AN EMPIRICAL STUDY OF POTENTIAL FACTORS IMPACTING STUDENT SATISFACTION – A STUDY FOCUSED ON STUDENTS LIVING IN THE NORTH OF ALBANIA AND ATTENDING PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES (CASE: UNIVERSITY OF SHKODRA, UNIVERSITY OF TIRANA AND THE UNIVERSITY OF MEDICINE, TIRANA)

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	Objective: This study aims to explore the factors influencing student satisfaction among attendees of public universities in the northern region of Albania, against the backdrop of declining student enrollment and significant emigration trends. **Theoretical Framework:** Student satisfaction is understood as a crucial aspect of educational evaluation, influenced by various factors such as educational experiences, services, and facilities (Chatzoglou et al., 2021). Emphasis is placed on understanding the interplay between demographic variables and their impact on satisfaction levels. **Method:** Data was collected via questionnaires distributed to students at the University of Shkodra, Tirana, and the University of Medicine in 2023. Factor and reliability analyses were employed to identify significant factors affecting student satisfaction. Multiple regression analysis was conducted, with variables including reputation, cost of study, course quality, employability prospects, and service quality. **Results and Discussion:** The findings indicate that demographic variables exhibit a notable influence on student satisfaction levels. Moreover, the regression analysis identified several factors—such as reputation, cost of study, and service quality—as significant predictors of student satisfaction. **Research Implications:** This study contributes to understanding the nuanced dynamics of student satisfaction within the Albanian higher education context. The findings hold implications for university administrators and policymakers in devising strategies to enhance student satisfaction and address the challenges of declining enrollment. **Originality/Value:** By focusing on the specific context of northern Albanian public universities, this research sheds light on understudied aspects of student satisfaction amidst broader socio-economic challenges. The study's findings underscore the importance of tailored interventions to improve overall student experiences and retention rates. Doi: https://doi.org/10.26668/businessreview/2024.v9i5.4690

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ESTUDO EMPÍRICO DOS POSSÍVEIS FATORES QUE AFETAM A SATISFAÇÃO DOS ALUNOS - UM ESTUDO FOCADO EM ALUNOS QUE MORAM NO NORTE DA ALBÂNIA E FREQUENTAM UNIVERSIDADES PÚBLICAS (CASO: UNIVERSIDADE DE SHKODRA, UNIVERSIDADE DE TIRANA E UNIVERSIDADE DE MEDICINA, TIRANA)

RESUMO

Objetivo: Este estudo tem como objetivo explorar os fatores que influenciam a satisfação do aluno entre os frequentadores de universidades públicas na região norte da Albânia, tendo como pano de fundo o declínio das matrículas de alunos e as tendências significativas de emigração.

Estrutura Teórica: A satisfação do aluno é entendida como um aspecto crucial da avaliação educacional, influenciada por vários fatores, como experiências educacionais, serviços e instalações (Chatzoglou et al., 2021). A ênfase é colocada na compreensão da interação entre as variáveis demográficas e seu impacto nos níveis de satisfação.

Método: Os dados foram coletados por meio de questionários distribuídos aos alunos da Universidade de Shkodra, Tirana e da Universidade de Medicina em 2023. Foram empregadas análises de fatores e de confiabilidade para identificar fatores significativos que afetam a satisfação dos alunos. Foi realizada uma análise de regressão múltipla, com variáveis que incluíam reputação, custo de estudo, qualidade do curso, perspectivas de empregabilidade e qualidade do serviço.

Resultados e Discussão: Os resultados indicam que as variáveis demográficas exibem uma influência notável nos níveis de satisfação dos alunos. Além disso, a análise de regressão identificou diversos fatores, como reputação, custo dos estudos e qualidade do serviço, como preditores significativos da satisfação do aluno.

Implicações da Pesquisa: Este estudo contribui para a compreensão da dinâmica diferenciada da satisfação do aluno no contexto do ensino superior albanês. As descobertas têm implicações para os administradores universitários e formuladores de políticas na elaboração de estratégias para aumentar a satisfação dos alunos e enfrentar os desafios do declínio das matrículas.

Originalidade/Valor: Ao se concentrar no contexto específico das universidades públicas do norte da Albânia, esta pesquisa lança luz sobre aspectos pouco estudados da satisfação dos alunos em meio a desafios socioeconômicos mais amplos. As conclusões do estudo ressaltam a importância de intervenções personalizadas para melhorar as experiências gerais dos alunos e as taxas de retenção.

