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Evaluation of Quality of Students' Characteristics and Motivations in UT-FNS, Albania

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Abstract: Academic quality improvement in higher education has recently been considered in many universities over the world. The aim of the study was to investigate the quality of students' characteristics and motivations in the Faculty of Natural Sciences at Tirana University. From the long experience, we know that universities can provide the best services to the community if they worry continuously to improve the quality of their services. Therefore, evaluation is one of the powerful tools for strategic development in higher education institutions. Higher education reform started about 6 years ago. It brought about many changes in the way students are admitted to higher education. Now is the time to investigate these changes and judge their goodness. In literature was identified a lot of factors in study success at the individual level. The most important of them are student's characteristics (socioeconomic status, gender, background, etc.), and student's motivations. In order to gain insights into both topics, an exploratory study was conducted within a sample of 800 students in the Faculty of Natural Sciences (University of Tirana, Albania). Participants were selected on the basis of their voluntary participation after lessons. The research method we used in this study is descriptive-analytic; perceptions were gathered and measured with open-ended and multiple-choice items. The results of this study indicate that the students come mainly from general secondary schools and very few (about 1%) from vocational ones. They come from middle and lower-income families (about 60 %). The main factors motivating students continue to be parents/family and professional career. The motives for choosing the program are found "The best for the study program I wanted" and "Convenience in finding jobs" (respectively 53 % and 41 %).

Keywords: Faculty of natural sciences, Students characteristics, Students motivations, Higher education

Introduction

Education is a very important component for the development of a country, therefore it has started to develop since ancient times. Like any other element, we need a quality education at all levels to fulfill the aspirations of individuals and society. Educational service is intangible, expendable and it is produced by the universities and consumed by students. The quality of education services in higher education institutions cannot be objectively measured. It also is a complex and varied concept that should be explored. Measuring service quality in higher education institutions is full of challenges. Recently the conditions in which they operate higher education institutions have significantly changed. But, what is meant by 'quality' in higher education is unclear (Brockerhoff, Huisman, & Laufer 2015). Jethro Newton (2006) presented a paper titled 'What is quality?' to the 1st European Forum for Quality Assurance in Munich. He found that there is no authoritative definition of 'higher education quality', nor can there be one. He suggested a pragmatic approach: "quality as 'stakeholder-relative'". It is a multidimensional term (Elton 1998; Krause 2012), simultaneously dynamic and contextual, but may also be perceived differently by different stakeholders (Schindler et al., 2015).

As some argue, quality has always been part of the academic tradition (Newton, 2006) and quality control was historically based on informal peer reviews and self-regulation (Van Damme, 2011), the situation has significantly changed in recent decades. According to Rai (2012) quality is an attribute that is seen as subjective, depending on perception and usually is differently understood by different people. The term quality can be

looked at from two opposite sides: the producer (higher education institutions) and the customer (students). Quality is a diversified concept, which encompasses how learning is organized and managed, the content of learning and the level of achievement in terms of outcomes and what goes on in the learning environment, (Materu, 2007).

High quality service is an essential prerequisite for competitiveness and survival in the market of higher education. Numerous studies in this area have shown that students' satisfaction has a positive effect on students' motivation, their attendance, to attract prospective students and increase revenue (Vranešević, 2006, p. 13). From the long experience, we know that universities can provide the best education services to the community if they worry continuously to improve the quality of their services. Therefore, evaluation is one of the powerful tools for strategic development in higher education institutions. In literature was identified a lot of factors in study success at the individual level. The most important of them are student's characteristics (socioeconomic status, gender, background, etc.), and student's motivations. The first step in this direction is to evaluate these characteristics.

Method

The empirical research was conducted at Faculty of Natural Science of University of Tirana. Ethics approval was granted by the Ethic Commision of Faculty of Natural Science. The permission to conduct this study (distribution of the questionnaire) was granted by the Dean of the Faculty.

