FACTORS THAT INFLUENCE UNIVERSITY CHOICE OF ALBANIAN STUDENTS

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to identify the key factors that influence university choice in Albania. A quantitative method was used to answer the study objectives. A survey took place from January to march 2015 including freshmen students in 17 public and private Universities in Albania through paper self – administered questionnaire completed in university classrooms. The sample was chosen through a random stratified sample method. 1992 completed questionnaires are used for analysis, and only 1200 questionnaires are qualified for factorial analysis. By factorial analysis used are identified 9 key factors that influence university choice of Albanian students.

The results are very important for higher education institutions in Albania, which should be more student-oriented and should improve their marketing strategies in attracting the best and more talented students.

Keywords*:* University choice, students, marketing mix, higher education institutions (HEI)

Introduction

In 1990 there were only 14 000 students in Albania and limited capacities as well. Students were selected based on their merits and their "family background" (MAS, 2014)[11]. The admission capacities started with 5200 in 2005 up to 165 00 in 2013.

Along with the critics and strong objections against establishing non-public high education institutions, the first private University was licensed in 2003. During the first three years, their number was limited, and it was after 2006 that this market was widely developed. The increasing demand for education makes it easier for the establishment and survival of IAL. In 2007-2008, they took 10% of the market and 14% one year later.

Currently, there are 15 public IAL and 26 non-public IAL. Table 2.1 shows the increase in number of public and non-public IAL from 2004 to

[11] Final report on higher education reform in Albania (MAS, 2014)

2015. The total number of new students accepted for the bachelor program for the academic year 2014 – 2015 is 20843 where 82.5 percent of students attend public higher education institutions and 17.5 attend the private ones.

Table 2.1. Number of public and private higher education institutions from 2004 - 2015
Source: Ministry of Education and Sports (2015)

HEI	2004 - 2005	2005 - 2006	2006 - 2007	2007 - 2008	2008 - 2009	2009 - 2010	2010 - 2011	2011 - 2012	2012 - 2013	2013 - 2014	2014 - 2015
Public HEI	10	10	11	11	11	11	11	11	15	15	15
Private HEI	4	5	14	14	15	29	31	42	45	44	26

The selection of students in public institutions is made based on merits – preferences, where the high school GPA and the grades scored in the final exams affect the selection. Whereas, non-public institutions set their own rules as far as admissions are concerned.

The Albanian students already have much more chances for choosing where to study, whether abroad or at home, in public or private universities. Administrators of Albanian universities should know and understand how students make their choices and where are they going to study as well as factors affecting these choices so that they adopt the ways for attracting and retaining them and also adopt the service and communication for them. This introducing section is followed by a literature review on choosing the universities and the factors influencing the choice. Furthermore, it describes the employed methodology in order to meet the objectives of the study and analyze the data through factorial analysis. Last section makes a summary of the main conclusions and a series of recommendations.

Literature review

Kotler & Fox (1985, 1995:6) in trying to apply the marketing concepts in education area, defined it as follows:

"Marketing in higher education includes the students' needs analysis and other stakeholders', programs planning and other relevant services, by using an effective price, communication and distribution for informing, motivating and serving the market."

According to Ivy (2008) the marketing in itself helps the universities in providing those qualifications, which satisfy the students' needs. The institutions can develop the right programs with the right price policies, communicating with the students and distributing their programs effectively. An effective marketing helps students create real expectations about what the universities offer and what commitment and involvement is needed, without having unreal expectations and promises about offers which cannot be kept

(Kotler and Fox 1995). Shah (2010) claims that in such highly competitive environment, the universities are trying to identify what exactly differentiates different higher education institutions from one-another. He claims also that it is important to understand what attracts the prospect students in a university compared to another and to ensure that these expectations are met after they enroll. The image or the perception about a university and the reasons for studying in specific institutions could be based on different characteristics and traits of this institution.