Palavras-chave: Satisfação do Aluno, Universidades Públicas, Dimensões da Qualidade do Serviço, Análise Fatorial.

ESTUDIO EMPÍRICO DE LOS POSIBLES FACTORES QUE AFECTAN A LA SATISFACCIÓN DE LOS ESTUDIANTES - UN ESTUDIO CENTRADO EN LOS ESTUDIANTES QUE VIVEN EN EL NORTE DE ALBANIA Y ASISTEN A UNIVERSIDADES PÚBLICAS (CASO: UNIVERSIDAD DE SHKODRA, UNIVERSIDAD DE TIRANA Y UNIVERSIDAD DE MEDICINA, TIRANA)

RESUMEN

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Palabras clave: Satisfacción de los Estudiantes, Universidades Públicas, Dimensiones de la Calidad del Servicio, Análisis Factorial.

1 INTRODUCTION

Student satisfaction can be defined as a brief attitude resulting from an assessment of the educational experience, services, and facilities (Chatzoglou et al., 2021). The level of satisfaction that students perceive during their university years is not just a means to assess satisfaction; it is a reflection of the institution's ability to meet the diverse needs and expectations of its students. This study delves into the multifaceted world of student satisfaction, with a focus on students living in the northern part of Albania but attending public universities. Our study focuses on students from the University of Shkodra, the University of Tirana, and the University of Medicine. It aims to uncover the intricate network of factors influencing student satisfaction and how satisfaction levels contribute to easing the burden of tuition fees. By examining these factors, we aim to identify areas for improvement and highlight best practices that can guide universities in fostering a more enriching and supportive learning environment.

Higher education is a transformative journey for students, yet the financial challenges associated with pursuing a degree remain a significant aspect of their university experience. Globally the higher education (HE) sector has undergone a paradigm shift in terms of governance and state regulation (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2015), and universities world-wide are experiencing high levels of competition (Musselin, 2018) supply and demand challenges (Riddell, 2018) changes in funding regimes (Dearden et al., 2017) and debates about the efficiency and effectiveness of HE the sector (Antony et al., 2019)

The benefits of this research extend beyond the boundaries of academic inquiry. They hold real significance for university administration, policymakers, educators, and, most importantly, the students themselves. This is particularly relevant given that universities in Albania are facing a consistently decreasing number of students. The latest data published by INSTAT indicates that 198,352 students are currently enrolled in Albanian universities, 2% fewer than a year ago (Instat, 2023b). Another crucial factor is the high emigration figures our country is experiencing. In the year 2022 alone, 46,460 Albanians left the country (Instat, 2023a).

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One of the measures to alleviate this financial burden, currently in effect, is the policy implemented at the beginning of 2019, which includes increasing scholarships for excellent students and reducing tuition fees for students with a GPA between 5-9 in the Bachelor's cycle. Additionally, the tuition fees for Master's students with excellence were halved (Ministry of Finance and Economy, 2019).

All three universities that are part of our study have a long academic history, a considerable number of faculties and departments covering fields such as economy, law, medicine, technology, social sciences, and psychology. Starting with the University of Shkodra 'Luigj Gurakuqi', which commenced its activities in 1957, initially as a Higher Pedagogical Institute and obtained university status on May 28, 1991. In this university, 34,993 students have graduated in the Bachelor's cycle, 2,199 in the Professional Master's cycle, and 1,325 in the Scientific Master's cycle (UNISHK, 2023). Also established in 1957, the University of Tirana has been a strong competitor for the University of Shkodra, attracting many students from the north to study there (Universiteti i Tiranes, 2023). The University of Medicine, created in 2013, resulted from the merger of two existing faculties, the Faculty of Medicine and the Faculty of Nursing. Considering that opportunities in Shkodra are more limited in the field of medicine, this university provides more alternatives that attract many students to pursue their studies there (Universiteti i Mjekesise, 2023).

2 OBJECTIVES

Previous studies have examined the impact of quality or other characteristics of services on consumer satisfaction, including student satisfaction in higher education (Khan & Hemsley-Brown, 2020; Mulyono et al., 2020; Najimdeen et al., 2021). This study explores potential factors influencing student satisfaction, and its objective is divided into three parts. Firstly, this study seeks to examine the potential factors impacting student satisfaction. Secondly, it explores whether or not there are any significant differences in student satisfaction based on demographic variables, such as age, gender, etc.; and finally, it examine the relationship between the student satisfaction and the potential factors.

