

ATTITUDES OF UNIVERSITY PROFESSORS TOWARDS HIGHER EDUCATION IN THE REPUBLIC OF NORTH MACEDONIA AND THEIR WORK SATISFACTION

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Abstract

The purpose of the study is to reveal the relationship between the attitude of university professors towards the environment in which higher education institutions are operating currently in the Republic of North Macedonia and their job satisfaction. This paper attempts to address the problem of applicability of the Law on Amending and Supplementing the Law on Higher Education, by relating above-mentioned variables measured by the degree of job satisfaction of the university professors.

Quantitative correlation was used as a method of research in this study. Therefore, a group of 305 Albanian professors of higher education were randomly selected, both from private and public institutions, with an average age of 40 years and a working experience of 7 years – surveyed by relevant measurement instruments. The correlational analysis between attitudes toward higher education in the country and the job satisfaction of the professors in the university has been shown to have an average positive statistically significant relationship, while ordinal regression showed that attitudes are important predictors of the job satisfaction variable. Of the relevant variables, only work experience resulted with poor adverse relationship in relation to attitudes towards the environment in which higher-education institutions are operating.

Keywords: Attitude, Higher education, Job satisfaction

1. Theoretical framework

1.1 Professor attitudes towards higher education

The assessment of higher education situation in the Republic of North Macedonia by the Albanian university professors in the country has been used as a predictive variable in this study due to the impact that it may have on the satisfaction of professors at work.

The situation in higher education in the Republic of North Macedonia assessed in the academic year 2014/15, which includes the period from September 2014, has been identified as extremely important in numerous activities of non-governmental organizations, in public debates by the Ministry of Education and Science with professors and students from public and private universities. Its importance lies in the proposal made for the amendment of the Law on Higher Education by the government of the Republic of North Macedonia (December 2014), which was an effective proposal of the Assembly. However, primarily, this reform was preceded by a proposal on key reform needs drafted by universities (Nr.13-12151/1 in 24.07.2014). The Law on Higher Education got amended three times during 2014 (Official Gazette No. 11/14, 116/14 and 130/14), while the proposal for the last amendment raised a large public debate, involving all stakeholders and was accompanied by protests and boycott

by both, professors and students. Therefore, the changes included many important points of organizing university activity, including the state exam for students in each course. This exam aimed to verify the knowledge, skills and abilities of students during their studies at the end of the first and second cycle of studies (Article 69-a, 2014).

This paper does not intend to investigate the education system reform proposal, but it attempts to explain the concrete situation, which was followed by a lot of debates and public discontent expressed by professors, students and university leaders, certainly, not all of them but a considerable number of them. In Macedonia, public debates on this topic were organized by many organizations and universities which elaborated on their respective requirements and analyzes. They became more intense especially during December and January 2015.

In a debate organized by the Faculty of Law, the Albanian professors of the University of Tetova (UT) opposed this proposal, qualifying it as discriminatory for the Albanian community and the only public university in Albanian language in the country (UT organized a debate on the proposed amendments to the Law on Higher Education, 2014).

The general assessment of the disputers was that the amendments and supplements proposed by the Government of the Republic of North Macedonia to the Law on Higher Education, especially in the part related to the state enrolling exam for students, was regarded as a serious interference with the university autonomy. This was an obstinate action of the Government to adopt the foreseen changes, thus leading to students, professors and other society groups reaction and mobilization in mass protests and resulted in an open letter addressed to the Government of RVM, signed by professors of various universities in the country. (Debate organized by QMBI regarding the proposed changes foreseen in the Law on Higher Education, 2014). In all recorded debates, it was notable that the need to make changes was fully agreed, but a better and more detailed analysis of the real situation was necessary.

As witnesses of this situation, this study refers to the survey data of 909 subjects from public and private universities, mainly Albanians, from November 20 to December 5, 2014 carried out by the Education Office of the University of Tetova. The survey findings were also reported in the public debate organized at the university. They show a low average of the higher education change assessment by the Albanian professors (N=84; M=2,43), from minimum 1 to maximum 7 of assessment values. These findings and other statistical data highlighted the professors' negative attitude toward higher education in the country, and thus resulted in inclusion of this variable in our study, since the current study sample is basically the same.

1.2 The professors' satisfaction at work

The overall assessment of satisfaction at work is treated in many similar studies compared to different variables of employees in organizations. Considering this multifactor-related variable in this study, the same variable is treated as explained (dependent), and assessed as the overall satisfaction in the working environment. Precisely, Kreitner and Kinicki (2006) have defined work satisfaction as the way employees feel about their work in various aspects. A researcher such as Dawes (2004) classifies satisfaction in its two components: cognitive and emotional.

Work satisfaction is a concept that refers to the attitudes and feelings of people towards their work, respectively, considering these as positive and favorable attitudes towards work (Armstrong, 2006). However, taking in consideration the relation of work satisfaction with work environment components, such as the working environment, working conditions, measuring this variable in our research was also based on Kim's theory (2005), since work

satisfaction is determined by the employees' overall feelings or attitudes towards their work, as well as by the working environment conditions, equal rewards and communication with colleagues (Sadegh R., & Azadeh T., 2012).

