bring to their studies. The data was collected using an online survey based on the MEPU questionnaire, developed by [1] and [2]. Analysis of the data revealed social science students are intrinsically motivated regarding life aspirations. However, contrary to previous research, the students here are extrinsically motivated regarding work and career. They are prepared for higher education, to work independently and cope with deadlines however, they underestimate the volume of work required by the program, some lack confidence to deliver presentations or plan their studies in a time efficient manner. Implications from the survey allow for better informed social science education and teaching to assist students in their transition to higher education resulting in higher-quality learning. There are also implications for educators in terms of marrying students' motives with their learning goal orientation. Recommendations include the application of universal design for learning to fulfil a wholly inclusive teaching approach. Further research should examine the ways in which students draw on their prior-learning experience as well as their socio-economic background to make sense of their learning process.**

***Keywords*— Higher education, social science, motives, preparedness.**

I. INTRODUCTION

This study explores the opinions of first-year social science students as they begin their studies at an Irish higher education institution. Undergraduate students are likely to have a range of reasons for attending university. This study assesses students' motivations for pursuing higher education, their preparedness for higher education and their motivates for studying social science. The impetus for this work emanates from the fact that expanded access to and participation in higher education has necessitated educators to become more knowledgeable about students' motivations for their program; ultimately social science education will be enhanced. The work comes at a time of increasing higher education enrolments in Ireland. Between 2014 and 2021 total enrolments in higher education in Ireland increased 17.5 % (from 209,322 to 245,663) while University College Cork saw a 19 per cent growth in enrolments over the same period [3]. In UCC, the increase has resulted in a more diverse student profile with varying degrees of preparedness as registered students originate from 104 different countries [4]. Analyzing a sample of first year UCC students offers a current understanding of these students' experiences, as well as the challenges they bring to their studies. This is important as understanding the students is one aspect in ensuring a smooth start of an academic program [5]. The study sheds light on who these students are and allows for better informed curriculum and teaching which is instructive for those who implement educational programs for students transitioning to higher education. The study follows the approach of [6] [7] and [1] [2] in combining research on educational persistence and motivational theories for higher education. The paper is organized in the following manner. The next section analyses prior literature, which serves as a framework for the study. The data collection process is then described. The findings are presented and discussed, and the paper concludes with a discussion of the study's implications and recommendations for further research.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A. *Motivation and social sciences*

Motivation is broadly conceptualized as the 'drive' that directs students learning [8] [9] [10] [11]. Reference [11] suggested academic motivation encourages students to engage in learning tasks more effectively and pursue their academic goal. Without motivation, proper curriculum and good instruction are not enough to guarantee the success of students [8]. Papers have dealt with the study of motivation when it comes to choosing a university degree in the field of social sciences [12] [13] [14]. However, heavy reliance has been on accounting degree programs [15] [16] [17] [18] [19]. In these papers the main motivations expressed are prestige, job opportunities and working conditions, parents and others' external advice, financial gain, interest, and lifestyle. Irish studies have also explained the motives behind accounting students' motives and preferences [20] [21] [22] [1] [2]. However, in Ireland there is no study that includes the bachelor's degree in Social Science (BSOC) in their research.

There are several constructs of motivation. These include goal orientation theory, social cognitive theory, and self-determination theory. Under goal orientation theory, motivation is directed by mastery versus performance goals [23] [24] [25]. Focus is on extrinsic achievement outcomes [26] where students believe effort and outcome coexist and that to succeed, they must work hard [27]. Performance oriented individuals tend to be competitive [28]. Under the social cognitive theory, motivation is defined as students' ideas about their abilities [29] [30]. Diverse variables, such as self-regulated learning [31], study skills [32], self-efficacy beliefs [33] and social support [34] have been depicted as having a direct impact on achievement [35].

Conversely, self-determination theory is characterized as a distinction between intrinsic versus extrinsic motivation [36] [37] [38] [39]. Intrinsic motivation has been widely recognized in literature without much debate [40] [41] where students are motivated by seeking enjoyment, interest, satisfaction of curiosity, self-expression, or personal challenges [40]. Intrinsically motivated individual's also complete tasks based on the satisfaction of the task itself, without additional reward or associated consequence [42] [43]. Intrinsic life aspirations (e.g., personal growth, contributing to one's community) elevates personal well-being over time [44] and originates in the person themselves, such as vocation [45] where an individual has the inclination to dedicate themself to a specific profession [41]. Extrinsic motivation, on the other hand, can be categorized into four subtypes: external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation and integrated regulation [46] [47] [48].

