



STUDENT SATISFACTION AS AN INDICATOR OF QUALITY IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Abstract

This study investigated university students' satisfaction from the physical environment and services provided in a higher education institution to indicate the quality in higher education. The questionnaire included students' demographic data and close-ended questions in a Likert type scale with adequate validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha = .99). The sample consisted of $N = 200$, where $n = 130$ (65%) were female and $n = 70$ (35%) were male undergraduate and graduate students studying at public, private profit and private nonprofit universities in Albania. The majority of students were second year undergraduate students $n = 89$ (44.5%) who were studying at private nonprofit universities $n = 73$ (36.5%). By using t test analysis, results revealed that there were gender differences where male students scored higher than female students ($p < .05$) on most of the students' services provided by the university. Single factor ANOVA showed that students from different university groups differed significantly $F(4, 195) = 6.15, p < .05$ on students' services. The work has been concluded with suggestions and future developments on this issue.

Key Words: Higher education, students, satisfaction, quality.

INTRODUCTION

Universities as public and private higher education institutions are characterized by a very complex and sophisticated structure that are changing under the influence of politicians and economic leaders. Often, these institutions has been criticized and invited to change in this changing world. However, some universities have maintained their conservative nature and they have been using the same teaching and research strategies as they have been used at least 30 years from now. Indeed, as we enter the knowledge society at the beginning of the twenty-first century, in which the 'essential key ... to human wellbeing in this daunting new world is knowledge' (Hirsch and Weber, 1999), higher education is attracting even greater political interest. A growing focus on the quality of education has been central to this political interest.

Quality has become one of the key elements of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Quality in education aims at bringing the attention to the education for human rights and also emphasize the importance of the economic, social and environmental grounds of a certain area. The definition of quality in higher education is to certain extend complex, although sometimes it is easy to identify it from a multidimensional perspective including teaching, research, staff-students relationships, services and facilities.

In Eastern Europe and especially in the Balkans, higher education, while highly valued and considered by all, encounters big challenges at the millenium. Thus, the academic community and its leaders must focus on the present issues in higher education, explore the challenges toward the future and identify effective initiatives to address such challenges (Hirsch & Weber, 1999). There are two important views which can define the character of these challenges. The first one is that universities should be flexible and feasible in their structure where they should have the opportunity to make adjustments in their academic industry and meet the current needs of the student community. Secondly, a higher education institution should aim at effectively pursue teaching and research as well as contribute with community service in a fast growing world.



There is a universal agreement that a learning society is based on individual initiative assisted by the social, economic, and political environment provided by the government (Hirsch & Weber, 1999). Within such context, the development and extension of knowledge is derived from an academic institution. All the universities should have a moral obligation to improve and contribute to the social, intellectual, cultural and economic background of the individuals in the society. In doing so, universities contribute to both the intellectual vitality and the economic well-being of society; produce educated citizens; train the next generation of leaders in the arts, sciences, and professions; and actively engage in community service activities that bring faculty knowledge and research findings to the attention of citizens and industry (Hirsch & Weber, 1999).

Important developments and changes occurring in science and technology have influenced the field of education as well. New paradigms have been shaped in learning and teaching processes and strategies as a result of these changes (Gecer, 2013). The needs of our student community for the services provided by the universities will continue to grow. There is a growing interest in following university-level studies not only by the young students but also by the adult students, who need to pursue more education and skills necessary for their careers. Demand for higher education has continued to grow and 40-50 per cent enrolment rates are considered a development target in OECD countries. In developed countries, statistics show that there is a growth from 22 per cent of adults with higher education qualifications in 1975 to 41 per cent in 2000 (OECD, 2005). Access and equity are key determinants of a sustainable development in higher education systems as there is a growing demand for enrolment from all levels of demographics. Higher education is increasingly acknowledged as an element of sustainable development, and lifelong learning has become a result of societal changes (Uvalic-Trumbic, 2006).

The university is an educational as well as a service setting, where the service is often produced and consumed simultaneously (Childers et al., 2014). One way that educational institutions may consider enhancing service quality in the university is by considering how the students' connection to the university campus and their willingness to benefit from all the services may influence their level of satisfaction. According to Chang and Fisher (2003) the level of a student's satisfaction in a lesson is a very important component for them to acquire the knowledge or skill. A student can be considered to be satisfied if he feels that the lesson meets his needs and expectations. This can motivate the student to put more efforts on learning, increase his/her positive attitude towards the lesson, and to attend other courses in future (Gecer, 2013).