Data and Research methodology

The primary data was collected through a model questionnaire. Questionnaires have long been used to assess the education quality by higher education institutions. They are usually distributed online. Their main drawback is that very few students complete them. Therefore we chose to distribute the questionnaire manually. The questionnaire was distributed in 7 June 2019, and the data was collected in 27 June 2019. Authors has distributed 800 questionnaires to current students at Faculty of Natural Science of University of Tirana, and all the questionnaires were valid. Respondents were selected randomly, on the basis of their voluntary participation after lessons according to years of study. The respondents that were of interest were current students of two cycles of study, Bachelor and Master (of science and professional).

The questionnaire was divided into three parts. The first part of the questionnaire dealt with demographic questions. In the second part of the questionnaire were asked questions related to factors that influenced the students to decide to study at Faculty of Natural Science. The third part of the questionnaire examined the student's motivation that lead them toward the study at Faculty of Natural Science of University. The model questionnaire that was used had 20 items and measured with open-ended and multiple-choice items. The attributes were assessed by the respondents by using a ten-point Likert scale where 1 represented "strongly disagree"/"not at all" and 10 represented "strongly agree"/"fully".

Respondents' profile

Demographic features of the respondents are shown in Table 1 and were analyzed through descriptive statistical analysis. The sample had twice as much female respondents (67.6%) than male respondents (32.4%). Most of the respondents, 79.5% are studying at the first cycle of study (bachelor) and others 20.5 % at the second cycle of study (master of science and professional)

Table 1. Profile of respondents

Item	Percent (%)
Gender	
Female	67.6
Male	32.4
Level of study	
Bachelor – 1st cycle	79.5
M.Sc. – 2nd cycle	18.6
M. Proff.	1.9

Figure 1 shows the distribution of the number of members in student's family. It is noticed that most of the families consist of 3-5 members (75.75%).

Figure 1. Family composition
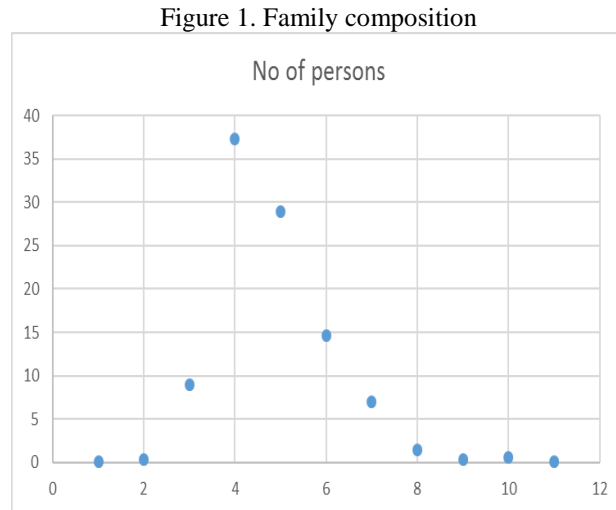
From Figure 2 we see that the vast majority of students come from low and middle income families (63.8%) and only very few of them come from high-income families (2 %).

Figure 2. Family income
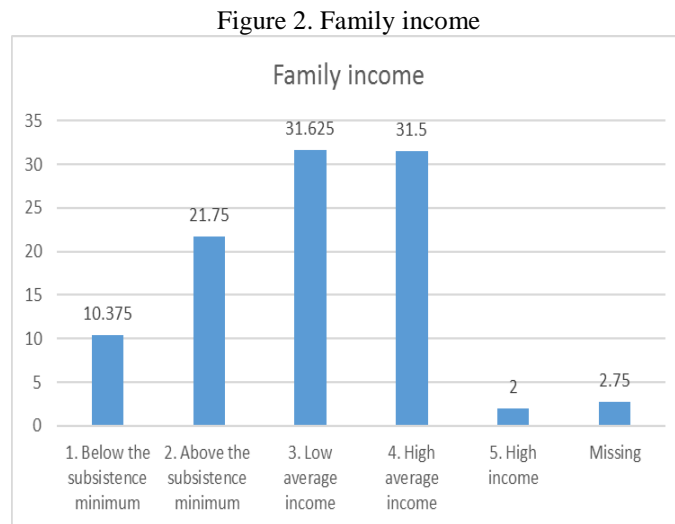
Results and Discussion

In the following tables and figures there is given detailed overview of the attributes that students were asked question. From the Table 2 we see that the most students come from the general high school.

