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INFLUENCE OF DEMOGRAPHIC VARIABLES ON ACADEMIC STAFF PERFORMANCE – A CASE STUDY FROM SOUTH EAST EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY (SEEU), NORTH MACEDONIA

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ABSTRACT

This study aims to determine the demographic characteristics influencing the performance of Academic staff at the Southeast European University (SEEU). This study employs data from the student evaluation carried out by the students for their respective professors and courses for the Fall and Spring semesters during the academic year 20/21.

A lot of research has been done on demographics and its effect on the professor's performance, and they point out that demographic attributes can change the rating evaluations, therefore these factors need to be analyzed at SEEU to come to our conclusion.

We assume that middle aged professors, females and single professors receive higher evaluation scores.

In order to analyze the demographic characteristics of the academic staff of SEEU and how they influence student evaluations, quantitative research methodology was used including calculation of frequencies, percentages, means and cross tabulations.

The results of the study show that students generally evaluate with high grades their professors, where the average of the whole questions asked resulted above 4.5, as per Likert scale, 1-5. Furthermore, the general results of the academic staff according to the demographic characteristics such as age, experience in teaching, academic title, gender and marital status for each academic staff do really show differences in student evaluation values. This is an important thing to know when recruiting and retaining academic staff that appear to be highly appreciated by students especially because that results from higher teaching quality.

Key words: Demographics, Academic Performance, Student Evaluation, Quality

INTRODUCTION

Education is a key element in the nowadays society, therefore each student deserves to have quality education and the best professors. Professors are the ones who contribute to the student's path to a better and more productive way. Professional development of professors it is a very important step in the search of the reaching high quality in teaching and learning.

Over the last years, many universities have established as a target to have high quality of teaching, with the aim in assisting and enhancing teaching resources and to produce best practices for teaching methods (Skelton, 2005; Jameel et al., 2019). Consequently, Quality Teaching has come to be more and more a significant point within the academic world over the past few years (Yang, 2020; Vlachopoulos & Makri, 2021; Ine et al.,2020).

As quality of teaching has come to be a very important topic in the educational realm, it seems that the emphasis has shifted from delivering education in mass or to just finish a degree, to delivering quality education at large scale.

Having high quality professors, leads to high quality of education, this in turn leads to high quality of citizen, which shows a nation worth of quality. Henceforth professor play a very important part in encouraging quality education and in shaping the future of a nation.

The Southeast European University gives great attention and focus on quality education. SEEU has Quality Assurance and Quality Control office that carries out the analysis of the quality of teaching in the University. Every semester Student Evaluation is carried out along with Teaching Observation to see and make sure that quality education is maintained according to the university standards. Having highly satisfied student body is a very important matter for a private-public University that is mostly funded by student tuition fee. In the last few years, there has been additional income from other sources, such as research projects, but still the income received from tuition fee takes the biggest portion of university funding.

This research focuses on the demographic characteristic influencing the performance of the academic staff at Southeast European University, and how they relate to Student Evaluation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Professors have to maintain their quality of teaching, but in order for them to do that, they have to be satisfied with their job, as stated by researchers Miankheil (2012), Ine et al., (2020), that satisfied academicians are happy and happy academicians hold positive attitude towards their universities. If employees are devoted, emotionally involved and identify with their organization, then they have a higher chance of remaining with the organization (Meyer et al., 2002).

Universities are shaped by people, have disclaimer characteristics, prospects, levels of education and congregate to attain the same aim, to produce best quality students. In this regard, SEEU applies a total quality management system (TQM) that includes every member of staff and every academic and administrative unit aiming at excellence and student satisfaction.

The approach of the SEEU for measuring the performance of university administrative/support services includes instruments for evaluating individual and unit operation, client satisfaction from their work and mechanisms for job revision that can be further used for optimization. It is also beneficial for providing equal opportunities for all employers in terms of recognition of the efficient and effective task accomplishment and motivation. (Kareva & Memedi, 2021, p.521).

There is a need to identify the connection between employees and universities in terms of conceptual framework of university commitment and its demographics. Demographics are defined as a set of qualities or characteristics of a population or group of individuals (Merriam-Webster, 2011: 436).

