

Students' Attitudes Toward Higher Education: Academic Challenges and Their Impact on Deviant Behavior

Shukrije Rama¹, Agron Beka²

Abstract

It is generally accepted that more than half of all students entering universities are academically unprepared for studies. They usually fail to do well for various reasons: social, psychological, financial, etc. Often, first-year students have difficulty managing their time, lack motivation, are unskilled at higher-level thinking, lack background knowledge, have little experience in the subject they expect to study, etc. Students are usually uninformed at the outset of the new academic year. Though they enrolled in university for an education and to prepare for their future careers, they approach their studies with a lack of seriousness from the very beginning. They are timid, scared, and inexperienced with university environments, especially due to the lack of guidance or counseling. These difficulties may influence students' academic performance and potential involvement in deviant behavior. This research paper aims to explore how academic challenges in higher education contribute to deviant behavior and to recommend potential interventions using strain and social learning theories. To achieve these results, the literature review was chosen best to determine the students' attitudes toward higher education, the struggle they can face, which can result in anxiety, stress, and poor academic performance which in some cases may lead to deviant behavior, including abusive actions, such as drug addiction.

Keywords: Higher education, academic preparedness, student challenges, deviant behavior, drug addiction.

Introduction

In Western Balkans countries, the system of higher education is such that secondary schools are too general; hence, when students graduate, they don't have a clear idea of what they are going to study (Rama, 2012). As a result, a large portion of young students fail during their studies due to this lack of proper preparation during their secondary schooling, accompanied by the lack of information from the corresponding institutions of education. This is one of the prominent reasons for these failures. In this respect, it is important to mention the "recommendations", such as a parent's desire for their children to study in a particular field. For such reasons, many students enroll in majors that they are not interested in, or in which they lack the basic knowledge necessary to proceed with their studies. This lack of direction can lead to failure during their studies, partly due to inadequate preparation in secondary schooling and insufficient information from educational institutions. Such uncertainty and frustration may contribute to social disengagement or deviant behavior, as students struggle with unmet expectations and pressures (Bambara et al., 2009). In some cases, parental expectations also play a significant role, as

¹ The first author of this article is Dr.Sc. Shukrije Rama, Heimerer College, Kosovo. Email: shukrie.rama@kolegji-heimerer.eu

² The corresponding author of this article is Prof.Assoc.Dr.Agron Beka, Mitrovica, Kosovo. Email: agron.beka@umib.org

students may enroll in fields they are not interested in or lack the necessary knowledge for, which can further aggravate feelings of alienation.

To illustrate this point, during the 1990s, a majority of the students enrolled in Medicine High School because of their parents' wishes. (Rama, 2012). There were many cases when students enrolled and studied without necessarily liking the field of study just to fulfill their parents' desires, leading some to eventually quit after the first or second year. Another interesting example in Western Balkans universities resulted after the introduction of the Department of Political Science and Public Administration and Psychology (Greene, 2018). These examples indicate that the majority of freshmen not only lack preliminary knowledge before enrolling in a university, but they are often unclear about what they will study even after enrolment; others happen to be "accidentally" enrolled in a certain faculty (Wadsworth, 2000). There are also cases when, due to financial difficulties, freshmen are obliged to study other majors that are less costly in terms of financial contribution. The system of higher education cannot solve these problems alone, therefore education authorities need to focus also on secondary and primary education, if they are to address the problems of students without traditional academic backgrounds entering higher education (Peretomode, 2015).

Nevertheless, students enrolling without preliminary preparation for their field of study remains a very problematic issue for the system of higher education in Western Balkans Countries. It not only influences the financial cost of those already studying, but these students face many difficulties in the labor market once they have graduated and are seeking employment (Sadikaj, 2010).

Therefore, this research paper aims to investigate the different challenges that students encounter when moving into higher education, focusing on social, emotional, academic, and financial aspects. It intends to analyze the relationship between academic experiences - like stress, failure, and pressure - and the chances of students engaging in deviant behavior. The research will also assess the significance of strain and Social Learning theories in understanding how academic challenges lead to such behavior. Lastly, it will look into how these theories can be utilized to inform the creation of effective interventions to reduce deviant behavior in higher education environments.

Students' interest only in finishing the semester

The quality of higher education institutions in Western Balkans, both public and private, is quite low. However, with the end of the war, the number of universities has risen dramatically. Several factors play a role in the quality of studies at these universities. First of all, the primary interest of the majority of the students is to get a passing grade that would in turn enable them to finish the academic year, and, eventually, to get a diploma. They are not concerned with studying properly, as is the case in many European universities. However, this is not only because of their indifference and lack of interest.