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3 THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Authors and researchers from various parts of the world have focused their studies on student satisfaction in higher education. They have identified various factors that influence student satisfaction. An important indicator is the 'retention' of a high number of students who enrol to pursue studies at the focal university (Druzdze & Glymour, n.d.). Mentorship programs have been established in faculties to link academic performance with the dropout rate (Campbell & Campbell, 1997). Aldridge and Rowly (1998) observed a group of students at a university in the United Kingdom to measure levels of satisfaction. The results shown are alarming, as variables with negative effects on satisfaction reflect areas in which the university needs to intervene for improvement. This negative effect is like an ailment that, if left untreated for too long, will worsen, and there will be no room for improvement. Therefore, this study presents negative associations with satisfaction as something 'positive' that can be intervened upon for improvement. Similarly, Napoli and Wortman (1998) assessed that psychological measures, such as life events during university, self-esteem, social competence, social support, personal consciousness, psychological well-being, and satisfaction with academic, administrative, and social university systems, influence university persistence. A study was conducted in German universities, through the collaboration of Hennig and other authors, using a student satisfaction model based on relationship quality (2001), which revealed that teaching quality and students' emotional commitment to their institutions were important for their satisfaction.

Mai (2005) studied student satisfaction in higher education and its influencing factors. It was found that the overall impression of the school, the general perception of the quality of education, the expertise and interest of teachers in their subject, the quality and access to IT facilities, and the career prospects of students were the most influential predictors of student satisfaction. Similarly, Deshields et al. (2005) used a satisfaction model and Herzberg's two-factor theory to examine determinants of student satisfaction with education. They found that faculty performance and classes were key factors determining the quality of the student experience in college, which in turn led to satisfaction.

The reputation of a university is consistently considered a key factor in student satisfaction. Studies have shown that students often perceive an institution with a strong academic reputation as providing higher-quality education. This positive perception significantly contributes to student satisfaction. The university's reputation is a concept similar

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to the brand image proposed in the literature by Zeithaml and other authors (Zeithaml et al., 1993) for service quality. In the marketing of products or services, the image influences consumer satisfaction (Khalifa et al., 2021). In the context of higher education institutions (HEIs), reputation is evaluated based on years of service, the number of graduating students, post-graduation employment, etc. In various studies, consumer satisfaction with reputation has a direct, positive (Mulyono et al., 2020), and statistically significant relationship (Alves & Raposo, 2007). Additionally, the reputation of a university can influence a student's sense of belonging and pride. When students attend a prestigious institution, they often feel a deeper sense of pride and satisfaction, which can positively impact their overall experience.

The cost of education, including tuition fees and other expenses, is an important factor in student satisfaction. High financial burdens can lead to increased stress and anxiety among students, potentially lowering their satisfaction levels. Some studies have shown a direct relationship between high education costs and low levels of student satisfaction. A statistically significant influence has also been observed in the study by Khan & Jashim, where the connection between these variables is negative, meaning that as the costs of education increase, student satisfaction decreases. On the other hand, students who perceive their education costs as reasonable or receive financial assistance are more likely to report higher levels of satisfaction. The most important investment we can make is in ourselves, as everything spent on learning will one day yield the desired return.

In the concept of education quality, the structure and design of course materials are also included. The choice of a specific course or major within a university plays a key role in student satisfaction. Studies show that when students find a course that aligns with their interests and career aspirations, they are more fulfilled with their academic experience. This alignment between personal goals and the course curriculum has a positive impact on motivation and engagement, which are crucial rewards for satisfaction. However, a mismatch between student expectations and the actual content or quality of a course can lead to dissatisfaction. Universities that offer a wide range of quality courses and allow students to explore their interests tend to have higher satisfaction levels among their students. Brophy (1999) suggests that the structure and coherence of course design are important factors in facilitating learning for students. Some studies support a direct relationship between well-designed courses and students' overall performance assessments (DeShields et al., 2005). The study by Hartman and Schmidt (1995) indicates a direct connection between course design and student satisfaction.