If we refer to the literature, there are a number of models that analyze the choice of a university. Through these models, we strive to understand the process and the factors influencing the choice. The main changes between the models have to do with describing the variables and the way they affect the activity of the institution in order to encourage the students to enroll there (Hossler, Braxton & Coopersmith, 1989).

In a broader sense, decision-making process is considered as a problem solving process undertaken from the applicant in the moment of making his/her choices. These models are known as consumer buying behavior, which is considered as a multi-step, process where are included: the need, information research, evaluation of alternatives, buying decision and post-buy feelings and behavior (Kotler, 2003).

Chapman (1981) one of the first to apply the theory of consumer behavior in education is suggesting that in choosing an institution or a major, students and their parents would go through several steps uniquely defined. These steps include: *pre-research behavior, research behavior, application process, decision making, enrolling*

Hanson & Litten Model (1982) is considered one of the most influencing models in the literature of choosing the university. This model includes three steps: decision for being included in the higher education process; investigation of institutions; and application and enrolling process. There are 5 separate processes within these steps through which a student goes through: aspirations to continue with the studies; starting the research process; gathering information; sending out applications and enrolling. This five-step process presents multiple variables affecting the choice. This model is seen like a combination of Chapman and Jackson models.

Hossler, Schmit and Vesper (1999) claim that the majority of the studies that try to understand the University choice process, can be included in one of the following categories: *economic models, sociological models of achieving a status and combined models.* Another model is the *marketing treatment,* which explains the process of choosing a University affected by internal and external influences complemented with the communication efforts.

Models of consumer behavior relate the process of choosing the University with the models of marketing treatment. University choice is compared to a buying process with several steps. (Blackwell, Miniard & Engel, 2006; Kotler & Amstrong, 2010). Students start to become aware about a comparatively large number of higher education institutions as later they narrow the number to be considered and chosen (Blackwell, 2006, Kotler & Fox 2002). Students' notion as prospects is to be discussed (Hemsley – Brown & Oplatka, 2006), but the development and application of models of consumer behavior in choosing the University has found acceptability. (Obermeit 2012).

Kotler & Keller (2012) built the stimulus – response model in order to understand the consumer behavior. Just like marketing stimuli, the environmental ones intervene as well the consumer's consciousness. Further on, the combination of consumers' characteristics and psychological processes affect the decision-making and purchase process. The task of a marketer is to understand what happens in the consumer's consciousness after he/she gets the external stimulus and the final decision for purchasing.

Main factors influencing the University choice

In order to adopt the choice strategies and attract the best students, Universities should know what are the factors affecting the decision for enrolling in that institution (Maringe 2006). The choice factors are related to the criteria used by students, which are a set for sorting out the possible options (Kim & Gasman, 2011). Future students are supposed to ask for information during their decision-making process in order to make an informed choice (Briggs 2006). Shah (2010) points out that studying the factors affecting the student's choices for attending a higher education institution are important for several reasons: First, it gives the institution an understanding of reasons why students chose a specific institution to another; secondly, the information could and should be used from the universities for helping them in designing their marketing plans; thirdly, to understand the students' expectations and strategies that could be implemented for improving the student's experience. There are many studies, which include different criteria, which are used by the students when they chose a higher educational institution.

Pero et al. (2015) discussed that universities are interested to attract students, but they do not have information about students' intentions. Moreover, both general and subjective factors are considered from students when they chose a program and a university to attend. They presented a psychometric survey of a questionnaire, which aimed to evaluate the variables related to the aspects involved in the selection process and admission in the Spanish university system. Their study is addressed to one

of the main problems faced by the universities; recruiting the talents. The best universities want the best students, even by those, which are not. Pero et al. (2015) discussed that this problem is the result of two determining factors: firstly, specific laws in each country determine the access of universities; and secondly factors which drive students to chose a university level.

Their questionnaire considered 6 factors: *consideration of the university, perceived benefit, social effect, professional aspects, environmental influence and geographical location.*

Çokgezen, M. (2014) examined in his study the determiners of university choice in Turkey by using data from school levels. He tried to determine the effect school characteristics in choosing a university in Turkey. These characteristics were classified into two large groups: cost and quality.