Studies show that the correlation between work satisfaction and organizational commitment is important. This means that, employees with higher work satisfaction show more dedication to work (Diana, 2008).

To explore the relationship between the overall level of satisfaction and the tendency to resign, Bezati (2012) found that there is a negative substantial correlation and valid from a statistical point of view ($r=-.51$; $p<0.001$) between the level of work satisfaction and the tendency to resign. The lower the level of work satisfaction, the higher the tendency to resign. In the study "The satisfaction of Albanian teachers from their work" by the authors Tamo and Karaj (2007) cited by (Bezati, 2012), among the factors that have the greatest impact on the overall satisfaction of teachers from work were: clarification and harmonization of instructions sent to schools; creating and using the professional development opportunities for teachers; objective teacher efforts and achievements assessment by the school and society; improving cooperation and understanding among teachers; increasing teacher autonomy and freedom to make teaching in line with professional beliefs; teaching load; communication with students, and others. Bruce and Blackburn (1992) point out that satisfied workers are more motivated, more productive at work, take less days off and keep the same job for a longer period (Bezati, 2012).

Our comparisons with these variables will be presented in the findings section of the study, aiming to provide explanations regarding the predictive rate of attitudes towards higher education of university teachers and towards job satisfaction, as an important factor for quality education.

2. Methodology

2.1 Population, sample selection and instruments

This is a quantitative correlational study, which has analyzed the relation between the attitudes of university professors towards higher education in RNM with their work satisfaction, through certain measurements.

The targeted population of this study was the higher education Albanian professors in the Republic of North Macedonia. The sample framework is determined based on public and private universities professor lists, which are provided by relevant university services and official websites.

The study sample was selected through randomized stratified method in all public and private universities where the lessons are taught by professors of Albanian nationality in the Republic of North Macedonia.

The universities included in this study are: State University of Tetova, South East European University, Balkan University and the Faculty of Pedagogy within "Kiril and Methodius" university in Skopje. The International University in Struga and Fon University are not included in the survey since the Albanian professors engaged in these universities, are listed and included in the sample of the aforementioned universities.

The random selection was applied to the total number of professors in all universities, from their respective professor lists. Deans of faculties and heads of departments are not included due to the nature of the variable related to the quality of communication with supervisors. In the groups where there were less than 50 professors, the whole sample was included, based

on a 95% accuracy interval. The criterion for sample selection is based on homogeneous characteristics between groups, respectively, professors of Albanian nationality. Professors who have been on the list in two or more universities are selected only in those universities with fulltime working status and at the same time responded only about that university. The professors who participated in the pilot are not included.

Firstly, each professor from the list is assigned a code and the selection is made in computer mode, according to sample selecting criteria. The total number of participants is 305, with an average age of 40 years and a 7-year working experience. In universities where the total number is less than 50 professors, the whole sample is included, since the aim of this study is not the comparison of institutions as a category but of the population in general.

The ethical criteria of the study were respected during data collection, the participation was voluntary and with full anonymity, the blind form. Data collection is carried out during the academic year 2014/15, more precisely April/May 2015. The data is managed only by the researcher, with clear online instructions.

Instruments developed by the researchers themselves were applied for the measurement of study variables, presenting concrete questions about attitudes towards higher education in the country, assessed at a scale of 0 (very bad) to 5 (excellent), while overall work satisfaction is assessed at 0 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

Metric characteristics are not presented in this study since they are not part of the aim of the study, while the use of statistics is applied based on the quality of data gathered from the normality test. The study has taken care of the relevant variable effect which is not presented below since it is not part of this paper.

2. 1 Findings

Based on the descriptive statistical analysis and grouping of cases into categories, it resulted that 11 professors think that the current situation in higher education in the country is *very bad*, always referring to the respective academic year. The assessment "*bad*" was given by 54 or 18,12% professors, whereas the majority is positioned in the option "*neither good or bad*". With "*good*" were 97 or 32, 55% of answers while "*excellent*" was chosen by 34 or 11,41% (table 1). The accumulated answers show that the professors' attitudes toward higher education are mainly positioned on the average level (Mod=2) and slightly over the expected average, but it cannot be said to be positive (Table 2).

According to the results presented in Table 2, it turns out that 10 professors or 3,36% are not satisfied at all with the work, 20 professors or 6,71% indicate that they are unsatisfied; meanwhile 79 or 26,51% of professors state they are moderately satisfied. The answers of 101 or 33,89% professors chose the options satisfied. This is the most dominant alternative, while the second is completely satisfied in 88 or 29,53% of answers. The overall mean of work satisfaction of professors is 3,80 (Mod = 4), which is above the expected mean with standard deviation (SD=1,05) and the margin of error of (SE =,06).