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The quality of services offered by a university, including academic support and administrative assistance, significantly influences student satisfaction (Tanese et al., 2003). Research indicates that students who receive effective and efficient support services are more likely to be satisfied with their educational experience. Additionally, services related to academic counselling, library resources, and technological support have been found to play a crucial role in determining levels of student satisfaction. Universities that invest in improving these services are more likely to have satisfied students. Conversely, poor service quality can lead to frustration and dissatisfaction among students. Consumers are satisfied when the service meets their expectations, or highly satisfied when the service exceeds their expectations. Cost is also a influencing factor in satisfaction. Students perceive the cost of their education as reasonable, and this contributes to positive satisfaction outcomes, a finding supported by the study of Khan and Jashim.

The perception of future employment is closely linked to student satisfaction. Students often seek higher education to enhance their career prospects, and their satisfaction is intricately tied to the belief that their university is preparing them for a successful and fulfilling career. Institutions that provide robust career services, internships, and skill development opportunities are more likely to have satisfied students. Additionally, studies have shown that students who feel their university has strong ties to employers or provides support in job placement report higher levels of satisfaction. In contrast, a lack of prospects for employment can lead to dissatisfaction, as students may assess the value of their education. Expectations for graduate salaries drive enrollment in higher education: those with a university degree expect to earn more, and obtaining a degree increases the probability of finding a job (Godofsky et al., 2011). Students rely on their degree to secure employment, even though they may not expect this job to be offered by the institution. As consumers, satisfied students are also more likely to recommend their institution positively to their peers (Najimdeen et al., 2021).

The study of student satisfaction has also been a focus for many researchers in our country. Neza and Llazo are two educators from the University of Durres 'Aleksandër Moisiu' who have focused on the factors influencing consumer satisfaction. This study reveals a connection between consumer satisfaction and their willingness to recommend the university for enrolment in the future. Additionally, this study has drawn some key findings: data analysis confirms a positive correlation between the quality of service, including the quality of image, staff quality, tuition fees, study duration, and consumer satisfaction (Neza & Llazo, 2023). Similarly, Kruja et al. (2021) are focused on students' perceptions and satisfaction with services

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in public and private universities in Albania. The study results show that there is a gap between public and private universities. Overall student satisfaction positively influences their retention (Kruja et al., 2021).

4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND HYPOTHESES

Based on the above-mentioned discussion, this study seeks to answer the following questions:

- What are the potential factors impacting student satisfaction and their significance?
- Are there any significant differences in student satisfaction based on demographic factors, such as age, gender, place of study (Shkodra or Tirana), etc.?
- Are there any significant differences in student satisfaction based on education cycle and the field of study?

Consistent with the research questions raised, the following hypotheses are derived:

- H1: There is a significant impact of service quality dimensions on student satisfaction.
- H2: There is a significant relationship between age and student satisfaction.
- H3: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on gender.
- H4: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on educational cycle.
- H5: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on place of study.
- H6: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on rural/urban.
- H7: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on the field of studies.

5 METHOD

5.1 SUBJECTS & PROCEDURE

The data were collected through online questionnaires distributed to current students who reside in the northern region of Albania, but study in Shkodra and Tirana during the autumn of 2023. The questionnaire, created in Google Forms, was distributed online through social networks such as WhatsApp and the email addresses of current students. Out of 550 distributed questionnaires, we received 298 responses. Among the respondents, the majority (65.1%) were females, and the average age of the participants was 21.7 (years). Of the surveyed individuals, 72.8% were Bachelor students, while the remaining portion were in Master's programs. The

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data have been uploaded to the statistical program SPSS and coded according to the program's specifications (Kahn, 2006). For the variables included in the model, their calculation was performed in the form of averaging using 'Compute Variable', enabling the generation of respective index.

5.2 INDEPENDENT VARIABLES

Drawing on the existing literature, to select research questions, five service quality dimensions were used in this study: reputation, cost of study, service quality, course and employability It should be noted, that based on Parasuraman's et al. SERVQUAL gap model (1985), perceived, expected, as well as the gap between perceived and expected values were used in this study. We will only be presenting the factor and reliability analyses for perceived measures.

Reputation: To measure 'reputation', three items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.717 to 0.857 with a median of 0.770. This factor explained 77.027% of the total variance. The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.841. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable.

Table 1

Items Used to Measure Reputation Variable (N = 298)

Items	Factor Loadings
1. The university where you are studying is a prestigious and internationally recognized place to study.	0.736
2. Had a good reputation in terms of course / department /lecturer	0.857
3. Had a good research reputation	0.717

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Cost of study: To measure 'cost of study, four items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.626 to 0.693 with a median of 0.667. This factor explained 60.656% of the total variance. The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.833. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable.

