

## Motivating Albanian women seeking higher education

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### Abstract

Education is recognized by UNESCO (2012) as “a fundamental human right, one that all individuals are entitled to enjoy whatever the circumstances in which they live, that also brings important benefits to human society as a whole (p.8).

In order to achieve faster these benefit, it is necessary the participation of men and women on an equal basis. In that sense, keeping women away in all aspects of the development process only be reason of gender is a waste of valuable resources, even more when they constitute half of the population.

However, the importance of women’s participation in education is critical. According to Dundar and Haworth (1993), education of women is important not only from the angle of equal education opportunity between the sexes, but also for the substantial social and economic returns to female education that can be achieved by raising women’s productivity and income level, producing better educate and healthier children, and reducing fertility rates (p.1). Vanderslice and Litsch (1998) in turn, expressed that woman who have increased education are more aware about opportunities for themselves. They are more self-confident, open minded, and more competitive. While Kelly and Slaughther (1991) argued that through qualifications and credentials secured through the higher learning, women would equip themselves for all manners of professional positions, entering the market place and political arena with the same advantages as men.

**Keywords:** Albania, women, higher education.

### Introduction

During the communism, Albania had achieved universal literacy rates, with an appreciation on the high levels of women’s education and their participation in the labor force. However, the sharp economic decline and the changes in the labor markets accompanying the transition of Albanian society to free market policies has had a great impact on people’s live as well as the position of women in society (ETF, 2010). Although, Albania is still going through a long process of democratic reforms, political and economical transitions that are proving to be painful to a vast majority of citizens, with the new reforms and changes Albanian women have better opportunities to get higher education than they had in the past (UNESCO-CEPES, 2011). Therefore, this study aim to explore and to identify the factors, which motivate Albanian women to seek their higher education and as well as to make recommendations that would encourage more their participation in higher education.

This study aims to explore the factors that tend to motivate Albanian women to pursue higher education with particular reference Albanian University, Berat. The questions, which guided this study, were:

- What are the socio-cultural factors that influence Albanian women's choice to pursue higher education?
- What are the personal factors that encourage these women to acquire higher education?
- What the economic factors and do these factors encourage Albanian women to seek their higher education?

Education has always been a high priority item for the Albanian government. Every year large proportions of the budget of the government are spent on teachers, new educational facilities and the maintenance of the existing ones (UNESCO-CEPES, 2011). Although there is a lot done nevertheless, there are very few studies on the subject of women and higher education in Albania. Therefore, the study of such nature will shed more lights on the subject and will fill the gap of knowledge by generating unique information.

### **Research Methods**

It is the aim of this study to explore the factors that motivate Albanian women to seek their high education, and to do so the present study employs qualitative case study approach. According to Berg (2004), the qualitative method is that method of research that properly seeks answers to the questions by examining various settings and the individuals who inhabits these settings. Furthermore, with the case study our primary task is to understand the case and the majority of time is devoted to interpretation, because it was the goal in this study to develop a rich understanding about each participant's experience.

The research was conducted in Berat city, and in particular at the Albanian University, Berat. The University of Berat, a subsidiary of Albanian University, is not only an academic center, but also has an architectural value that increases day by day the touristic potential of the city, which stimulates this province to accumulate the intellectual treasure eager to return this place to a source of development. Albanian University opens its door to the student in the academic year 2009-2010. In the first academic year there were only 1000 student registered, whereas following by academic year 2010-2011 with 2600 number of students. And in the academic year 2011-2012 with 4000 students registered and following their higher studies in faculties such as; Law, Social Sciences, Economic, Education, Nursery, Information Technology, Architecture etc.

Population of this study were Albanian women students at Albanian University, who were registered and followed their studies in Albanian University at the time of the data collection. As the unit of analysis ten respondents were selected.

Purposive sampling method was employed in order to allow and ensure the right selection of participants on their knowledge and experience on the issue under the exploration in the present study (Blaikie, 2000; Rubbin & Babbie, 1997).