Some students enroll in a university just for the sake of studying something, so as not to be followed by the stigma of a "non-educated" individual. Perhaps wishing to satisfy their parents' desire for a certain field of study; they register without seriously considering the subject, or without questioning whether they have the talents or skills for studying in a certain field. As a result, the probability of stagnation or failure is quite high among these students. Looking at it from an economic perspective, students are obliged to finish their studies in a rushed fashion, without the proper devotion and commitment, to avoid further spending. In turn, it is expected that they enter the labor market after graduation and thus be ready to support their families. This lack of motivation easily can contribute to social rescues and even deviant activities, as students who feel disconnected from their education may turn to other vents for validation (Akarowhe, 2018).

Most of the students are concerned with the idea of failing an exam, fearing that this would burden the budget of their families. To help defray those costs, students may seek to find a job, which in most cases turns out to be a great detriment to the student's performance in classes and exams. Many of them enroll in university lacking the motivation to study (Zanaj, 2010).

Most of the students are concerned with the idea of failing an exam, fearing that this would burden the budget of their families. To help defray those costs, students may seek to find a job, which in most cases turns out to be a great detriment to the student's performance in classes and exams (Nikaj, 2021). Many of them enroll in university lacking the motivation to study. Their primary interest is to finish their schooling and be able to find a job. With a lack of motivation on one hand and a lack of stimulation from the state on the other, finishing their studies successfully becomes even more difficult, further contributing to their lack of interest in studying (Rama, 2012).

The majority of them have no motivation any longer, or they don't find themselves interested in the subjects they are dealing with. As a result, students do not study properly, regarding their efforts solely for the benefit of passing exams and receiving a diploma. They are not interested in achieving high grades and excellent results. In other words, considering the quantity of graduated students, there is little quality (Sadikaj, 2016).

Aims

This research paper aims to explore how academic challenges in higher education contribute to deviant behavior and to recommend potential interventions using strain and social learning theories.

Objectives

The objectives of this study are as follows:

- To examine the challenges that students encounter when moving into higher education, including social, emotional, academic, and financial aspects;

- To analyze how academic experiences, relate to the likelihood of engaging in deviant behavior, particularly how academic stress, failure, and pressure may lead to such actions.
- To evaluate the relevance of strain and social learning theories in understanding how academic challenges contribute to deviant behavior among students.
- To explore how the strain and social learning theories can guide effective interventions.

Research Questions

- What encounters do students face when moving into higher education, including social, emotional, academic, and financial factors?
- How do academic experiences like stress, failure, and pressure connect to the chances of students participating in deviant behavior?
- How applicable are Strain and Social Learning theories in understanding the link between academic challenges and deviant behavior among students?
- In what ways can Strain and Social Learning theories guide the creation of effective interventions to tackle deviant behavior in higher education environments?

Methodology

The methodology used for this research is mainly desk research through a literature review. The literature was based on studies in Albanian, Serbian, and English. Literature was not limited in terms of time since previous theories were relevant to the researched topic. There have been analyzed studies on student encounters in higher education, concentrating on social, emotional, and academic features, as well as their association with deviant behavior as well as strain and social learning theories and educational resilience frameworks.

Literature review

The lack of interest in conducting proper science

Some of the most often heard questions among students at the University of Prishtina include: "Did you pass the semester?" "Did you graduate?" "Did you pass the exam?" These questions cast serious doubts as to whether students are enrolling in university to gain knowledge. Any interest in conducting proper scientific work is very low if it exists at all (Rama, 2012). The few scientists in Western Balkan countries have very little time for scientific or academic work. Mongkhonvanit (2009), considers that "the success of higher education reform may not depend only on the external governance systems, but mostly on the improvements of teaching, learning and research within the university itself. According to Dida (2004), modern equipment and/or ICT infrastructure alone cannot guarantee its success,

since the critical success factors rely on its utilization strategy in compliance with the context of knowledge management (Dida, 2004).

The majority of the few scientists in Western Balkan countries hold several different jobs at the same time. Despite working in the public universities and the many private universities in Kosovo, they also occupy important public posts in the country (Latifi et al., 2012). Likewise, many of the PhD recipients in the country are committed to several working positions, or are members of political parties; therefore the time they can devote to research is very limited. These professors also have very little time to attend to their students. According to Basit (2010), there are cases when a professor doesn't come to lectures during the whole semester while giving grades to the students at the end. Therefore, there is little room for them to be dedicated to scientific activities.

