



ASSESSING THE ELEMENTS OF UNIVERSITY SERVICE QUALITY ON STUDENT'S SATISFACTION AND LOYALTY IN ALBANIA (CASE STUDY-STUDENTS OF DURRËSI UNIVERSITY)

Violeta Neza, PhD 

Marketing Department, Faculty of Business, University "Aleksander Moisiu", Durrës, Albania
nezaleta@hotmail.com

Edlira Llazo, Phd

Marketing Department, Faculty of Business, University "Aleksander Moisiu", Durrës, Albania
llazo@hotmail.it

Abstract

Quality is the focus of studies by researchers around the world. But when it comes to the quality of Higher Education Institutions, Universities are the centre of attention for their evaluation by Agencies which assess their activity also in the framework of sustainable development. Their management system, the implementation of legality, scientific research, and the provision of contemporary programs by national values, mission, and vision is always the focus of these agencies. But this study aims to bring some dimensions of quality from the perspective of students who have chosen to study at "Aleksandër Moisiu" University as their destination to complete their studies in different cycles. A structured questionnaire was used with questions that aim to identify some elements of quality, including the innovation that students have valued when they have chosen the Institution where they want to complete their studies. The data obtained from the questionnaires have been combined with secondary data. to highlight the factors that have influenced the choice of students. There are also suggestions received through an open question to understand what elements should be changed in the future. The results of the study can help Higher Education Institutions to improve in the future those dimensions that have been evaluated less by the students.

Keywords: Quality, University, sustainable development, agency, innovation

INTRODUCTION

In today's modernized world, as all consumer approaches have changed about products and services, this has also been influenced by Covid19, and the preferences for choosing Higher Education Institutions have changed. A good part of the students who complete their secondary education prefer to study abroad, as they value a higher quality education as an opportunity and, in addition, to have better employment opportunities than those offered by Albania. However, students who choose to continue their studies in Albania, before deciding where they will study, receive information about the quality of the University where they want to study. In this aspect, the choice is a challenge as today many universities offer programs of different study options which are options for students. The educational process developed online due to Covid19 harmed the quality of teaching as the universities were not prepared for this approach, otherwise, we did not have the proper infrastructure for online access. However, there was a quick adaptation through online platforms, which enabled a normal process but with the shortcomings associated with problems with the Internet. Technological developments have significantly influenced the transformation of communication approaches within the context of a sustainable economy (Krause, 2021). These changes and advancements have also impacted universities, including their communication strategies. Service quality is a crucial factor that plays a vital role in shaping consumer satisfaction (Krause, 2021).

Recent studies emphasize the importance of integrating sustainability into various aspects of campus activities within higher education institutions. To achieve this, universities are advised to employ marketing activities and cater to the needs of students as consumers, thereby enhancing the university's sustainable competitive advantage (Harahap et al., 2021).

In evaluating quality, several factors are considered, such as the university's image, the competence of the academic staff, and the cost of studies (Pokrovskaja et al., 2019). The quality of education provided is also dependent on the overall effectiveness of the school's management system (Manjar ALAM et al., 2021). Furthermore, the reputation of a university is directly linked to the overall satisfaction levels of its students (Manjur ALAM et al., 2021).

Characteristics of the University of Durrës

The University of Durrës in its modern form was founded in 2006, but its traces stretch back to 1380, making it one of the oldest institutions in Europe. The University of Studies of Durrës (Latin: Universitas Studiorum Dyrrhachium) was established around 1380, but due to the Ottoman attacks, it was withdrawn to Zara to establish Studium Generale, or the University of Zara, with the First Rector Gjon Durrsak. The University of Durres currently has approximately 20 thousand students enrolled across its three study cycles and five faculties. The university

operates with a student-centered approach, where all aspects of university life, including teaching, services, activities, and tools, are designed to benefit the students. This student-focused philosophy is supported by a dedicated and dynamic staff, a computerized environment that facilitates constant interaction with the Western academic world, and a wide range of extracurricular activities.