By analyzing the data, it resulted that choosing a university from Turkish students was related negatively with the cost elements and positively with the service quality. The regression results showed that the students preferred those universities, which had a good academic reputation, were located in large cities and the teaching language was in English. Also, they wanted to have these services without paying too much. The results showed that the public universities students were more price-sensible, whereas the last ones were more interested in the academic performance, which was, preceded the income differences of both groups.

Alonderiene & Klimavičiene (2013) analyzed the factors affecting the university choice and the programs in management and economics for the freshmen students in public and private universities in Lithuania. A method of quantitative research – online questionnaire – was used in order to have 7907 freshmen students in management and economics in public and private universities in Lithuania.

In analyzing the factors affecting the choice of program, *individual characteristics of the applicant had the larger influence in choosing the program*. The opportunity for being accepted and the factors related to studying were considered as important. In choosing a university, its reputation and the city where it is located had the greatest influence, whereas city and university's infrastructure and social life were the lowest rated. As far as reference group's influence was concerned in decision-making process, parents and actual students had the highest influence.

Raposo and Alves (2007), analyzed those factors which mostly influence the choice process by integrating all the suitable factors identified by the literature in one single model and measuring simultaneously the influence of all factors and their interactions. They analyzed the model for the students studying in different fields and showed different explanatory

capacities depending on the subject fields, because the variables that formed each factor changed depending on the students' subject fields. They concluded that individual factors had the largest positive influence; educational supply had a larger influence as expressed in terms of estimating the university's reputation, opportunities of the labor market and location.

Briggs & Wilson (2007) explored the influence of two factors: information offered from the universities and the cost of package in choosing the majors on bachelor levels in 6 universities in Scotland. After having identified the changes between the universities, genders and disciplines, the factorial analysis of information ways was undertaken in order to determine the strongest relations. Briggs (2006) concluded that there were 10 factors that influence the students' selection from a higher education institution. These factors include: *the academic reputation, distance from home, individual perception, employment of graduates, social life, admission requirements, teaching reputation, quality of academic staff, information provided from the university, and the reputation of scientific research.*

Soutar & Turner (2002) classified these factors into two categories: there are the factors related to the university in the first group and personal factors are included in the second group. Among factors related to the university are identified: type of major, academic reputation of the institution, campus, quality of the teaching staff, and type of university. Personal factors include: distance from home, what do students' family and relatives think about the university and the university their friends want them to attend.

John Donnellan (2002) analyzed the decision making process on choosing a university from the students of Massachusetts Amherst University. The aim was to determine if the factors reviewed from the university had larger influence on choice than the external factors out of university's control. 553 freshmen students filled the questionnaires. The results showed that non-marketing factors were more influencing on students' decision-making process than marketing factors. The most influencing marketing factors were visits on campus and information on a specific major. The most influencing non-marketing factors were parents and friends. Price was one of the most influencing institutional attributes in choosing a university.

Other important factors such as: size of the institution, surrounding community, friendly/personal services, availability of programs, variety of subjects, extra-curricula programs, admission requirements, admission in MA programs, cooperation with other reputed institutions, campus facilities, size of classrooms and quality of social life.

From analyzing literature, it results that there exists a considerable number of studies, theoretical and especially empirical ones, which are

related to the factors that influence in choosing what university to attend. Despite of the context and the time of studies, a considerable number of common factors result to be important in the majority of the studies.

The methodology

The objective of this research is to examine the process of choosing the university from the Albanian students and the factors that affect their choices, by identifying the importance of marketing factors. By reviewing the literature, there were identified and arranged the factors which would be measured later through data collection and analysis. The data collection method was the survey through questionnaire consisting of closed ended questions.

There were 17 Albanian higher education institutions involved in the study, where 10 were public universities, 4 non-public universities and 3 non- public higher education schools.