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Table 2

Items Used to Measure Cost of Study Variable (N = 298)

Items	Factor Loadings
1. Tuition fees are more affordable compared to other alternatives.	0.683
2. Had good bursaries or scholarships	0.693
3. Had a reasonable accommodation cost and cost of living	0.626
4. Was in a place where it was easy to find part time work	0.665

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Service Quality: To measure 'service quality', three items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.719 to 0.820 with a median of 0.771. This factor explained 77.176% of the total variance. The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.850. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable.

Table 3

Items Used to Measure Service Quality Variable (N = 298)

Items	Factor Loadings
1. There is a useful website where information can be obtained.	0.775
2. There are laboratory rooms and spaces where lectures or group assignments can be conducted.	0.820
3. There is a rich library.	0.719

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

Course: To measure 'course', four items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.758 to 0.872 with a median of 0.819. This factor explained 81.909% of the total variance. The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.926. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable.

Table 4

Items Used to Measure Course Variable (N = 298)

Items	Factor Loadings
1. Had the course content and structure that I wanted.	0.794
2. There are assessment and teaching/learning methods that I prefer	0.872
3. The curriculum and textbooks are selected by internationally renowned authors and are easy to understand.	0.853
4. There are competent teachers who facilitate the learning process for students.	0.758

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

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Employability: To measure 'employability', three items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.861 to 0.880 with a median of 0.873. This factor explained 87.307% of the total variance. The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.926. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable.

Table 5

Items Used to Measure Employability Variable (N = 298)

Items	Factor Loadings
1. The department where you are studying offers good employment opportunities both domestically and internationally.	0.880
2. Provides numerous innovative ideas and opportunities to implement them.	0.861
3. It is a promising window for future employment in general	0.879

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

5.3 DEPENDENT VARIABLE

In this study 'Student satisfaction' was used as dependent variable:

Student Satisfaction: To measure 'student satisfaction', three items were included in the questionnaire. A principal component analysis, using eigenvalue greater than one criterion, revealed a simple structure with factor loadings ranging from 0.848 to 0.926 with a median of 0.884. This factor explained 88.409% of the total variance. The results of the reliability analysis indicated a Cronbach alpha of 0.934. Given the exploratory nature of this study, such value is considered acceptable.

Table 6

Items Used to Measure Student Satisfaction Variable (N = 298)

Items	Factor Loadings
1. Overall, I am satisfied with the service provided by the university.	0,848
2. If I could turn back time, this university and the department where I study would still be my choice.	0,878
3. I wholeheartedly recommend it to friends and relatives who want to pursue higher education.	0,926

Note. All questions were rated on a scale 1 (totally disagree) to 5 (totally agree).

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6 RESULTS

To explore the potential factors impacting student satisfaction, we performed regression analyse, using respectively student satisfaction as the dependent variable. The five dimensions of the student satisfaction: reputation, cost of study, service quality, course and employability, were used as the independent variables. In the first model, we entered the five perceived dimensions as the independent variables and student satisfaction as the dependent variable. The results indicated that the model was highly significant ($F(5,297) = 179.423$, $p = 0.000$); adjusted R^2 was 75.0%. Consequently, hypothesis H1 was supported given that we found dimensions, such as reputation, cost of study, service quality, course and employability to have a significant impact on student satisfaction.

To test whether or not there are significant relationships between age and student satisfaction, simple regression analyse was performed, using age as the independent variable and student satisfaction, as the dependent variables. The results of the simple regression analyses indicated that there was a significant relationship between age and student satisfaction ($F(1, 296) = 4.422$, $p = 0.036$). Furthermore, regression slope coefficient was positive and significant. Consequently, hypotheses H2 was supported.

To test whether or not there is a significant difference in student satisfaction based on gender t-tests was performed. The results indicated that there was a difference; in fact, mean student satisfaction for males ($M = 4.45$, $SD = 0.905$); was higher than mean student satisfaction for females ($M = 4.208$, $SD = 1.08$). The difference was marginally significant ($t(296) = -1.933$, $p = 0.054$ (two-tailed)), for $α=0.10$. Consequently, hypotheses H3 was marginally supported.