The primary data sources used in this study include the in-depth interview. One such advantage of in-depth interview is that it yields rich sources of data on people's experiences, opinions aspirations and feelings. According to Kvale (1996), data captured during qualitative interview is literary an interview, an interchange of views between two persons conversing about a theme of mutual interest, where the researcher attempts to understand the world of the subject's point of view to unfold the meaning people's experiences and to uncover their lived world prior to scientific exploration (pp. 1-2). In Kumar's opinion (2005), conducting an interview is more natural form of interacting with people than making them fill out questionnaire, do a test or perform some experimental task. Other advantages of the interview are that it provides a greater understanding of the subject's point of view, freedom to follow up whatever the interviewer thinks as important and it also gives qualitative depth by allowing the respondent to talk in his own frame of reference (Coolican, 1994). Therefore, in this study, the process of interviewing the respondents continued until the data became saturated and the information started to repeat itself.

In spite of the numerous advantages the interview has over other research instruments, it also has some drawbacks. Since it is based on a face-to-face interaction, it may be influenced by interpersonal variables that can lead to bias, which Babbie (1989) calls the Hawthorne effect. He explains that people are so much concerned with the attention given to them by the researcher that the results of the investigation are more related to their pleasure than to actual research. In order to minimize such effects in our study, we paid particular attention to the selection of the subjects for the interview and all self-selection procedures were avoided.

## Results and Discussion

The findings from this study interpret the factors that appear to motivate Albanian women to pursue higher education. Although some of these factors seem to overlap, effort is made to analyze them separately.

### *Socio-Cultural Factors*

The findings in this study make clear that some of the socio-cultural factors that influenced the Albanian women to pursue their higher studies are:

1. The urge of these women to become role models;
2. Support of the parent for their daughter to pursue higher education;
3. Influence and encouragement from others, like husbands, relatives, children etc.
4. Better opportunities.

As indicated by previous research done by Perkin (1993) the role models are crucial sources of motivation to women students. As is explained by all the respondents, becoming a role model is a very important factor motivating women to pursue higher education and career development. As four of them indicated that they enrolled themselves so as to be a role model for their children. On the other hand three of the respondents showed that they wanted to have positive impact on the other women in their life, such as their younger sisters.

Some of the women in this study felt that higher education has offered them many

opportunities. According to them the higher education becomes a vital tool for taking part in dynamic Albanian society and open many opportunities for them too.

The finding of the present study on parental support suggest that, parental support in terms of material assistance is one of the major motivating factors in women's pursuit of higher education. Although, the level of support given by the parents to their daughters may depend on many factors, like their financial situation and their level of education, nevertheless the parents' level of education, play a crucial role. The more educated the parents are the higher is their support for their daughters to pursue their higher studies. The statements of eight respondents, explained that their parents supported their higher education because they themselves were educated. This finding seems to be consistent with previous studies such as Mayanja's (1998) that has similar findings on the influence of parent's education in encouraging women to enroll in higher education.

Some of the women in this study emphasized the importance of parent's financial support as one of the major reason for the successful completion of their higher education. There are five of the respondents that supported this finding. This finding are consistent with the previous studies done by Okeke (1989) who observed that changes in social values and attitudes by parents are facilitating women's access to higher education.

From the interviews done, the findings show that parents who live in urban and rural area both supporting their children's higher education, however, this finding is not consistent with the previous research done by ETF (2010), who suggested that urban parents tend to give more support towards their children's higher education than the parents living in rural areas.

Another important finding on this study is the encouragement of Albanian women by others to pursue their higher studies. The statements given by respondents show that there seem to be positive peer influence in encouraging women. Such peer influence may arise from what Browne (1998) regard as the emergence of the importance of peer group in adolescent whereby there is very much reliance on peer group for support, identity, security and guidance.

However, according to Smith (1993), husband's encouragement to their wives to pursue higher education is crucial to their success. The current study adds support at the study done by Leonard (1994) which identifies three main forms of encouragement that husbands can give to their wives when they return to education such as; husbands assisting their wives in economic terms, husbands sharing their domestic duties and child care responsibilities with their wives to allow them to study, and when husbands are generally supportive and encouraging.

Pursing higher education bring better opportunities for them according to Albanian women. Besides the economic and social advantages, some of the respondents commented that according to their opinion being better educated provide better upbringing of their children.

#### *Economic Factors*

Besides the socio-cultural factors discussed above, the economic factors play an important role in inspiring women to seek higher education. From the interviews

with our respondents some of the economic factors that prevails from the findings are; the security for their future, the desire to earn higher income, dictates of job market requirements.