At UAMD, the learning process is developed in a manner that incorporates knowledge control procedures, academic staff recruitment, student counseling, university library services, and scientific research. These practices aim to provide a unique academic experience that encompasses essential elements found in European and American universities¹.

Units to later expand to six Main Units (Faculties). It offers a variety of study programs, nearly 100 study programs with study profiles in all three study cycles and with academic staff with scientific titles and degrees capable of providing quality teaching. The academic staff evaluation process includes, among other things, a questionnaire addressed to students every year. The questionnaire is structured with questions in the form of variables that provide information about the ability of the academic staff. UAMD buildings are equipped with contemporary facilities that create facilities for students. Also, among other things, the University and Faculties periodically organize scientific activities such as national and international scientific conferences with the participation of different authors from the best universities in Europe and beyond. These activities create spaces to become familiar with mainly regional, economic and social developments, impacting the adaptation of study program curricula to the needs of the market. The University also has an interdisciplinary Scientific Journal where the academic staff publishes scientific articles free of charge. The institution has numerous agreements with other national and international universities as well as with other institutions, agreements which affect the continuous improvement of quality at the University. Also, "Aleksandër Moisiu" University follows favourable mobility policies for staff and students, giving the University a different quality profile. These and many other activities and characteristics make this university easily differentiated from its competitors.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The satisfaction of students is influenced by various factors, such as faculty policies, the expertise of academic staff, and the availability of diverse programs (Astin, 1993). Additionally, crucial aspects that impact student satisfaction include the overall image of the university, the competence of the academic staff, and clear opportunities for future career prospects within the

¹University of Durres." Retrieved from <https://uamd.edu.al/>

chosen field (Derkach et al., 2021). When selecting a university, the institution's background, experience, traditions, and history play a significant role in showcasing the specifics of professional activities during the admissions process (Kanwar & Sanjeeva, 2022).

Improving the academic environment within classrooms can be achieved by involving older students to share their perspectives and reasoning methods (Tadese et al., 2022). To attract more students to high-quality study programs, universities can implement various strategies such as enhancing training programs, promoting communication about high-quality programs, increasing enrollment quotas, and diversifying enrollment methods (Le et al., n.d.). The reputation of a university is the primary factor influencing students' choices, followed by factors such as completion time, academic quality, and the qualifications of the academic staff (Echchabi, 2018). Additionally, the location and image of the university and the level of regional development significantly impact students' selection of a university (Uyar A, 2018).

In today's competitive academic landscape, where students have abundant choices, it is crucial to investigate the factors that enable educational institutions to attract and retain students (Dhaqane & Afrah, 2016). Student satisfaction is extensively studied in both academic and non-academic settings. In academic settings, the satisfaction data of students aids colleges and universities in adapting their curriculum to meet the needs of a dynamic marketplace (Wach et al., 2016). The relationship between student satisfaction and academic performance is of utmost importance in contemporary higher education, garnering significant attention from teaching practitioners and academics, as it can enhance the educational experience for students (Adília & José, 2021).

Effective communication, motivation, pedagogy, cooperation, and proper implementation of planned activities are essential factors influencing teaching quality (Sokoli et al., 2021). Comparatively, the quality of teaching in smaller class sizes is slightly higher than that in larger classes (Noben et al., 2022). Innovation must be accompanied by quality to effectively engage students (Cavazos-Arroyo & Máynez-Guaderrama, 2022). Higher Teach scores are associated with improved student outcomes (Molina et al., 2020). It is crucial to distinguish between good teaching and successful teaching, as they are not inherently synonymous (Fenstermacher & Richardson, 2005). The delivery of education by teachers to students can positively impact creativity, talent, and intelligence (Putrianingsih et al., 2021). Moreover, the indoor environmental quality (IEQ) contributes positively to the learning experience and short-term academic performance of students (Brink et al., 2021). The overall rating of a course is more strongly influenced by variables related to the course's outcome, content, and concepts rather than the rating of the teacher (Fajčíková & Fejfarová, 2019).