Table 2. High school from which students come from

Type of high school	Percent
1. General	98.75
4. Electronics/informatics	0.5
9. Religious/Madrasa	0.125
11. Technical/technological	0.375
12. Other professional	0.25

There are no students from other schools (linguistic, Sports, arts, economic/commercial, Pedagogical, Agricultural, Tourism/fishing school). In Table 3 are given the education level of student's parents. As we see there are no significance difference between fathers and mothers education.

Table 3. Education of parents

Education	Father (%)	Mother (%)
1. Primary school	0.6	0.5
2. Middle school	11.9	16.5
3. High school	52.9	55.2
4. University	33.6	26.7
Missing	1.0	1.1

In Table 4 are indicate the answers to the question "which of the factors influenced to continue the study". From this table we see that the two main factors still are Parents/family (34.5 %) and Personal career (54.6 %).

Table 4. Factors influenced to continue the study

Factor	Has influenced (some) (%)	Primary (only one)
1. Parents/family	69.6	34.5
2. Relatives/friends	13.6	0.9
3. School/teachers	18.2	1.4
4. General opinion	16.1	2.2
5. Personal career	73.5	54.6
6. Other	9.2	6.4

The result for the question "For what reasons did you choose this faculty" are displayed in the Table 5. Students have chosen 6 reasons which more affected to choose the faculty (Good academic reputation - 28.5 %, Best for the study program I wanted – 43.1 %, Convenience in finding jobs – 56.1 %, Relatives/friends recommended me – 23.9 %, The only institution that offered the study program I wanted – 25.4 %, My family/parents recommended me - 22.8 %). From them they are choose 2 most influenced reasons "Best for the study program I wanted" and "Convenience in finding jobs" with 25.6 % and 35.8 %, respectively.

Table 5. Reasons for choosing the faculty

Reasons	Has influenced (some) (%)	Primary (only one)
1. Good academic reputation	28.5	7.2
2. Best for the study program I wanted	43.1	25.6
3. It is close to home	5.1	0.6
4. Good facilities for curricular activities	2.4	0.4
5. Convenience in finding jobs	56.1	35.8
6. Good reputation in terms of social life	16.9	3.0
7. Graduates from this faculty have social prestige	8.8	1.9
8. Relatives/friends recommended me	23.9	2.6
9. The only institution that offered the study program I wanted	25.4	13.6
10. Faculty information and promotional activities	2.2	0.1
11. Only he accepted me	3.8	1.8
12. My family/parents recommended me	22.8	5.4
13. Good facilities for non-curricular activities	2.0	0.0
14. The cost of tuition	7.8	1.7
15. Friends chose it	0.9	0.3

Conclusion

The quality of higher education is becoming more and more important and remains an important issue in practice. As the competition between universities continue to intensify, the quality with which higher education institutions offer the higher education become a substantial concern for the university themselves. Users of services leave quickly from that educational institution whose services do not meet their expectations.

The results of this study indicate that the students come mainly from general secondary schools (99 %) and very few (about 1%) from vocational ones. They come from middle and lower–income families (63.8 %). The main factors motivating students continue are Parents/family (34.5 %) and Personal career (54.6 %). The motives for choosing the program are found "The best for the study program I wanted" and "Convenience in finding jobs"

(respectively 53 % and 41 %). Therefore the Faculty should continue to work in this direction to maintain and strengthen its position in the competition between other universities in Albania.

Acknowledgements

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