The data from the interview show the need for future economic security as a motivation for women's higher education. Almost all the respondents confirmed their enrolment in this institution as a way to have an economically secured future. The finding adds support to studies done by Miluka (2000) and what Perkin (1993) said about more and more women relieving their husbands of the responsibility of being the sole breadwinners. In the present study some of the respondents expressed the view that they saw higher education as a means of getting good jobs, which may consequently lead to economic self-reliance, and the ability to be financially capable of sustaining a comfortable life.

However, one of the best ways to have an economically secured future may be to earn a higher education. 8 out of 10 of the respondents explained that they come to this institution because getting a higher education means to them to earn higher income. This findings support Santiago and Eirnarson's(1998) and Benham's findings (1974) where higher education was perceived by the subjects in their study as a means to earn a higher income.

Accordingly, it is assumed that an economic motive for Albanian women to pursue higher education is the expectation of entering the job market at a high level. This assumption has been confirmed by findings from 7 out of 10 respondents. Nevertheless the findings, a noteworthy observation is that despite the aspiration there are discriminatory practices in job market in Albania that may deny many women to enter a job at the level that they desire. But in the same time some of the respondents highlighted the problem of inadequate progress while in the job marked without higher education. Many of them foresee that life can be hard without higher education and this can be due to the current economic situation in the country. According to most of them under such circumstances higher education may be the best means to getting higher paying jobs. Therefore, this may also show that besides the financial benefits that higher education might bring to Albanian women, they also might be realizing the difficulty in fitting into a society with rapid technological changes and changing life styles.

### *Personal Factors*

As regard to personal factors motivating Albanian women to pursue their higher education, career development is an important component of personal development motive, which is seen as encouraging for women as in the study done by Lightbody (1997), Jaccobsson (2008). In the present study 6 out of 10 of the respondents explained in their interviews that they pursue higher education in order to develop a career.

Another personal factor that motivates Albanian women to acquire their higher education is to enhance their prestige. Thus, the prestige enhancement as used in this study refers to the use of higher education by the women to promote their individual dignity through getting prestigious jobs, prestige in the society, social recognition. The present finding shows that 7 out of 10 respondents saw higher education as a means to get prestigious job and as such a change in their social status to a higher

and more affluent life style. This finding seems to add support to studies conducted by Jung (1978) and Chanana (1988), which explain that people are more primarily motivated by their social needs.

It is clear that women in Albania are realizing the (Pascall & Cox, 1993) importance of higher education as a means of gaining social recognition in society. Our finding is supported by a recent research done by Erwin and Maurutto (1998) who also found that high prestige, challenging work and personal autonomy were what the majority of women in their study were aiming at.

Therefore, because of the role education plays in the individual's as well as country's development, many Albanian women today pursue higher education not only for personal development, but also for making contribution to national development. Focusing on personal development motives for higher education Pascall and Cox (1993) stated that education offers women increased opportunity in paid work, insurance of their independence and gaining of new identity in society.

### **Conclusions**

In conclusion we can say that based on the findings of the present study, the socio-cultural factors that were considered important by the respondents in this study in motivating Albanian women to pursue their higher education are the urge to become role models, encouragement and support from parents, husbands and others.

As regard to the economic factors, women in this study seem to be motivated by the desire to have an economically secured future, the perception of higher education as a means to earning a higher income, and the realization that life can be hard without higher qualifications.

Whereas, the personal factors which seem to motivate the Albanian women to pursue their higher education can vary from development of a career, to getting prestigious jobs and enhancing their personal statues in society.

### **Recommendations**

Although, the present study has led to some interesting results, we recommend that this study should be replicated in the large number of respondents, or in other areas, or universities as setting, with more time spending in the interviews in order to obtain further insights on women's motivation to higher education.

The respective Ministry, which deals with women affairs, should set up and fund new research institutes with the main objective to conducting researches to identify ways and means of increasing women's participation in social life in general, and in higher education in particular in order to reach a better social development for the country.

Lastly, we recommend that Women's Studies to be introduced as a discipline in all higher institutions in Albania. Its introduction can provide channels to study women's issues in depth and recommend ways and means to deal with the problems faced by Albanian women today.

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