The population targeted in meeting the study's objectives was the freshmen students of both public and private universities who had completed at least one semester. There were chosen freshmen students who had already made their decision about what university to attend and were supposed to still remember the decision - making process, sources of information and the factors that affected their decisions.

The procedure of selecting the sample was the stratification method and random selection of the groups which had classes a certain day and involving therefore all the students of the group. The selection was made randomly but it was ensured a coverage and representation of as many majors (subjects) as possible within departments. The students were explained the objective of the questionnaire and the how it should be filled in. The period of data collection was from January to March 2015. The selected sample resulted with 1992 students that represented about 10% of the total population distributed respectively and proportionally according the universities. Comrey and Lee (1992) suggested a scale for the observations, where a sample of 100 observations is considered as poor, 200 observations is a fair sample, 300 is a good sample, 500 is a very good sample and more than 1000 observations is an excellent sample. Therefore, we can argue that our selected sample is an excellent one and the findings could be generalized very well for the total population.

The final version of the questionnaire, after having passed the testing stage, was distributed to be filled from the selected sample of students and is made up of 6 sessions. Questions of each session provide information about demographic data of students and their families, data about choosing the university they are attending, sources of information they used during the

choice process, factors of mix marketing that influenced their choices and a prior assessment of the service and satisfaction quality as the choice is made.

As far as the sources of information are concerned, the students were asked to choose a Likert ascending scale from 1 – 5 about how much the source of information affected their choices for the university (none; a little; somewhat; very much; extremely).

The fourth session of the questionnaire is considered to be one of the most important sessions because it is intended to meet the most important objectives of the survey, thus, to identify the most important factors that students perceive as such in the choice process and the importance of each of them. Through the Likert scaling, which is used in this case for measuring the importance of each factor, the respondents were asked to say how important was each of these factors while choosing the university in a measuring scale from 1 – 5 (where 1 – unimportant and 5 – very important). There were involved a total of 43 factors arranged in 5 main categories taking into account the elements of mix marketing and individual factors, that are important to our survey. These 43 factors were used in performing the factorial analysis. Data were processed with SPSS20 and Excel.

Analysis and interpretation of results

As far as the students' gender is concerned, female students take 70.4% of the total and male students only 29.1. The average age of the students involved in the survey is 19.23 years old, average grade of the high school is 8.95, whereas the total of points scored in high school final exams is 5692. The average number of students' brothers and sisters is less than 2, a fact that shows that the Albanian family is diminishing and the average number of births has decreased.

The sources of information that students use during the process of choosing a university are many, referring to non-formal communication sources and the information sources provided from the universities that in theory are referred as integrated marketing communication (Kotler & Keller, 2012). In a scale from 1- 5 the students were asked to estimate how much influenced each of 28 information sources on their choices (1-None, 2- a little, 3- somewhat, 4-very much and 5- extremely). Students who participated in the survey considered non-formal sources or the reference groups as the most influential information sources in the decision-making process. Parents took the first position with 3.5 points (out of 5), then came the students who actually attend that department or those who already graduated with an average of 3.37 points; sisters and brothers with 3.26 points, peers with 3.26 points, and high school teachers with 3.10 points.

Afterwards, other types of marketing communication used from the universities were classified where the most influential one resulted public

relations appearing in the form of news about/from the university estimated with an average of 3.09 points (out of 5), appearance on media of experts and academics estimated with 2.97 points, visits in departments/universities came up to be somewhat influential with 3.02 points. It is noticed that websites of the universities/departments result to be visited by approximately 55% of the students involved in the study having an average influence with 2.92 points (out of 5), materials for the new students with 2.89 points, online ads with 2.75 points, introductory and informing videos online with 2.74 points. Information sources less or no influential were: radio ads with 1.68 points, followed by billboards with 1.99 points, posters with 2.13 points, ads on media with 2.44 points, brochures and leaflets with 2.44 points.