Maybe the term "Copy/Paste" is not appropriate for describing the "real science" in Western Balkans countries, but it is often the case (Rama, 2012). Probably the best term to describe the situation in the higher system of education and the situation of the research is "plagiarism", omnipresent in the academic sphere (Rrapi, 2007). However, this term doesn't apply to all researchers, as some of them are quite original and professional.

Finally, it can be concluded that students' lack of interest in scientific and research-oriented pursuits is a result of professors' lack of devotion, socio-economic circumstances, a lack of funding, etc. These elements have created a mosaic of barriers to proper research and scientific work in higher education institutions in Western Balkan countries (Elezi et al., 2001).

Lack of motivation and lack of state stimulation

Prominent elements influencing the quality of higher education in Western Balkans are no doubt the lack of motivation and state stimulation. Early on, each student is motivated. Yet, as the semesters and years pass, their motivation deflates. This is also best indicated by the fact that 90% of the students are initially very punctual and regular in their attendance of lectures, seminars, and exams, while after the second semester most of them are demotivated and their interest is very low.

What is the cause of their lack of motivation? First and foremost, some of the students have not found their ideal field of study, or they have not enrolled in a field where they are skilled and thus can succeed (Sadikaj, 2016). Second, many students face financial barriers to continuing their studies. Due to financial hardships, some students cannot enroll in the field of studies they want, while others realize that they cannot afford the costs after they have already registered.

A third factor is the student's inability to find a job after having finished their schooling. Most of them are disheartened knowing that they might find it hard to accommodate themselves in the labor market. These economic burdens may contribute to deviant behavior, as students struggling to secure legal employment may turn to illegal actions as a resource of survival, such as corruption or other

forms of economic criminality (Gjuraj, 2003). Fourth, the lack of interest among students is because many students who have a BA and an MA diploma find it hard to get a proper job and become successful. In many cases, they lose out to unfair competition from people with political connections in the country, even though the latter are not equipped with any diploma or adequate qualification. This wisdom of injustice and inequality can foster anger, which may lead to social conflict or even deviant actions, as those marginalized in the job market may seek to use illicit means to gain advantages (Latifi, 1980).

Fifth, students can be demotivated by the professors themselves. As mentioned previously, many professors are still teaching according to the style of the old system, wherein the professor only talks and the students passively listen, without applying the modern method of teaching, that of interactivity (Sadikaj, 2021). This style of teaching not only demotivates students but also instills fear in them. Such a learning environment may strain a culture of disentanglement, where students feel disconnected from their academic work and society, potentially leading to a lack of social responsibility and ethics, which could have deviant consequences in the future (Hysi, 2010).

Finally, the lack of state-based stimulation for the students has a very negative influence on their commitment and also on the quality of studies in the country, as it is known that universities offer little research work if any at all. The lack of state support, combined with the frustration over academic and employment challenges, may encourage a sense of hopelessness and apathy, contributing to a climate where deviant behaviors and activities are seen as viable alternatives to academic and professional success (Latifi, 2013).

The most frequent fear of students in the faculty

Fear is a psychological feeling evident among all the students. Yet, we must differentiate the fear students in higher education institutions in Western Balkan countries feel as compared to that felt by students at other universities in developed countries. It must be emphasized that the education system is only a part of the political and social system; therefore, in Western Balkan countries, it is highly influenced by the remnants of the old system, the communist system (Zanaj, 2010).

For a long period, Western Balkans countries were under a communist regime, and their education system was of course highly influenced by that political system; the repercussions of which are still felt today. Despite the political changes in these countries, many professors have preserved the traditional authoritarian divisions in the professor-student relationship, causing much fear among the students.

With time, and especially with the opening of new private universities and the arrival of international academic staff and professors, the old divisions are being rapidly erased (Denga, 2001). Nevertheless, in many faculties with older professors, the dividing line between the students and the professor still exists, creating anxiety among the students.

Other than the factors mentioned above, additional factors that cause students to feel fearful are the methods of grading, testing, and lecturing (Cheng, 2012). Many professors continue to lecture and conduct their classrooms as they did under the old system, where the professor talks while the students passively listen. In these cases, contemporary methods of teaching involving interactivity and critical thinking are not encouraged (Osher et al., 2010). Exams and grading create the greatest fear among students, and this is especially seen in public universities (Nichols et al., 2013). These causes of their distress are various: the enlargement demands compared to high school, the complicity of literature, the unfamiliarity with critical thinking, the challenges of growing up, and making life-altering decisions (Crossman, 2018). Furthermore, private or personal concerns such as romantic contacts, economic difficulties, and the pressure of achieving independence, contribute to their suspicions. This lack of institutional support intensifies the failure rate (Kimani et al., 2013).