Table 1. Frequency of attitudes towards higher education in RNM by categories

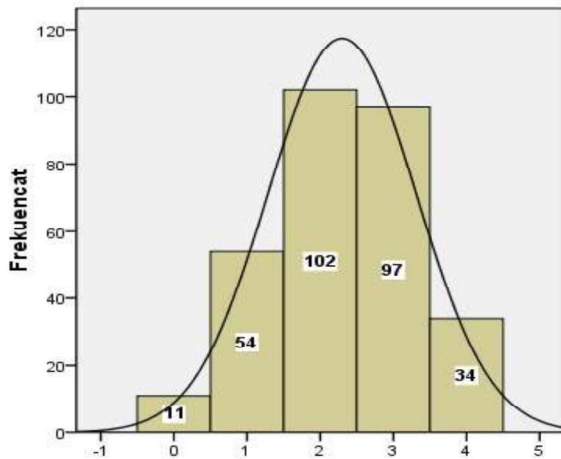
		N	%
Attitudes toward higher education	Very bad	11	3.69%
	Bad	54	18.12%
	Neither good or bad	102	34.23%
	Good	97	32.55%
	Excellent	34	11.41%
	Total	298	100.00%

Table 2. Frequency of satisfaction at work by categories

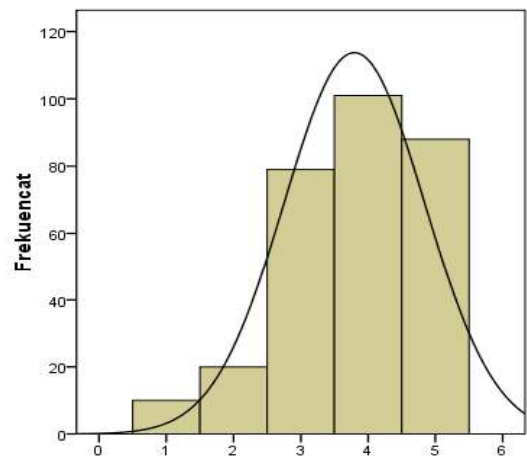
		N	%
Work satisfaction	Not satisfied at all	10	3.36%
	Unsatisfied	20	6.71%
	Moderately satisfied	79	26.51%
	Satisfied	101	33.89%
	Completely satisfied	88	29.53%

Table 3. Descriptive statistics of attitudes toward higher education and work satisfaction

		Attitudes	Work satisfaction
N	Valid	298	298
	Missing	7	7
Mean		2.30	3.80
Median		2.00	4.00
Std. Deviation		1.012	1.045
Minimum		0	1
Maximum		4	5



Graph 1. Frequency of attitudes towards



Graph 2. Work satisfaction higher education in RNM

Graph 2 shows that the histogram pillars present more satisfaction on the side of higher values above the average, indicating a relatively high work satisfaction of the professors. From the presented data there are 7 subjects in the calculated responses.

Using the rank correlation, respectively the Spearman coefficient (Table 4), a relation between professor attitudes towards higher education in RNM and their work satisfaction was found, which results positive and with average correlation ($r=.407$, $p<.01$), statistically significant at level .01. Based on this result, it is verified that by increasing the professors' positive attitudes towards the higher education, the work satisfaction in the working environment in HE institutions is increased. Based on the regression analysis, it shows that 18.6% of work satisfaction is explained by the attitudes of HE professors, on the three first levels of work satisfaction $p=.00$. The logit model showed a statistically significant model of predicting variance of work satisfaction by professor attitudes towards higher education.

Table 4. Correlation between attitudes towards HE and work satisfaction

		Work satisfaction	
Spearman's rho	Attitudes	Correlation Coefficient	.407**
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
		N	298

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

$R^2=18.6\%$, $X^2(8)=36.229$, $p=.00$

Based on the correlation analysis with the relevant variables, only work experience resulted in weak negative relationship ($r=-.13$, $p=.02$) with attitudes towards higher education.

4. Conclusion

In lack of similar studies, the analysis of this study showed that the attitudes of university professors towards higher education have 18.6% effect on their work satisfaction in the teaching process, namely a positive average correlation. If the attitudes towards the education system in the country increase or improve then the professor work satisfaction, as an important factor for quality and continuous education, will also increase. The constant commitment shows the tendency that an employee will remain with the organization and will not resign for many reasons; therefore, it correlates positively with work satisfaction, although to a lower extent than in Bezati's (2012) results, who found that work satisfaction correlates negatively with the tendency to resign. Herzberg's theory (Cukic, 2004) also highlights that meeting hygienic and motivational needs leads to a higher level of satisfaction or leads to a decrease in work dissatisfaction. Likewise, Lathan (1998) states that good employee treatment is explained by work satisfaction or positive attitudes towards work.

The frequent changes in the Law on Higher Education resulted that professors' attitudes to the education system were positioned at a low level. It is certain that this variable is very dynamic and can change, but this study has aimed at capturing the right moment to determine the effect on work satisfaction.

Similar studies should be conducted in future to review the effect and status of current attitudes of university professors towards higher education in the country.

This study recommends that changes in the education system, especially from the relevant institutions, should also take into account the professors' attitudes, since ignoring their opinion leads to dissatisfaction, which is also reflected in the teaching process.

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