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research objectives

To find out the factors those affect the satisfaction of students.

To find out if the image of the university and study costs affect student satisfaction.

To find out if the academic staff of the university affects student satisfaction.

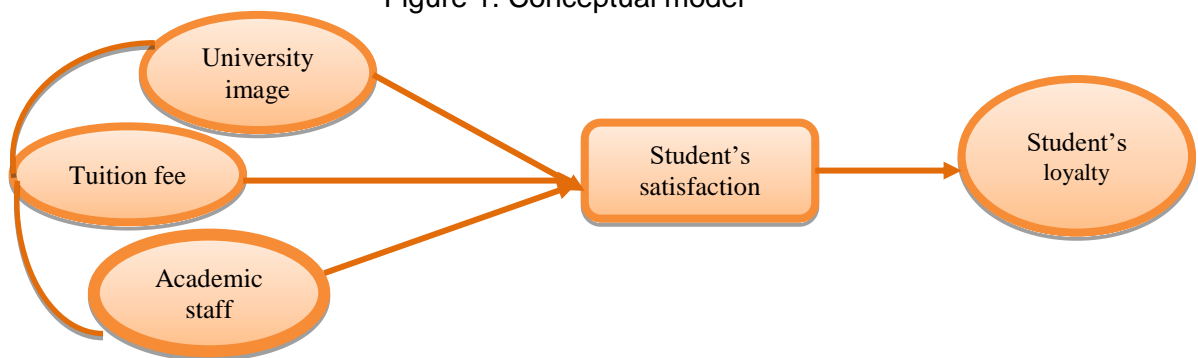
Research questions

Does the image of the university influence the student's decision to choose it?

Does the tuition fee affect the choice of university?

Does the quality of the academic staff influence the choice of university?

Figure 1. Conceptual model



Research Design

The study was done through the quantitative analysis of some variables related to the satisfaction of the students as well as their loyalty. The survey was conducted among the students of the University of Durrës, where the selection was made to collect valuable information for the study. The survey instrument is structured into two sections. The initial section collects demographic information, while the subsequent section comprises variables assessed using the Likert scale, which measures the attitudes of the respondents expressing their opinions from the level "Not at all agree" to "Very much agree"

Population and sample size

The population is the totality of students of the University of Durrës, while the sample is an adjusted sample where 215 students were interviewed and they expressed their opinions regarding the questions raised. In this study is used simple random sampling method which is one of the best probably method. Referred to this method it means that everyone has the same probability of being chosen to be a part of study. This is a reliable method of gathering

information because every single person (student in this case) is chosen randomly. The questionnaire was distributed through Google form and analysed as below in this study.

ANALYSIS

The analysis used in this study is mainly a descriptive analysis which gives us sufficient information to understand the approaches of students regarding the quality of different factors, perceived by them when they decide to choose a Higher Education Institution where they want to continue their studies. The sample chosen for this study consisted of 250 questionnaires, but only 215 of them were valid for analysis. Of the 215 students interviewed, 46 were men or 21.4% and 169 were women or 78.6% (Table 1).

Table 1: The percentage of respondent's gender

Gender		Frequency	Percent	Valid %	Cumulative %
Valid	Male	46	21.4	21.4	21.4
	Female	169	78.6	78.6	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

According to an open question at the end of the questionnaire, some of the students state that one of the weak points that directly affects their perceived quality is transportation, which is limited in time and often becomes an obstacle to achieving the satisfaction the students. Another question addressed to the students is to understand the attitude they had toward the location of the University of Durres, this question is also related to its distance from the city centre and the necessity of a regular transport line: How positively do you rate the location of the university? The percentage of answers is presented below where it is seen that the majority of students (58.6% of them) answer that they do not evaluate it "positively" or "very positively" and this attitude is related to the limited service in transport schedule.