In deviant behavior contest, the devastating fear and anxiety students face may lead to disengagement and lower academic commitment, potentially increasing the likelihood of deviant behavior. Without proper support systems, some students may resort to deviant behavior, including cheating or other forms of academic dishonesty, as a way to cope with the pressure or feel a sense of control in an environment that feels oppressive (Kavutha et al., 2015). Furthermore, students who experience excessive stress without appropriate guidance may develop maladaptive coping mechanisms, some of which could involve antisocial behaviors or deviant acts in their later life (Cheng, 2012).

Strain and social learning theories for students and deviant behavior

Various theories have been postulated in an attempt to explain students' deviant behavior; the most notable are strain theory, social learning theory, and educational resilience frameworks. These paradigms offer different insights into factors that mold young people's behavior, and how social pressures, peer influences, and individual resilience influence their deviations from expected norms (Beckman, 2020).

Theories like the Strain Theory, Social Learning Theory, and Educational Resilience provide structured insights into the factors that lead to students' behaviors, influenced either by social pressure, environmental influence, or personal resilience. Strain Theory explains how external pressures can lead to maladaptive responses while Social Learning Theory emphasizes the importance of modeling behaviors through peer interactions and social context. Additionally, the Educational Resilience Framework points to several protective factors that may reduce the chances of deviant behaviors while fostering positive ones (Bellon, 2017).

An examination of the deviant behaviors of students in higher education therefore portrays an interaction of environmental and individual elements that requires the use of theoretical frameworks such as the strain theory, social learning theory, and educational resilience frameworks (Thompson, 2015).

Strain theory gives a critical framework to the understanding of the relationship between social pressures and deviant behaviors, especially in complex educational environments that students are usually found in. Based on the premise that individuals experience stress because of their inability to achieve culturally valued goals through legitimate means, the theory postulates that this disconnect leads to a variety of forms of maladaptive responses, which in this case include criminal behavior (Moreno et al., 2016).

Interactions between stress and exposure to violence within both family and university contexts may exacerbate risk factors in aggressive behavior, thus understanding such dynamics becomes significant to educational resilience frameworks (Gentle, 2019).

According to social learning theory, individuals learn behaviors through observing others; therefore, this theory places much importance on the environmental context and social interaction in developing both prosocial and deviant behaviors. With this in mind, the behaviors that students are exposed to - by peers, parents, or even their media representations - influence them according to the model. The four elements of social bonding in social control theory -attachment, involvement, commitment, and trust—are intertwined with Social Learning Theory as it reinforces the fact that solid social bonds can deter one from delinquent behavior (Thompson, 2015).

Conclusion

From the above facts, we can see that many factors contribute to the demotivation and increased level of fear in the students. To attain desirable results, a host of efforts are needed - not only from the students and the professors, but also from the universities, the ministers of education, and the governments. To have a quality system of higher education, good management is needed, along with a sufficient budget and especially research and publishing. In other words, much stimulation from the state is needed. Despite the state's commitment towards the development of higher education, a thorough reform is needed in the education system, including secondary and primary education, which are steps to higher education. It is also important to mention that the combination of the stress, social learning, and educational resilience theory frameworks is relevant to the issue of deviant behavior in students. These theoretical constructs give important clues about the reasons for deviant behavior and the critical need for proactive preventative measures.

Recommendations

Based on the results and their consequences, the following recommendations are offered to educators and policymakers on how to respond to the impacts of educational failure in delinquency. These recommendations are proposed for the improvement of learning-teaching conditions in higher education.

- Create collective support initiatives that facilitate constructive behaviors and establish beneficial strategies for students, as these prove instrumental in diminishing anger and optimizing behavior;
- Structure university courses that cultivate constructive peer relationships and reinforce exemplary behavior, minimizing intimidation and establishing a more accommodating and welcoming social atmosphere for students;
- Devise holistic programs that consider the complete student, concentrating on scholastic, psychological, relational, and intellectual factors that shape behavior;
- Facilitate partnerships between educators, psychological health professionals, administrators, and families to establish an integrated and reinforcing network for students;
- Examine fundamental and structural factors that influence student misconduct, such as disparity or resource deficiency, to establish a more balanced and enriching scholastic environment;
- Apply research-validated strategies that demonstrate success in minimizing unsuitable behaviors while advancing collective student outcomes;
- Support student participation in the development of institutional policies and support programs, cultivating a sense of stewardship, responsibility, and dedication;
- Persistently evaluate and refine interventions and strategies based on input and results to secure their efficacy and longevity.