As soon as the students make it to a higher education institution, they bring there all the skills and knowledge gained before and they are expected to use and expand them during their degree courses (Whittle et al., 2010). Educators, as well are expected to identify and understand the students' level of skills and knowledge as they already come with a certain experience in how to manage their learning but still the educators can provide support to encourage them toward a self-directed learning and bring them to the level required to successfully continue their education.

Social and physical factors of an institution's services may greatly influence the degree of attractiveness and the students' overall satisfaction. Social factors consist of student-faculty members relationships, student-administration members relationships and student-student relationships. Then, physical factors represent the class size and the environment, technology used during the lectures, library and computer laboratory, wi-fi connections in the campus, cafeteria and all student related service facilities. Considering the fact that all such services may have an impact on the students' attitude toward the institution and their satisfaction, in relatively small size non-profit private higher education institutions, educators have tried to maximize the services derived especially from social factors. The students can come and meet any time with their course instructor as well as with their academic advisor if available. They are also encouraged to participate in indoor activities where most of them are part of a student club. All the faculty members are willing to help the students find connections for their internship opportunities and match them with a study program at a top university abroad. Having a relatively small number of students in a certain field of study, makes it easier to spend more quality time one-on-one with the students. In such an environment, the students find opportunity to become more familiar with each-other, more helpful and spent much more time with each-other at the university campus. When an educational setting aims at keeping the student in the focus of its services, then each component of the social environment contributes toward student satisfaction.

This study investigated university students' satisfaction from the physical environment and services provided in a higher education institution to indicate the quality in higher education. Education as a service is provided by the educators who consider both physical and social environment to positively influence student satisfaction (Driscoll & Wicks, 1998). This research investigates how all these environmental factors can elicit positive and affective attitude from students toward their satisfaction. The research questions were as following: 1) *Are there any gender differences in terms of the benefit from the university services?* 2) *Are there any differences among students from different types of universities on their level of satisfaction from the university services and facilities?* and 3) *Do bachelor students differ from master students on their level of satisfaction from their university?*

METHODS

Sampling and Procedure

This study was conducted to provide a broader understanding of students' satisfaction from the services and facilities of a higher education institution. It aimed at exploring the environmental factors that influence their attitude, their experience as a student and increase their level of satisfaction from the institution while they are pursuing education. As shown in Table 1, a total of 200 university bachelor and master students where ($N = 70$, 35%) were male and ($N = 130$, 65 %) were female representing a group of students who are heterogeneous in nationality where the majority of the students were Albanian and the rest of them were Turkish.

Table 1. Distribution Categories by Gender

Distribution	Frequency	Percent
Male	70	35
Female	130	65
Total	200	100.0

Paper based questionnaires were distributed in person to the students of three private higher education institutions and two public universities found in two different main cities of Albania. The students were provided brief information about the aim of the study, they were assured confidentiality and they were thanked about their willingness to participate in this study. The survey took about 10 minutes to be completed during their break time in a classroom environment. Completed questionnaires were collected by the research assistants from each university and they were returned to the research team.

Measurement tool

In this study, a close-ended survey was used to obtain demographic information and data about the students' satisfaction level from the university they are pursuing education. The items of this survey were forced choice and a five-point Likert type scale (*from 1 = "Very satisfied" to 5 = "Very dissatisfied"*) was used to measure the respondent's level of satisfaction. The statements included in the questionnaire were clearly stated and aimed at obtaining the needed information about the students' level of satisfaction from the university services and facilities. The questionnaire consisted of 3 parts in six pages. In the first page of the questionnaire, demographic information related items are included. The second part of the questionnaire included 42 items about students' level of satisfaction on the university services and the third section consisted of an open ended question where the students could make any comments or suggestions about their university.

Scale reliability

For the internal consistency and reliability, we measured the Cronbach's alpha, which is a method of estimating internal reliability. As shown in Table 2, we received a Cronbach's alpha coefficient of 0.982 for the items. The Cronbach's alpha should be greater than 0.6, so this questionnaire is reliable.