Factorial analysis

Despite the main goal of factorial analysis to reduce the number of variables in a simple structure of factors, factorial analysis performed in this section has two main purposes. First, to test whether the theoritical factors identified from literature review are valuable factors in the case of Albania, and secondly, if the structure of theoretical factors remains the same or is expressed in different ways in the practice of university choice in our country. All variables for which information is collected in section IV of the questionnaire are included in the analysis. In this section of the questionnaire 43 variables are included under five main factors, which are namely: individual factors - 11 variables, characteristics of study - 11 variables, cost of studying and living - 6 variables, location and environment of the university - 9 variables , and academic staff and support staff - 6 variables.

Table 4.1. Factors influencing the selection of students

Source of the author (2015)

Individual factors	Characteristics of the study	Cost of studying and living	Location and environment of the university	Academic staff and supporting staff
1. Matura exam results 2. Average high school scores 3. Greater opportunities of employment after graduation 4. Career Opportunities 5. Individual preferenc	1. The study program 2. The subject developed 3. Reputation of the University 4. Reputation of the Faculty 5. Reputation of academic staff 6. The level of scientific research 7. Teaching methods 8. Opportunities for	1. Tuition fees 2. Accommodation costs 3. Living expenses 4. Travel and transportation expenses 5. The costs of living in the area 6. The possibility of gaining 7. scholarships	1. The city where the university is located 2. Location of the faculty (center, periphery) 3. The size of the university 4. Distance from home 5. Facilities of the faculty	1. Reputation of academic staff 2. Quality of teaching 3. The academic staff with scientific degrees and titles 4. Interaction lecturer - student 5. Communication of administrative staff 6. Competence of administrative staff

e about faculty 6. Individual preference about the university 7. Interest on field of study 8. Preferred study program 9. Financial security after graduation 10. Talent in this field of study 11. The social position after graduation	exchanging programs with other universities 9. Accreditation of University 10. Accreditation of the study programs 11. The opportunities of study transfer		6. Adequate infrastructure of classes 7. Computer labs 8. Libraries 9. Cafes and recreational facilities	

Data adequacy

The decision for involving everyone has been made not only based on theoretical expectations. From the empirical point of view this decision is based on the anti-image correlations matrix. The elements of the main diagonal of the matrix have considerable sizes – all of them are larger than 0.5 - a fact that can be interpreted as an indicator that all variables should be included in the analysis. This is enforced by the fact that the elements outside the main diagonal are enough small.

This result favors the use of data collected through the questionnaire in the factorial analysis even from another point of view. Although the analysis of the factors is performed with metrical data, our data are not the same kind. They are ordinal, but "the kindness" of data is not affected by the supposition, thus, the fact that they are ordinal does not necessarily affect the results of the analysis.

Another indicator of a good factorial analysis has to do with the recommended size of the sample. Comrey and Lee (1992) suggested that a sample consisting of 1000 observations is considered to be an excellent sample. Considering that out factorial analysis included 1200 cases with complete data for all 43 variables, our sample in an excellent one for performing the factorial analysis, based on dimension criterion.

Another indicator of the quality of factorial analysis is the report of the observations number with the variables number that will be involved in the factorial analysis. Catell (1978) suggested that this report gets values

from 3 to 6; Gorsush (1983) suggested at least 5 and Everitt (1975) thought that this report should be at least 10. Such recommendations have no enough bases for support, but are mainly focused on the researchers' experience.

Another measure of data adequacy in performing the factorial analysis is Kaiser-Myer-Olkin (KMO) test, which should get a value higher than 0.5, and Bartlett's test of sphericity, which should result statistically important. Both tests aim to explore the correlations matrix, based on prior suppositions of the factorial analysis. There should be the correlation among variables as considered for the analysis. KMO gets values between 0 and 1, but there is an agreement between the researchers that its value should be above 0.6. Bartlett's test of sphericity tests the zero hypothesis that the correlations matrix is a unit matrix, thus, the elements of the main diagonal are 1 and those outside of it are 0. This is a good case where the variables under survey have no relation with one another. Bartlett's test of sphericity is linked to the importance of the survey, showing the validity and adequacy of the responses collected through questionnaires n addressing the issue we are discussing. The analysis is considered adequate if the test value is smaller than 0.05, in which case hypothesis 0 of missing correlation among variables is dismissed. The requirement of factorial analysis for correlated variables is confirmed.