References

- Akarowhe, K. (2018). Effects and remedies to cultural shock on adolescent students. *Sociology International Journal*, 2(4), 306-309.
- Bambara, L. et al. (2009). Sustaining school-based individualized positive behavior support. *Journal of Positive Behavioral Interventions*, 11(3), 161-176.
- Basit, T. (2010). *Conducting research in educational contexts*. Continuum.
- Beckmann, L. (2020). Risk factors of adolescent aggression within major socialization contexts: A social-ecological perspective. Available at [https://ul.qucosa.de/landing-page/?tx_dlf\[id\]=https%3A%2F%2Ful.qucosa.de%2Fapi%2Fqucosa%253A71470%2Fmets](https://ul.qucosa.de/landing-page/?tx_dlf[id]=https%3A%2F%2Ful.qucosa.de%2Fapi%2Fqucosa%253A71470%2Fmets)
- Bellon, S. (2017). Flourishing Firefighters: A plan for optimal organizational deviance using healthy human systems. *Dissertation in Practice at Western University*, 18. Retrieved from <https://ir.lib.uwo.ca/oip/18>
- Cheng, J. (2012). The effect factor for students' deviant behavior. *The Journal of Human Resource and Adult Learning*, 8(2), 26-32.
- Crossman, S., et al. (2018). EGFR signaling coordinates patterning with cell survival during Drosophila epidermal development. *PLOS Biology*, 16(10), 437.
- Denga, D. (2001). *The eve of the 21st century education threshold: Strategies for entry and sustainable development*. Rapid Educational Publishers.
- Dida, A. (2004). *The foundations of sociology*. Prishtina-Tirana.
- Elezi, I., Hysi, V. (2001). *Penal policy*. Tirana.
- Gentle-Genitty, C. (2019). Understanding juvenile delinquent behavior through social bonding. *International Association for Truancy and Dropout Prevention (IATDP)*.
- Gjuraj, T. (2003). *Introduction to sociology*. Shkodra.
- Greene, J. (2018). Broken windows theory. *Salem Press Encyclopedia*.
- Hysi, V. (2010). *Criminology*. Tirana.
- Kavutha, M., et al. (2015). Influence of drug use on academic performance among secondary school students in Matinyani District, Kenya. *International Journal of Scientific and Research Publications*, 5(11), 726-731.
- Kimani, G. et al. (2013). Teachers' factors influencing students' academic achievement in secondary schools in Nyandarua County, Kenya. *International Journal of Education and Research*, 1(3), 1-14.
- Latifi, V. (1980). *Juvenile delinquency in Kosovo*. Prishtina.
- Latifi, V. (2013). *Criminal policy*. Prishtina.
- Latifi, V., Elezi, I., & Hysi, V. (2012). *Policy for combating crime*. Juridica.
- Mongkhonvanit, P. (2009). *100 voices, a decade of inspiration and achievements in higher education*. UNESCO – CEPES: European Center for Higher Education.

- Moreno, D. (2016). Promoting resilience in Latino/a youth: An examination of resilience research and its implications for the developmental outcomes of U.S.-born Latino/a youth. *Pepperdine Digital Commons*.
- Nichols, B., et al. (2013). Improving academic performance through the enhancement of teacher/student relationships: The relationship teaching model. *A Journal of the International Christian Community for Teacher Education*, 1(2), 1-2.
- Nikaj, I. (2021). *Sociology*. Tirana.
- Osher, D. et al. (2010). How can we improve school discipline? *Educational Researcher*, 39(1), 48-58.
- Peretomode, V. (2015). Emergent issues and educational development in the century. Delta State University, Abraka International Conference.
- Rama, S. (2012). *The higher education in Kosovo: Challenges of a long transition: Human aspects of an education reform*. Lambert Publishing.
- Rrapi, G. (2007). *Sociology*. Prishtina.
- Sadikaj, B. (2010). *Sociology of law*. Prishtina.
- Sadikaj, B. (2016). *General sociology*. Prishtina.
- Sadikaj, B. (2021). *Sociology of law (Second edition)*. Prishtina.
- Thompson, J. (2015). General strain theory and bullying victimization: Do parental support and control alleviate the negative effects of bullying? *Scholar Commons*.
- Wadsworth, T. (2000). Labor markets, delinquency, and social control theory: An empirical assessment of the mediating process. *Social Forces*, 78(3), 1041-1066.
- Zanaj, F. (2010). *Sociology of law*. Tirana.