Table 2: Reliability statistics

Reliability statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.982	48

Data Analytic Strategy

The data were analyzed by using SPSS 20.0. Descriptive statistics were used to describe the sample. The responses received from this study were coded as 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5. The data was analyzed using single factor ANOVA and the independent samples *t*-test of SPSS for windows to compare the level of satisfaction of the students, and to check if the difference between the mean values of the test variable for one group differs significantly from the mean value of that variable for the second group with regard to gender (0 = male and 1= female), education level was collapsed into (0 = bachelor and 1 = master) and type of school (0 = public, 1 = private, and 2 = private nonprofit)of the respondents.

RESULTS

The results revealed that there were significant differences between male and female students on their reported level of satisfaction from their higher education institutions' services and facilities. Male students were significantly different from female students especially when they reported about their level of satisfaction on: "academic advising services" ($p = .014$), "career planning services" ($p = .013$), "dean of students services" ($p = .008$), "financial aid services" ($p = .013$), "cafeteria service" ($p = .024$), "social and cultural activities" ($p = .013$), "university orientation program" ($p = .004$), "testing grading system" ($p = .014$), "course content of the field of study" ($p = .044$), "instruction in the field of study" ($p = .007$), "attitude of the faculty toward the students" ($p = .013$), "variety of courses offered at this university" ($p = .013$), "class size" ($p = .013$), "availability of the academic advisor" ($p = .007$), "availability of financial prior to enrolling" ($p = .038$), "accuracy of university information before enrolling" ($p = .023$), "concern for you as an individual" ($p = .007$), "attitude of university non-teaching staff toward the students" ($p = .007$), "racial harmony at the university" ($p = .007$), "opportunities for student employment" ($p = .014$), "opportunities for personal involvement in campus activities" ($p = .021$), "student government" ($p = .007$), "religious activities and programs" ($p = .023$), "campus media, student journal, newspaper, radio etc." ($p = .023$), "the university in general" ($p = .023$).

T-test analysis showed that there were no significant differences between bachelor and master students on their level of satisfaction. We found that bachelor students were significantly different on reporting their level of satisfaction from "University catalog/admissions publications" ($p = .001$), "Personal security/safety in the campus" ($p = .025$), "General registration procedures" ($p = .007$), "Religious activities and programs" ($p = .026$). Single factor ANOVA showed that there were no significant differences among students from different university groups on their level of satisfaction from the university services. However, we found that there were significant differences among students coming from different types of universities on "Personal security/safety in the campus" $F(2,98)=3.64$, $P = .03$, "Racial harmony at this university" $F(2,98)=3.55$, $P = .03$, and "Opportunities for personal involvement in campus activities" $F(2,98)=9.23$, $P < .01$.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Important developments and changes occurring in science and technology have influenced the field of education as well. New paradigms have been shaped in learning and teaching processes and strategies as a result of these changes (Gecer, 2013). Education as a service is provided by the educators who consider both physical and social environment to positively influence student satisfaction (Driscoll & Wicks, 1998). Since the education system has undergone through many changes due to science and technology advancement, so do change all the components of education. Today teachers or professors take the role of following, guiding and supporting the students' learning process (Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, & Tinker, 2000). All the universities should have a moral obligation to improve and contribute to the social, intellectual, cultural and economic



background of the individuals in the society. In doing so, universities contribute to both the intellectual vitality and the economic well-being of society; produce educated citizens; train the next generation of leaders in the arts, sciences, and professions; and actively engage in community service activities that bring faculty knowledge and research findings to the attention of citizens and industry (Hirsch & Weber, 1999).

The understanding of satisfaction that appears to underpin these somewhat crude measures is a very narrow one. It equates with a form of contentment, with the positive and happy feelings that derive from everything being settled (Fulford, 2013). This study included some limitations where among some of them we can mention that we have used only student-reported data and did not include staff-reported data as well. Another limitation of this study comes from the relatively low number of the students coming from private and private non-profit universities when compared to those coming from public university.

This research provided findings toward students stated opinions and experiences from the higher education institution where they are learning, targeting their level of satisfaction from the services and staff of that institution. Students reported high level of satisfaction from the campus safety, admissions office services, registration procedures and social activities in the university. All this findings can help the authorities and policy makers for the improvement of the quality in higher education, considering that such areas are vital for the students' life in higher education.

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