External regulation concerns behaviors driven by external rewards [49] however literature has shown a major in social sciences (e.g., sociology, political science), has supposedly less personal value for attaining a well-paid job [50]. Introjected regulation concerns extrinsic motivation that has been partially internalized where behavior is regulated by the internal rewards of self-esteem for success [46], ego-involvement [46] and status and promotion [11]. However, [50] [51] found those who major in social sciences have a lower personal value for attaining a well-paid and decent job. In identified regulation, the person identifies the value of an activity, the employment prospects and security rather than the task itself [11] [52]. Integrated regulation recognizes and identifies not only the value of the activity, but also core interests and values [46] [48]. Overall, extrinsically motivated students are associated with lower levels of involvement and limited performance with a more surface approach to learning [53].

However, intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are not in an either-or relationship, one student can have both types of motivation, high or low [54]. Research studies within social sciences are frequently based on the distinction between the intrinsic and extrinsic motives [37] [55] [56] whereby intrinsic motives refer to enjoyment, vocation, and students' personal satisfaction; whereas extrinsic ones are those that show recognition which is external to the activity (prestige, social approval, family expectations, remuneration) [12]. Given the diverse multidimensional constructs, [9] and [57] suggest overlap across the three constructs of motivation. For example, confidence in one's abilities and chances of success is correlated to performance, adopting many other variables such as mastery goal orientation, intrinsic motivation, self-regulated learning, effort ratings, emotional competences, social integration, intention to persist, and deep-processing study strategies [58] [59]. For a comprehensive description of the motives of first year social science students' this study applies all three motivational constructs from several theoretical traditions that have been extensively recognized in literature. Specifically, [2] [24] [6] [7].

B. *Preparedness*

Academic preparation is a broad concept that encompasses aspects including "being knowledgeable, making the best decisions, having reasonable expectations, and being motivated" [61]. Effort and preparedness are indicators of energy or active student behavior in the student motivation process [62] [63]. It has been shown that students' perceptions of their readiness for higher education are critical in determining their ability to successfully transition to a new learning environment [64]. According to the research, students arrive at university with high hopes of participating actively in university life and great confidence in their academic and personal abilities [65]. Students' high levels of self-assurance in their academic and personal abilities could have a variety of effects [65]. On the one hand, it may encourage students to adopt good learning attitudes [65]. On the other hand, it may limit students' ability to notice the need to learn new skills that are necessary in their new environment, putting them at a disadvantage [66]. Nonetheless, given the diversity of the student population in higher education, students approach learning in a variety of ways, and anxiety is high for both personal and intellectual reasons at this time in their lives [66]. Unfortunately, many students

struggle because they have a misunderstanding of what higher education learning entails [67]. They enter third level with under prepared [68] with epistemological assumptions derived from their past school experiences, in which learning was frequently connected with the passive absorption of external knowledge [69] [70]. Some researchers argue that students enter higher education with fewer basic disciplinary skills than are required (for example, statistical skills for psychology studies) [71] while others argue that first-year students demonstrate poor generic writing skills [72] [73]. Higher education aims to promote higher-order cognitive skills such as critical thinking and the ability to synthesize and apply knowledge across several contexts [74]. Additionally, in recent years, there has been an increase in scholarly concern that students are underprepared for entry-level university courses and that this has resulted in lower standards [68]. When faced with difficult academic work, effort refers to trying hard, working hard, paying attention, and displaying tenacity [7]. Students, however, can control and vary their effort [63] making it a relevant element in this study on the transition from secondary to higher education.

The growing trend among students to work part-time jobs exacerbates a problem [2] [24] [75] [76] where students spend far less time on independent study than their lecturers recommend [2] [24] [76]. Part-time student work is becoming more common [77] with approximately 80 percent of students in Eurostudent countries combining their studies with one or more paid jobs [78]. With around 60 per cent of all students working during the academic year [78], a job means students focus less on their studies [79] [80] [81] [82] [83]. While studying time alone does not guarantee success, students who do not devote themselves to their studies and instead work while in university have a negative correlation with grade achievement [84] [63] [85] [81]. This was confirmed by [86] where they found students in Ireland who work while studying have different time demands and are less able to devote significant time to their own education. In fact, full-time students in Ireland were found to work, on average, 17 hours per week throughout the semester [86].