To test whether or not there is a significant difference in student satisfaction based on educational cycle, t-tests was performed. The results indicated that there was a difference; in fact, mean student satisfaction for bachelor's students ($M = 4.300$, $SD = 1.030$) was higher than mean tourist satisfaction for master's students ($M = 4.272$, $SD = 1.036$); however, the difference was not statistically significant ($t(296) = 0.208$, $p = 0.835$ (two-tailed)). Consequently, hypotheses H4 was not supported.

To test whether or not there is a significant difference in student satisfaction based on the place of study (Shkodra/Tirana) t-tests was performed. The results indicated that there was a difference; in fact, mean student satisfaction for students who study in Tirana ($M = 4.813$, $SD = 0.282$) was higher than mean student satisfaction for students who study in Shkodra ($M =$

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4.029, SD = 1.162). The difference was statistically significant (t(296) = 6.648, p = 0.000 (two-tailed)). Consequently, hypotheses H5 was supported.

To test whether or not there is a significant difference in student satisfaction based on the urban/rural, t-tests was performed. The results indicated that there was a difference; in fact, mean student satisfaction for students who live in rural area (M = 4.476, SD = 0.832) was higher than mean student satisfaction for students who urban area (M = 4.157, SD = 1.137). The difference was statistically significant (t(296) = 2.671, p = 0.008 (two-tailed)). Consequently, hypotheses H6 was supported.

To test whether or not there are differences in mean student satisfaction based on the field of studies, ANOVA was performed. The results of the first ANOVA indicated there was a significant difference in the mean student satisfaction based on the field of studies (F(6, 291 = 9.708, p = 0.000). Consequently, hypotheses H7 was supported.

Table 7

Summary of Results

Hypotheses	Supported or Not
H1: There is a significant impact of dimensions included on student satisfaction.	Supported
H2: There is a significant relationship between age and student satisfaction	Supported
H3: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on gender.	Supported
H4: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on educational cycle.	Not Supported
H5: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on place of study.	Supported
H6: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on rural/urban.	Supported
H7: There are significant differences in student satisfaction based on the field of studies	Supported

7 CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This study examined how potential factors such as reputation, cost, service quality, and employability influence the satisfaction of students residing in northern Albania who are pursuing studies at three public universities. From our analysis, the service quality variable is a positive influencing factor on student satisfaction. This finding aligns with the research conducted by professors at the University of Durrës (Neza & Llazo, 2023), as service quality is a factor with a positive effect on satisfaction. Similarly, articles by Mai (2005) and Khan (2020) present the same connection. Additionally, the course has a positive effect on student satisfaction. The structure and coherence of course design are crucial factors in facilitating learning for students (Brophy, 1999). These results are consistent with the findings of the referenced articles. Reputation emerges as a variable with an impact on consumer satisfaction in this study, aligning with other

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research where consumer satisfaction with reputation has a direct (Alves & Raposo, 2007) and statistically significant positive correlation (Mulyono et al., 2020).

The link between student satisfaction and expectations for employment in relation to the field of study is positive, with the latter having a positive impact on satisfaction. According to Godofsky, the expectation for graduates' salaries encourages enrolment in higher education: those with a university degree anticipate earning more, and obtaining a degree increases the probability of finding employment (2011). Students rely on their degrees to secure employment.

In the study by Pickle and Bruce (1972), consumer satisfaction increases with age, and in our study, we reached the same conclusion as age was statistically significant in satisfaction. Gender differences were also statistically significant, with males reporting higher levels of satisfaction. Students residing in rural areas are more satisfied than those living in urban areas, a finding supported by Sorensen's study (2014), which focused on differences in insecurity levels, comparison frameworks, and levels of social interaction. Based on the location of their studies (Tirana or Shkodra), students studying in Tirana are more satisfied compared to those studying in Shkodra. This is linked to reputation and the discovery of a broader range of fields where they can study and be closer to what they have wanted to study. A connection between the level of education and satisfaction indicates that the higher the study cycle, the lower the levels of satisfaction. However, the current study's results show no statistically significant difference in satisfaction based on the study cycle pursued by the students. But a statistically significant difference is observed in the relationship between fields of study and satisfaction.

The study has encountered several limitations that can be improved in the future. To conduct a more accurate study on the perceived satisfaction of students in public universities, a larger sample is required for examination and more universities need to be included. Additionally, online surveys may not be a reliable measure of consumer preference, as there is a possibility of neglect or incomplete focus when respondents complete the survey. Moreover, respondents may evaluate based on their current psychological state and may not provide an accurate assessment of the service received.

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