Results of both tests are shown in Table 4.2. The value of Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin statistics on sample adequacy in performing a factorial analysis is 0.934 and shows that our sample is estimated "very good" for performing the factorial analysis. The value of Bartlett's test of sphericity shows that zero hypotheses is dismissed almost entirely. Therefore, the variables are correlated and the results of factorial analysis that will be performed with them are valid and suitable for addressing the problem of factors, which affect the university choice in Albania. Based on the results of the above tests, we may claim that there is information for all variables collected through questionnaires and they are adequate to be included in the analysis.

Table 4.2. Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure and Bartlett's test of sphericity of sampling adequacy

Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy.		0.934
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	35677.654
	Df	903
	Sig.	0.000

Results of the factorial analysis

There are several ways for selecting the adequate number of factors, such as the one taking chance of Eigen values that should be higher than 1 and the Scree graph.

Considering the fact that the essence of factorial analysis is to explain a large amount of variance of original variables by means of a smaller number of factors, attention should be given to the amount of explained variance. This amount is 69.22% and taking chance of the fact that our variables were theoretically a division in 5 factors, the final solution of the factorial analysis was found to be not 4 but 9 factors. In order to interpret the factors, the solution was given through Varimax method. Eigen values, individual variances and the cumulative method of 9 factors resulting from the analysis are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 4.3. Total variance explained from common factors

Factor	Rotation Sums of Squared Loadings		
	Total	% Of variance	% Cumulative
1	4.567	10.621	10.621
2	4.552	10.587	21.208
3	3.667	8.527	29.735
4	3.526	8.199	37.934
5	3.400	7.908	45.842
6	3.335	7.755	53.597
7	2.483	5.775	59.372
8	2.437	5.668	65.040
9	1.798	4.183	69.222

For interpreting the common factors, correlations should be studied, as they determine the strength of relations. Factors can be identified from larger correlations, but it is important as well to analyze the 0 and lower correlations in order to confirm the identification of factors (Gorsuch, 1983). Interpretation of factors includes information contained in each of the variables and their meaning is drawn after analyzing the coefficients of the higher correlation among the variables and each of the factors. The inferior limit of factor loading is 0.421, a considerable figure.

The first factor explains 10.62% of the total variance of variables involved in the analysis. It has high correlation coefficients with 6 variables, which are included in the factor of costs and living and studying as referred to the original listing. Thus, listing these variables under the same factor confirms the fact that in Albania, the factor "*costs of studying and living"* is expressed as expected from the theory. The correlation coefficient of this factor is higher with "travel expenses", 0.869. This correlation is little lower with the variable "living expenses" and it is almost similar to the correlation with the variable "Living costs in the area". "Initial accommodation costs" correlation coefficient with the factor is 0.782, whereas "Studying tariffs" coefficient of 0.715. The variable having the lowest correlation coefficient is

"Opportunities for gaining scholarships", whose correlation with the variable is 0.452. Description of this factor is the same with the one defined in the questionnaire - "Costs of studying and living".

The second factor explains 10.587% of the variance and is related to six variables involved in the factorial analysis. The factor has a higher correlation coefficient with "Teaching quality" (0.734) and "interaction lecturer - student" (0.727). It is closely correlated as well with "The academic staff with scientific degrees and titles" (0.710).

"Reputation of the academic staff" is also one of the variables having a high correlation coefficient with this factor (0.66). "Communication" and "Competences of supporting staff" are two other variables, which are related with this factor. Their correlation coefficients with it are 0.673 and 0.632 respectively. All these variables could be arranged under the heading "*Qualities of teaching and supporting staff"* which is the description of this factor.