Additionally, students nowadays often fail to be physically active [87] [88]. Students must therefore develop good time management skills by engaging in relevant learning activities if they want to excel in higher education [89] and make better use of their study time [90]. The failure of students to balance their time between study and work may contribute to the challenges that many students have when transitioning to higher education [91].

The study aims to:

(1) determine whether some motives for attending university are more important to social science students than others.

(2) ascertain social science students' reasons for choosing their degree program.

(3) identify students' preparedness for higher education with emphasis placed on allocation of time and confidence in their own abilities.

III. Data Collection

Using the MEPU questionnaire developed by [1] [2] the data was collected over four months, January 2022 to May 2022, via an online MS Forms questionnaire. The online learning management system, Canvas, at University College Cork was used to disseminate the survey to all full-time social science students via their student email accounts. In the online survey, the students were presented with a box ensuring they were over 18 years. All those under 18 years were informed they could not complete the survey. All students' over 18 years and registered for first year social science were subsequently included in the survey. Only those who wanted to participate, participated. The students were informed that all information they provided was confidential and their anonymity was protected throughout the study. IP addresses were not collected at any point. Students were reassured that their responses were for the purposes of this study only. In total, 107 were distributed and 88 were returned representing an overall response rate of 82 per cent. Ethical approval for the study was granted by the university's relevant research ethics committee (protocol reference number: Log 2021-250). The questionnaire comprised of closed-ended questions. A five-point Likert scale (1, 2, 3, 4, 5) was used to capture the students' responses. There were three sections in the questionnaire. The first section investigated what motivated students to pursue higher education. The next section of the survey looked at their motives for choosing their degree program. The final section investigated their preparedness for higher education including questions relating to expected time allocation for study, work, and leisure time, as well as confidence in their own abilities.

IV. Results and Findings

A. *Motives*

Table 1 shows the results of social science students' reasons for pursuing higher education. Results indicate, 'a degree will enable me to get a good job' was the most important motivator with 95% of the responses ranking it either important or very important. 'To learn useful knowledge and develop skills' (90.70%) was the second most important motivator, followed by 'to develop my mind and intellectual abilities' (88.37%) and to 'become a better educated person' (87.36%). While the least important motivators were 'all my friends were going to university' and 'progressing to university is what others expected of me'.

Table 1. Motivation to attend Higher Education

Motivation Item %	Very Unimportant	Un important	Not so Important	Important	Very Importar
A degree will enable me to get a good job	2.30	0.00	2.30	37.93	57.47
To develop my mind and intellectual abilities	1.16	3.49	6.98	44.19	44.19
Completing this degree will increase my future earnings	1.15	0.00	12.64	41.38	44.83
Learn useful knowledge and develop skills	1.16	0.00	8.14	37.21	53.49
To become a better educated person	1.15	0.00	11.49	39.08	48.28
To meet the education requirements for my career plan	1.15	1.15	11.49	39.08	47.13
To study my subject area in an in-depth way	1.15	2.30	10.34	43.68	42.53
To broaden my horizons and face new challenges	2.30	3.45	14.94	32.18	47.13
I am interested in pursuing postgraduate studies	2.33	5.81	20.93	26.74	44.19
Ability to participate in sports and social activities	4.60	13.79	20.69	40.23	20.69
To prove to myself that I can be successful at	2.30	5.75	9.20	37.93	44.83
I really want to get a university degree	1.15	2.30	14.94	31.03	50.57
Going to university seemed like the natural thing to do	3.49	11.63	29.07	29.07	26.74
The opportunities for an active social life	6.98	9.30	13.95	40.70	29.07
Opportunity to improve my belief and self-confidence	3.45	1.15	13.79	36.78	44.83
Progressing to university is what others expected of me	14.94	19.54	21.84	24.14	19.54
To develop a better understanding of myself	1.15	3.45	27.59	40.23	27.59
Gives me time to decide what I want to do with my life	3.45	3.45	12.64	44.83	35.63
All my friends were going to university	23.26	19.77	32.56	17.44	6.98
A degree creates more opportunities in life	0.00	0.00	13.41	34.15	52.44

B. Degree Choice

Table 2: Reasons for choosing your degree (%)