The socio-economic attributes of a community are age, gender, education standard, income level, marital status, work, belief, birth rate, death rate, average size of a family, average age at marriage. A census is a gathering of demographic factors related to every member of a community. Literatures in relation to organizational dedication display many variables that define a dedication to the organization. Some of these variables are gender, qualification, designation, age and marital status. Furthermore, demographically satisfied and work satisfied employees tend to lead higher commitment to the organization than in the occasions where the employees are not satisfied with their job due to the same factors (Osibanjo et al, 2019).

The main purpose of a university performance evaluation system should be institutional enhancement through quality assurance in every process and action. Ranking systems could supplement the evaluation procedures undertaken by official actors (Anninos, 2007). Standard evaluation methods for improvement of performance are typically built on financial standard or built on some indexes which are measured and closely linked with financial performance (Amin & Khan, 2009). Thus, an effective evaluation method shall be a comprehensive evaluation system based on multiple angles (Anjum et al., 2011).

The performance assessment system has many different roles here. Initially, it is the instrument that aids the University to accentuate and convey the small number of vitally important behaviors and skills for which employees will be evaluated. Furthermore, generating a new performance assessment system may encourage the University to express what qualities or factors are truly essential points to the University. In the end, the assessment system can assure that these capabilities are completely understood and institutionalized (Aslam, 2011). Numerous researchers have recognized the influences of the personal and social traits of professors, students and administrators which have an effect their approaches towards each other. These demographic implications are more severe and wider as compared to the developed and advanced countries (Woolfolk et al., 2007).

Demography requirements are the study of explicit data that can be gathered from a population census or statistic records. Malik (2011) recognized that demographic components

such as rank, age, qualification, experience were linked to some degree with the job satisfaction as a whole, of university professors. According to Cosio-Zavala (1999), "demography is the scientific study of characteristic features and dynamics concerning the human population". Adeyemi (2010) deduced that the main forecasts of academic attainment were the professors' experience and their educational qualification.

Yusuf and Dada (2016) had a look at the influence of professors' qualification and experience on performance of students in Colleges of Education in Kaduna State, Nigeria. The study showed that students lectured by experienced and professional professors presented considerable divergence in performance. This research proposed that only qualified and experienced professors should be allowed to teach in Colleges of Education in Kaduna state, Nigeria. To the contrary, professors who are under qualified and are not professional should be motivated to continue to study part-time or full-time. This will then lead in improving the quality of teaching and increase the students' performance.

Burroughs et al., (2019) concludes that professor's experience is dependably related with attainment. Based on much research it also been recognized that teaching experience is positively correlated with learning outcomes. Kraft & Papay (2014) established that professors who have longer teaching experience produced students with greater academic performance.

Based on many literatures, it is evident that demographic factors have a very significant role in the professors' academic performance. Demographic factors concerning professors are very diverse, however for the purpose of this study four factors that are significant to our research have been selected as demographic variable for further examination using empirical analysis.

The SEEU has a ranking and remuneration policy, where it is stated all the regulation on student evaluation and it importance on the professor's performance and its criteria in their salary calculations.

Demographic characteristics of professors as age, work experience, scientific title, gender, marital status, were considered as possible factors of their academic performance (API score). API results are acquired from the professor's student evaluation; these results are based on 8 questions asked to the students.

The student evaluation scores are taken one by one then analyzed into averages for every single question as well as an overall average for that professor for that semester. Based on these averages and the demographic we are going to analyze and see if any of the variables have any effect on the student evaluation.

OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

The main research objective of this case study is to determine how and if demographic factors affect academic performance of professors. The aim of the research is to:

- "To analyze the effect of demographic factors of professors on their academic performance"
- "To recommend suitable measures for the improvement of academic performance of professors."

Based on the objectives, the following hypotheses are posed:

1. Professors' age influences student evaluation results in a way that middle aged professors are better evaluated than other age professors.
2. Professors with higher academic titles are better evaluated than those with power academic title.
3. Female professors are better evaluated than male professors
4. Single professors are better evaluated than married professors.