The third factor has the higher correlation with "University reputation", 0.743, and "Department reputation", 0.735. It is also closely related with the "Reputation of the academic staff", 0.675. In lower levels, the factor related to "Subjects taught", the correlation is 0.581; "Studying program" correlation is 0.536; the "Scientific research level" correlation is 0.528, and "Teaching methods" correlation is 0.475. This factor has a unique variance of 8.527. This factor includes the evaluation of a special reputation of all elements of a higher education institution, from scientific research to curricula and teaching. It can be named as "The reputation of the institution".

The fourth factor explains 8.2% of the variance and is related to five variables involved in the analysis, which were under the theoretical factor of the University location and facilities. The variable having the highest correlation with this factor is "Adequate class infrastructure", whose correlation coefficient is 0.7. The factor is also related to the variable "Adequate computer labs" whose correlation is 0.689, "Faculty facilities" whose correlation is 0.651, "Libraries" whose correlation is 0.650 and "Cafes and recreational facilities" whose correlation coefficient with the factor is 0.595. Based on these variables, the factor could be referred as "*Faculty facilities*".

The fifth factor explains about 8% of the total variance as explained before by the original variables. It is closely related to the variable of "Accreditation of study programs" with (0.782), "Accreditation of the university" (0.775), "Opportunities for study transfer" (0.744) and "Opportunities for exchange programs with other universities" where the factor's correlation is 0.677. Since the study transfer and exchange programs are legally possible among accredited institutions, seems like this factor is valid in front of higher education institutions' law; it is a factor, which

attracted attention during the period when the respondents chose the universities. The factor is referred as "*Accreditation*".

The sixth factor explains 7.755 of the total factor variance and has higher correlations with five variables of the present analysis. The first among them is "Individual preferences about the faculty" whose correlation coefficient is approximately 0.7; "Individual preferences about the university", whose correlation coefficient with the factor is 0.58; "Interest on the field of study", and "Preferred study program" are variables which have almost similar correlation coefficient (0.80). The other correlated variable with this factor is "Talent in this field of study" and its correlation coefficient with the factor is 0.691. This factor is referred as "*Individual preferences and talents"*.

The seventh factor has the higher correlation, 0.802 with the variable "Location of the faculty." The factor has a high correlation 0.746 with "The town where the university is located". Two other variables, which are closely related with this factor, are "University size" and "Distance from home". Correlation with them is 0.614 and 0.515, respectively. This factor includes the variables, which have to do mainly with the location. This is why it is referred as "*Location"*. This factor explains 5.775%.

The eighth factor explains 5.668% of the total variance and has higher correlation coefficients with 4 variables involved in the analysis. These variables are: "Greater opportunities after for employment after graduation", whose correlation coefficient is 0.8; "Opportunities for carrier", whose coefficient is 0.8; "Financial security after graduation", whose correlation is 0.7, and "Social status after graduation" whose correlation is 0.421. All these variables are related to the perspective of young people after graduation, and for this reason the factor could be referred as "*The perspective after graduation"*.

The ninth factor is related to two variables as following: "Matura exams scores" and "High school GPI". The correlation coefficients among these variables and the factor are too high, 0.916 and 0.890 respectively. Considering the generalization, this factor could be referred as "*High school scores"*. This factor explains 4.183% of the total variance.

We can conclude now that factors resulting from our analysis preserve their theoretical form, thus, their rearrangement did not affect our expectations. The individual factor which involved 11 variables has been re-dimensioned into three sub-factors: *Individual preferences and talents; Perspective after graduation; and High school scores.* This rearrangement appears too suitable for the Albanian context and fits the theories on university choice.

The second factor, characteristics of the studies, has been re-formulated into two sub-factors: *Reputation of the institution and*

Accreditation. As argued in the respective paragraph, such re-dimensioning could be explained with the concerns of the last year about closing several private universities, which reflected the process of university choice.