	Very Unimportant	Un important	Not so Important	Important	Very Important
I have the skills and abilities suited to my degree choice	0	2.33	10.47	47.67	39.53
I am attracted by the career prospects	0	0	9.41	45.88	44.71
I want to learn more about the subject area	0	2.33	4.65	43.02	50
My friends also planned to come to UCC	34.88	29.07	19.77	11.63	4.65
I wasn't too bothered what I studied at university	33.72	25.58	29.07	6.98	2.33
My friends also planned to do this degree	74.4	15.12	8.14	1.163	1.16
To develop a better understanding of my chosen subject area	1.18	1.19	8.33	64.29	25
This degree will look good on my CV	4.65	33.72	10.47	39.53	11.63
Encouragement from family to do this degree	13.95	26.74	33.72	18.6	6.98
To feel part of a like-minded community	5.81	4.65	27.91	38.37	23.26
This degree was not my first (CAO) choice	48.84	9.3	12.79	12.79	16.28

The responses on why social science students choose their degree program are presented in Table 2. 'Attraction to the career prospects' (90%), 'to develop a better understanding of my chosen subject area' (89%) and having 'the skills and abilities suited to my degree choice' (87%) are the highest rated factors in terms of importance. Motives such as 'my friends also planned to do this degree' (2.3%) and those indicating they weren't 'too bothered what they studied at university' (9.3%), or whether their 'friends also planned to come to UCC' (16%) reflected the least level of importance.

C. Preparedness for University

Table 3 shows 80.5 per cent of responses anticipate spending less than 12 hours per week on private study and 11.5 per cent anticipate spending more than 16 hours per week on study. 24 percent of the students surveyed spend fewer than five hours per week on leisure activities, while 4 per cent spend more than 16 hours per week on leisure. According to part-time job figures, 53 per cent of those sampled intend to work up to 12 hours a week part-time. 47 per cent of responses plan to work more than 12 hours a week part-time with almost 26 per cent working more than sixteen hours a week. Almost 15 per cent of the sample are not applicable to work part-time.

Table 3 Allocation of Time

Allocation	<5 Hours a week	5-8 Hours a week	9-12 Hours a week	13-16 Hours a week	>16 Hours a week
Study Count (%)	16 (18.39%)	23 (26%)	31 (36%)	7 (8%)	10(11.5%)
Leisure Count (%)	19 (24%)	32 (40%)	24 (30%)	2 (2.5%)	19 (24%)
Part time Work Count (%)	5 (7%)	11 (15.7%)	21 (30%)	15 (21%)	5 (7%)

Tables 4 and 5 present the results of first year social science students' preparedness for higher education as well as confidence in their abilities. Table 4 shows, 'the ability to receive lecture feedback' (91%), 'being able to work independently' (85%) and 'being confident about your ability to use digital resources' (76%) ranked the highest in terms of preparedness (scoring either well or very well prepared). Conversely, 'being confident about completing presentations' (45%), 'being able to plan your study in a time effective way' (47%), 'willingness to ask for help from your lecturers/tutors' (47%) and 'being confident about completing written assignments' (53%) ranked the lowest in terms of preparedness (ranking not well prepared and not well prepared at all).

Table 5 shows the 'ability to cope with continuous assessment deadlines' (80%) ranked the highest in terms of student confidence (scoring confident to very confident) in their abilities. The 'ability to pass all your exams at the first attempt' ranked second. However,

they are not all confident (20%) in their 'ability to achieve results in the top 10%' of their class.

Table 4: Preparedness for Higher Education %

	Not well at all	Not well	Not so well	Well prepared	Very well prepared
Willing to participate in class	5.7	5.7	23.9	35.2	29.5
Able to organize your own life generally	4.6	6.9	20.7	44.8	23.0
Being willing to ask for help from your lecturers/tutors	9.2	13.8	29.9	32.2	14.9
Being confident about completing written assignments	10.3	16.1	20.7	42.5	10.3
Being able to take responsibility for your own learning	1.1	6.9	21.8	46.0	24.1
Being able to plan your study in a time effective way	6.9	11.5	34.5	28.7	18.4
Being able to initiate your own study activities	5.7	8.0	27.6	43.7	14.9
Being able to evaluate your own progress	6.9	10.3	21.8	47.1	13.8
Being comfortable working in groups	9.2	11.5	21.8	39.1	18.4
Knowing what is expected of you academically	1.2	10.5	24.4	45.3	18.6
Being able to work independently	2.3	1.1	11.5	50.6	34.5
Being confident about your ability to use digital resources	0.0	5.7	18.4	48.3	27.6
Being mentally strong enough to cope with the change	4.7	9.3	22.1	44.2	19.8
Being confident about completing presentations	14.0	14.0	26.7	31.4	14.0
Ability to receive lecture feedback	0.0	3.5	5.8	64.0	26.7