METHODOLOGY & SAMPLE

Sample and procedure

This research study was commenced to analyze how professor's academic performance differs with their demographic factors. The data for the demographics were collected form the HR data base. Every semester SEEU carries out a student evaluation. In this evaluation the students evaluate the professors for the course taught for that semester. The evaluation contains 8 questions, and they are as follows:

1.	The course materials posted online on Google Classroom-GC (topics, lectures, videos, etc.) were well organized and user friendly (easy to follow)
2.	The information and instructions by the instructor for following the course through the GC platform were clear.

3.	The selection of materials and tasks on GC was relevant and appropriate for reaching the course objectives.
4.	The instructor used the opportunities for online interaction with students (discussions, chats, assignments, etc.)
5.	The assessment (mid-term exam, assignments, quizzes, projects etc.) was well organized and appropriately reflected the syllabus.
6.	The instructor provided regular feedback on the given assignments
7.	Overall course content rating
8.	Overall instructor rating

The method of evaluation is a Likert scale of 5 points, ranging in a scale of 1-5, (1 – strongly disagree, to 5- strongly agree). Students fill out the questionnaire on google form anonymously. The data are gathered by the quality assurance office and processed by the institutional research office.

The surveys are carried out each semester. At least one course per professor per semester is being evaluated. The evaluations are then gathered and then exported in excel for further analysis. The responses are then sorted by professor per course. Then out of that an average is calculated for all the 8 questions separately and then for the professor as a whole.

Demographic factors included: gender, age, work experience, scientific title and marital status were taken as independent variable. The dependent variable was the student evaluation average results per professor.

Table 1. Key figures used for demographics

Key terms	Note
Age	25-34 35-44 45-54 55-64
Gender	Female Male
Faculty	BE- Business and Economics CST – Contemporary Sciences and Technologies CSS- Contemporary Social Sciences LAW- Law LCC Language, Cultures and Communication
Academic title	High Lector Assistant professor Associate professor Full professor
Marital status	Yes No

Experience	1-2 years
	3-5 years
	6-10 years
	11-15 years
	16-20 years

The Southeast European University offers its students and staff many online services for efficient communication and management of the teaching and learning process. Through this research we wanted to analyze student assessment through the student evaluation on the subject and professors at the time of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Therefore, the research data were provided by the questionnaire organized at the end of the winter and summer semester of the academic year 2020/21. It is worth noting that in this period the questionnaire had some changes adapting to the Covid-19 pandemic period. The survey is designed to collect data on student satisfaction from their professors including the issue of digitization in relation to teaching materials published on the Google Classroom platform, course instructions and information, selection of materials and assignments, published teaching materials, use of opportunities for online interaction, regular provision of feedback on assignments and assessment of students' ultimate success.

PROCEDURE

In order to analyze the demographics influencing the quality of teaching, one need to have the data concerning the demographics of academic staff as well as the student evaluation data toward the professors. Since the study was conducted at SEEU, where student evaluations are carried out every semester for every professor, this was a great basis for the analysis.

The data are collected, then entered into Excel and IBM SPSS Statistics 20.0 software to perform statistical data processing. Frequency distributions, averages, percentages and cross-tabulations were used to analyze, interpret and verify the research hypotheses. The results of the cross-frequency tables for the six academic staff sections were carefully analyzed and interpreted.

RESEARCH SAMPLE

The Student Evaluation at the end of the winter and summer semester of the academic year 2020/21 is answered by 3062 and 5543 students respectively who reported subjectively on the attitudes and perceptions about the evaluation of their teacher.

Table 3 provides information about some of the teacher characteristics that students assessed in this study.

This shows that 55.81% of the teachers who were evaluated by the students are male, versus 44.19% female. It shows that 44.19% of teachers are in the age group 35-44 years, 45-54 years with 38.37%, 55-64 years with 15.12% and 25-34 years with 2.33%.

According to the faculty teaching we have 33.72% academic staff from LCC, 25.58% from BE, 17.44% from CST, 13.95% from LAW and 9.30% from CSS.