Table 2: The evaluation of University location

How positively do you rate the location of the university?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	65	30.2	30.2	30.2
	A little	61	28.4	28.4	58.6
	Indifferent	27	12.6	12.6	71.2
	Much	49	22.8	22.8	94.0
	Too much	13	6.0	6.0	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

Referring to the question regarding the ability of the academic staff, the answers are presented in the table below, where it is seen that the majority of students (75.9% of them) value the ability of the academic staff very much or extremely high. This confirms that students' satisfaction is influenced by this variable.

Table 3: The teaching ability of academic staff

How positively do you rate the teaching skills of the academic staff?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	1	.5	.5	.5
	A little	19	8.8	8.8	9.3
	Indifferent	32	14.9	14.9	24.2
	Much	116	54.0	54.0	78.1
	Too much	47	21.9	21.9	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

Some of the questions addressed to the students and related to the image of the university were: the evaluation of the history of the creation and its impact on the choices that the students had made, the evaluation of the activities organized by the University, the diversity of the study programs and the facilities and comfort offered by University. The tables below give us information about the opinions of the students, where the positive evaluation stands out in each case, thus confirming the fact that the *image of the university affects the students satisfaction and their positive attitudes towards it.*

Table 4: Image of the University

Is it a problem for you that "Aleksander Moisiu" University was opened in 2006 and does not have as much experience as UT					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	166	77.2	77.2	77.2
	A little	24	11.2	11.2	88.4
	Indifferent	17	7.9	7.9	96.3
	Much	6	2.8	2.8	99.1
	Too much	2	.9	.9	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

How much do you evaluate the activities organized from this University					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	8	3.7	3.7	3.7
	A little	37	17.2	17.2	20.9
	Indifferent	40	18.6	18.6	39.5
	Much	91	42.3	42.3	81.9
	Too much	39	18.1	18.1	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

How do you evaluate the facilities and comfort offered by the university?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	2	.9	.9	.9
	A little	65	30.2	30.2	31.2
	Indifferent	7	3.3	3.3	34.4
	Much	92	42.8	42.8	77.2
	Too much	49	22.8	22.8	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

How much do you appreciate the diversity of programs offered by university?					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	10	4.7	4.7	4.7
	A little	26	12.1	12.1	16.7
	Indifferent	41	19.1	19.1	35.8
	Much	120	55.8	55.8	91.6
	Too much	18	8.4	8.4	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

Table 4...

The majority of students answered positively (62.8%) to the question related to the payment of the study fee. This confirms the fact that the tuition fee has a positive impact on student satisfaction.

Table 5: Tuition fee

The study fee is affordable					
		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Not at all	31	14.4	14.4	14.4
	A little	22	10.2	10.2	24.7
	Indiferent	27	12.6	12.6	37.2
	Much	77	35.8	35.8	73.0
	Too much	58	27.0	27.0	100.0
	Total	215	100.0	100.0	

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Summary of the Results

Student satisfaction takes precedence over their loyalty, as evidenced by their willingness to recommend the university. This study has yielded several key findings: the data analysis confirms a positive association between service quality, encompassing image quality, staff quality, tuition fees, study duration, and consumer satisfaction. Moreover, it reveals a link between consumer loyalty and their willingness to recommend the university for future enrollment. In the future studies, a wider scope of the study is needed, including students from

other universities in Albania, so that the conclusions represent the opinions of the students as clearly as possible.

Recommendations

It is recommended that future studies be carried out with a larger sample. Also, it is recommended to include in the future studies other public and private universities to have a clearer overview of the factors that affect student satisfaction. It is also recommended that future researchers study the impact of word of mouth from former students to current students to better understand the impact of the image in conveying the opinion of others. It will be beneficial for researchers to assess the impact of employment opportunities for graduating students, facilitated by university partnerships with various companies, on student satisfaction.

Limitation of the Study

An identified constraint of this study is the relatively limited sample size, potentially constraining the extent to which the findings can be generalized.

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