Table 5: Confidence in own abilities (%)

	Not confident at all	Not very confident	Unsure	Confident	Yes, very confident
Ability to handle the course material	2.27	6.82	26.14	51.1	13.64
Ability to pass all your exams at the first attempt	4.60	6.90	27.59	49.4	11.49
Ability to perform above average in your studies	2.33	13.95	44.19	30.2	9.30
Ability to achieve results in the top 10%	19.54	31.03	35.63	9.2	4.60
Ability to cope with online and offline learning	2.30	6.90	25.29	46.0	19.54
Ability to cope with continuous assessment deadlines	2.33	5.81	12.79	51.2	27.91

V. Discussion

A. *Motives*

In terms of student motivations, the self-determination theory and the social cognitive theory are reflected here. Results corroborate the work of [54] where intrinsic motivation and extrinsic motivation are not in an either-or relationship, rather, the results reflect the presence of diverse multidimensional constructs as suggested by [9].

The sampled students here are extrinsically motivated (as described by the self-determination theory) as they stated getting a degree will enable them to secure a decent job as their most important motivator. This finding is consistent with [11] and [51] concept of identified regulation, as the students here rank employment prospects as the most important reason for attending higher education. Not only that but the career prospects of their social science degree were also ranked as the most important reason for choosing their degree. This finding contradicts that of [51] and [50] who found those with a major in social sciences have a lower personal value for attaining a well-paid and decent job. Additionally, not only do students in this sample exhibit identified regulation as they not only 'wanted to learn useful knowledge' i.e., recognise the value of the activity [11] [52] but they also exhibit integrated regulation as they want to 'become a better educated person', identifying [48] not only the value of attending higher education but also its core interests and values [46] [48]. The results here, however, contradict [54] portrayal of students having a surface-level approach to learning. Rather, like [41] students analysed here are also intrinsically motivated. The UCC social science students here want to learn useful knowledge, develop skills, develop their minds, intellectual abilities and become a better educated person in line with the findings of [42] [43] [45]. When choosing on a degree program, it didn't matter if the social science students' friends were going to UCC or pursuing the same degree. The social science students therefore exhibit signs of self-efficacy and individual ability [29] [30] i.e., the social cognitive theory. Students here considered what their friends were doing or what others expected of them as unimportant motivators to go to higher education.

B. *Preparedness*

Findings here indicate students are prepared for higher education, which complements the work of [64], who stated that students arrive at university with great confidence in their academic and personal abilities. Students here reflected high levels of self-assurance in their academic and personal abilities as they are prepared to work independently, can cope with deadlines, can handle course material and are confident in passing exams at the first attempt. According to [68] students are underprepared for entry-level university courses; however, this is not representative of the sample here. Rather, findings here reflect the work of [61] wherein active student behavior is viewed as effort and preparedness. Given the diversity of the student population in higher education, students approach learning in a variety of ways [66] this is true of the sample surveyed here. However, some students do enter higher education with fewer basic disciplinary skills than are required [71] some members of this sample, for example, lack confidence in their ability to deliver presentations and plan their studies in a time-efficient manner. Some students are hesitant to seek assistance and others are unsure about completing written assignments. This supports the findings of [72] [73] who claimed that first-year students have poor generic skills with varying effort.

Students in this study were asked how much time they intended to dedicate each week to private study,

leisure activities, and part-time work to determine their commitment to their higher education studies. Each semester, students in the social science program must complete six modules, each of which requires roughly three to four hours of private study each week. As a result, the university requires students to spend 18–24 hours per week on independent study. Reference [1] found 60% of students were expecting to devote less than 18 hours per week to private study while less than 5% were expecting to spend more than 20 hours a week studying. However, results here show the majority (80%) anticipate spending less than 12 hours per week on private study with around 11 per cent anticipating spending more than 16 hours per week on study. This finding suggests most students are greatly underestimating the amount of work required by the program, which may have a negative impact on their performance. As a result of their situation, many of these students may find it difficult to manage their time. The growing trend among students to work part-time jobs exacerbates a problem [1] [2] [75] and the findings reflected here are no different.