In terms of the academic title of teacher we have 37.21% teachers with the academic title Full Professor, 29.07% Associate Professor, 13.95% Assistant Professor, and 19.77% High Lector. In terms of marital status 94.19% are married.

Finally, according to the experience in teaching in higher education, we have 68.60% with 16-20 years of experience, 22.09% with 11-15 years of experience, 4.65% with 6-10 years of experience, 3.49% with 3 -5 years of experience and 1.16% 1-2 years of experience.

Table 2. Demographic information for academic staff

Variables	Values	Percentage
Gender	Female	44.19
	Male	55.81
Age	25-34	2.33
	35-44	44.19
	45-54	38.37
	55-64	15.12
Faculty	BE	25.58
	CST	17.44
	LAW	13.95
	CSS	9.30
	LCC	33.72
Academic Title	High Lector	19.77
	Assistant Professor	13.95
	Associate Professor	29.07
	Full Professor	37.21
Marital Status	Yes	94.19
	No	5.81
Experience	1-2 years	1.16
	3-5 years	3.49
	6-10 years	4.65
	11-15 years	22.09
	16-20 years	68.60

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In this section, we analyze the results of the assessment given by students on the subject they have attended during the academic year 2020/21, according to some characteristics on the overall assessment of the subject and the overall assessment of the teacher.

Table 4 shows that in all the points that students were asked about some important indicators related to subject evaluation and the lecturer who teaches that subject, the overall average of all teachers is above 4.51 according to the Likert Scale on satisfaction.

We can clearly see that in the last two questions on the evaluation of the overall content of the course and the overall evaluation of the teacher, the average was satisfactory with 4.72 and 4.82 respectively.

Table 3. Course Evaluation Feedback

	Indicator:	Average
1.	The course materials posted online on Google Classroom-GC (topics, lectures, videos, etc.) were well organized and user friendly (easy to follow)	4.72
2.	The information and instructions by the instructor for following the course through the GC platform were clear.	4.76
3.	The selection of materials and tasks on GC was relevant and appropriate for reaching the course objectives.	4.71
4.	The instructor used the opportunities for online interaction with students (discussions, chats, assignments, etc.)	4.76
5.	The assessment (mid-term exam, assignments, quizzes, projects etc.) was well organized and appropriately reflected the syllabus.	4.68
6.	The instructor provided regular feedback on the given assignments	4.66
7.	Overall course content rating	4.72
8.	Overall instructor rating	4.82

Table 5. shows the results of the questionnaire regarding the assessment made by students for the subject and teachers according to the performance indicator of the regulation on salaries and allowances, where if the average is from 1.00-3.50 the teacher does not receive salary compensation, from 3.51-4.00 receives 50%, from 4.01-4.50 receives 75% and from 4.51-5.00 receives 100% salary compensation in relation to this indicator.

Table 4. Performance indicators for student evaluation at SEE University

Grade	Percentage
1.00-1.50	0%
1.51-3.50	0%
3.51-4.00	50%
4.01-4.50	75%
4.51-5.00	100%

From the general data it can be seen that all teachers are evaluated with the overall average for the two semesters of the academic year 2020/21 with over 4.01, where 76.74% are evaluated with the average from 4.51-5.00, versus 23.26% with average from 4.01-4.50

In Table 6 we have a more detailed overview of teacher evaluation according to some characteristics of the teacher, such as: teacher gender, age, faculty where the teacher teaches, academic title of the teacher, marital status and experience in higher education.

Regarding gender, it is seen that the female gender has the best results, where 81.58% have an average of 4.51-5.00, compared to the male gender with 72.92%.

According to age, it can be seen that the age groups 20-34 years, 55-64 years, 45-54 and 35-44 years are evaluated with 90.40%, 84.62%, 78.79% and 71.05% respectively with the average 4.51- 5.00. Whereas according to the faculties, the highest evaluation with 4.51-5.00 is at the faculties of LAW, CSS, LCC, BE and CST with 100%, 87.50%, 86.21%, 68.18% and 46.67%, respectively.

According to the academic title, High Lector, Assistant Professor, Full Professor, are evaluated with an average of 4.51-5.00, 82.35%, 83.33% and 81.25%, respectively, while Associate Professor with 64.00%.