The University location and facilities factor has been re-dimensioned exactly after its components: *university location and facilities.* Whereas the last factor, *Academic and supporting staff*, remained the same even after the factorial analysis. We can state now that the university choice process in Albania meets our theoretical and conceptual expectations. Moreover, our analysis does not provide any evidences that selection in our country is made on rather contextual basis than theoretical ones, although contextual connotations are obvious from time to time.

Conclusion and recommendations

This study provides new evidences concerning the factors influencing the university choice from the Albanian students. Since the sample size is considered excellent, making up 10% of the total population, the results of this paper have high generalizing value for the remaining part of the targeted population as well. Female students take 70.4% of the total sampling and male students only 29.1. The average age of the students involved in the survey is 19.23 years old, high school GPI is 8.95, and the total points scored in the Matura exams are 5692.

Students who participated in the survey estimated the most influential information sources in the decision-making process out of 28 sources involved in the survey which were the non-formal sources or the reference groups where parents were ranked first estimating an average of 3.5 points (out of 5), followed by the students who actually attend the same department or are already graduated, sisters and brothers, peers, and high school teachers.

Afterwards, other types of marketing communication used from the universities were classified where the most influential one resulted public relations appearing in the form of news about/from the university estimated with an average of 3.09 points (out of 5), appearance in media of experts and academics, visits in departments/universities came up to be somewhat influential with 3.02 points. It is noticed that websites of the universities/departments have an average influence, and the same happens with the materials provided to the new students, online ads, and introductory and informing videos online. Information sources less or no influential were: radio ads with 1, point, followed by billboards, posters, and ads on media, brochures and leaflets.

The factorial analysis of 43 factors that correspond with other mix marketing elements arranged into 5 categories reduced the number of factors

in 9 main factors, which influence the students' choice about a higher education institution in Albania.

The first factor explains 10.62% of the total variance of the variables involved in the analysis and it was "*cost of study and living"*. The low level of incomes of the Albanian families explains this fact, and this often conditions the university choice to be near home in order to minimize the costs for accommodation and living.

The second factor explains 10.587% of the variance and is related to six variables involved in the factorial analysis. It is referred as "*Quality of teaching and supporting staff*".

The third factor was "*Reputation of the institution"*. This factor has a unique variance of 8.527.

The fourth factor explains 8.2% of the variance and is related to 5 variables involved in the analysis that were under the theoretical factor of location and facilities referred as "*Faculty facilities*".

The fifth factor explains about 8% of the total variance explained by the original variables. It is referred as "*Accreditation"*.

The sixth factor explains 7.755 of the total variance of the factors and has high correlations with 5 variables of the analysis and is referred as "*Individual preferences and talents"*.

The seventh factor has the higher correlation, 0.802 with the variable "Faculty location". It is referred as "*Location"*.

The eighth factor explains 5.668% of the total variance and has high correlation coefficients with 4 variables involved in the analysis. These variables are related to the young people perspective after graduation, therefore this factor is referred as "*Perspective after graduation*", whose correlation with the factor is 0.421.

The ninth factor is related to two variables, which are "Matura exams scores" and "High school GPI". This factor is referred as "*High school scores"*. This factor explains 4.183% of the total variance.

Although the sample is considered excellent and the results can be generalized for all the population, some limitations have raised from this study. The sample chosen of freshmen students have already taken the decision where to study, so they may have forgotten some of the factors that have influenced their choice or their answers may be biased. It might be interesting to focus in the reasons student choose a study program, which may be addressed in other studies in this field.

This analysis determined the necessity to understand the process of university choice and which factors are considered important to them. Albanian universities should change their communication strategies with prospect students and provide them with detailed information through websites, organize PR activities since they are regarded as more reliable

from the Albanian students. Cost sensitive issues towards studying and living makes it necessary to implement scholarship programs and government support for the students who do not afford the tuition expenses.

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