C. *Allocation of Time*

Almost half of the students sampled here plan to work more than 12 hours each week part-time, while over quarter anticipate working more than sixteen hours a week. While this is in line with Eurostudent countries and the work of [84] where 60% of first years worked an average of 8.5 hours per week, and [1] where 70% intended on working 12 hours on average per week respectively and [86], where they found full-time students in Ireland work on average 17 hours per week, throughout the semester. This result has consequences. Not only does it leave far less time on independent study [79] [81] [83] it provides greater challenges for the students who already lack confidence in planning their studies in a time-efficient manner and are hesitant to seek assistance. Like [89]) students here must develop good time management skills by engaging in relevant learning activities
In line with [87] [88] where most university students fail to be physically active, results here show 24% of responses dedicate less than 5 hours to leisure per week. This has implications as research shows leisure-time physical activity (LTPA) gives rise to increased subjective well-being, positive effects on life satisfaction, and psychological well-being [92] [93]. With one quarter of responses dedicating less than 5 hours to leisure per week. This has implications for well-being, life satisfaction, and psychological well-being.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The study provides insight into the characteristics of first year UCC social science students and enables a more informed curriculum which is instructive for those who implement educational programs for students transitioning to higher education. Research shows that repeated interaction between educators and their students leads to effective learning and overall success for the student. For almost half of those sampled here, communication may be seen as challenging due to an unease and an unwillingness to ask for help. Post covid environments have moved the lecturer role into the role of facilitator. Lecturers facilitate communication using a blend of asynchronous and synchronous communication. Both types of communication can help increase the quality of interactions between lecturers and students, while also improving student engagement and learning outcomes. Enhancing both synchronous and asynchronous communications such as instant messaging or group chat, videoconferencing, virtual classrooms, and video lectures, as well as audio recordings, email, and discussion boards enables social science students to have clear and frequent communication with their lecturer thereby enhancing their learning experience.

The findings also support the recommendation that program directors coordinate with pertinent University ancillary resources (such as UCC sport and physical activity services, Student Life, Access, Skills center, First-Year experience coordinator, Student IT services, and Careers services) to educate and encourage social science students to utilize their resources. For example, results such as not ‘being confident about completing presentations’, not ‘being able to plan your study in a time effective way’, not having the ‘willingness to ask for help from your lecturers/tutors’ and not ‘being confident about completing written assignments’ implies social science students should be encouraged to complete the UCC Skills Centre 7-week public speaking and presentation digital badge, access the ‘know where to go’ UCC IT needs online support, as well as the Skills Centre online academic writing and studying resources. Additionally, with almost a quarter of students dedicating less than 5 hours to leisure per week it is recommended that first year social science students should complete the UCC Everyday Matters- Healthy Habits for University life digital badge along with using the UCC sports facilities.
A further recommendation involves the incorporation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL) into lecturers' teaching practices to enable a better-informed curriculum assisting social science students make the transition to higher education resulting in higher-quality learning. Students analyzed here are both intrinsically and extrinsically motivated. Some students are prepared for higher education while others are less so. This finding reflects the diversity of students and while UDL is an educational framework that guides the design of learning goals, materials, methods, and assessments, regarding a diversity of learners [95], lecturers can examine their traditional teaching and learning practices and effectively make the transition to meet the needs of all students by applying a UDL approach. To cater for diverse student motives and student preparedness UDL can address learner variability by designing lectures that

proactively build in flexibility, choice, and engagement so that students experience a more inclusive environment with fewer barriers to learning [96].

This paper contributes to the development of a framework to improve quality of learning and sheds light on who these students are and how educators can tailor delivery. Further research should examine the ways in which students draw on their prior-learning experience as well as their socio-economic background to make sense of their learning process. Results from this research should provide social science educators with the opportunity to be more sensitive to and understand their students. There are implications for program directors to maximize usage of university ancillary resources as well as realign module delivery using UDL to respond to a diverse body of students. The findings should be of immediate and practical value to maintain retention rates and improve their learning experience.

LIMITATIONS

This study was conducted at a single university with a single cohort of students, which has a significant impact on the findings' representativeness. Extending this study to additional university courses and undertaking a college wide comparison would be extremely beneficial for university management and policy makers. Moreover, further qualitative research would allow the current study's findings to be enriched by providing deeper insight into the experiences of students. Future research should focus on grade achievements and retention. A few constraints are unavoidable when undertaking a survey of this type. The research employs a single descriptive analysis. While the method provides an objective assessment of students' ideas, it does not provide an in-depth analysis. The study is limited to social students studying one course at one university in Ireland. Additionally, the sample size is limited, however the 82% response rate contributes to the study's validity and reliability.

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