According to marital status, it turns out that those who are not married are rated higher with an average of 4.51-5.00, compared to those who are married.

In terms of experience, it is interesting, that with the evaluation points of 4.51-5.00 are evaluated with 100% those who have 1-2 years of experience and 6-10 years of experience, then comes those who have 16-20 years of experience with 76.2%, then 11-15 years of experience with 73.68% and finally 3-5 years of experience with 66.67%.

Table 5. Evaluation of SEEU staff by students 20/21 (N=86)

Variables	Values	Student Evaluation-Percentage	
		4.01-4.50	**4.51-5.00**
Gender	Female	18.42	81.58
	Male	27.08	72.92
Age	25-34	9.60	90.40
	35-44	28.95	71.05
	45-54	21.21	78.79
	55-64	15.38	84.62
Faculty	BE	31.82	68.18
	CST	53.33	46.67
	LAW	0.00	100.00
	CSS	12.50	87.50
	LCC	13.79	86.21
Academic Title	High Lector	17.65	82.35
	Assistant Professor	16.67	83.33
	Associate Professor	36.00	64.00
	Full Professor	18.75	81.25
Marital Status	Yes	24.69	75.31
	No	0.00	100.00
Experience	1-2 years	0.00	100.00
	3-5 years	33.33	66.67
	6-10 years	0.00	100.00
	11-15 years	26.32	73.68
	16-20 years	23.73	76.27

The results show that the female gender factor is rated with higher grades by students, which confirms our hypothesis that the female gender of the academic staff is preferred by the students the most. Also, in the factor of marital status, students rate the single staff with a higher grade, which confirms the hypothesis that single academic staff are rated better than married professors.

The results on the factors of age and academic title of the academic staff, however, did not differ significantly in the evaluation of students, which refutes our hypotheses that the middle-aged academic staff.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Demographic characteristics have a major impact on the performance of academic staff, where they are managed by higher education institutions, following and working on these characteristics to increase the performance of academic staff, in order to increase the quality of teaching and learning in general. (Kareva et al., 2021). This study analyzes some of

the demographic factors of academic staff regarding the evaluation given by their students. The findings of our study support the evidence regarding the quality of teaching, as the results of student assessment on staff performance in all questions came out with an average above 4.5 (from 1-5).

The study concluded that most of the academic staff had over 16 years of experience in SEEU. Also, most of the staff are with academic calling Associate Professor and Full Professor and they are middle-aged. The fact that most of the staff are educationally qualified and with academic titles Full Professor and Associate Professor shows that the University gives great importance to higher education in terms of their performance at work.

In terms of gender of the academic staff, the results show that gender plays a role in staff performance, where female professors performed better. As for the characteristic of age, the best results were for the range of young and over 55 years old. On the other hand, the LAW faculty staff was rated more compared to other faculties. Whereas according to the academic title almost all turned out well, while the best results according to the academic experience came out to be 1-2 years and 6-10 years. Most of the SEEU academic staff were married, where married people have more family responsibilities, leading those who are unmarried to have better evaluation results.

It is necessary for the Ministry of Education and Science to measure the impact of the demographic characteristics of the academic staff in all Universities in the country, where it will enable higher education institutions to take measures to increase the efficiency of individual work of academic staff.

Also, the study should look at the other demographic factors such as: whether the professors come from urban or rural areas, whether they have been educated within the country or abroad; whether they are monolingual or they speak foreign languages etc.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

As it is with every study, analysis or research, our research also had its own limitations and hindrances. For example, the study was done on two different semesters for the academic year 20/21, meaning that the courses evaluated were different. This means that the evaluation for Fall semester was carried from a different population of students and the evaluation for spring for different course as well and by different

students. It does not stand that the same student evaluated the same professor for both semesters, and since the evaluation is anonymous, we cannot know what.

Also, the analysis does not contain all the professors, because the idea was to have the professor be evaluated both semester, and there are cases where some professors were not evaluated in both semesters, so those were omitted.

The other limitation is that not all the students have carried out the evaluation, leaving us to think about the way to motivate the students to fill out the evaluation to have a heavier data set.

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