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Analysis of Students' Desired and Fulfilled Expectations from the Future of Academic Studies: Educational Effectiveness for Prosperous Life

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Analysis of Students’ Desired and Fulfilled Expectations on the Future of Academic Studies: Educational Effectiveness for Prosperous Life

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Abstract

Universities and higher education institutions (HEIs) aim to provide the maximum support for the community. Hence, to obtain the optimum results, the educational policies must be in alignment with the societies’ needs and prerequisites. The present research investigated the undergraduates’ expectations of studying at university and the fulfillment of those expectations prior and after being accepted into the university. 600 first-year undergraduates were selected based on cluster sampling from 2783 first-year undergraduates at Allameh Tabataba’i University, Iran. The data were gathered through deep interviews and cross-sectional survey. We emphasize that the centralized educational system in Iran works as a speed bump to obtain the goals and ambitions as portrayed in the HEIs’ mottos. The findings remind the educational policy-makers that success does not happen in a vacuum; rather, it is a collaborative joint practice among all members of the HE sector. The novelty of the research is its applicability to those centralized systems of policy-making worldwide specifically with engagement of students which adds to the literature and can urge the authorities of the HE sector to modify their earlier policies in the short run; and work toward decentralized system of educational leadership as the main panacea in the long run.

Keywords: University students’ expectations; Future of academic studies; Educational policies; Failure/ Success of university trainings; Students’ rate and society needs.

Análisis de las Expectativas Deseadas y Cumplidas de Estudiantes sobre el Futuro de sus Estudios Académicos: Eficacia Educativa para una Vida Próspera

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Resumen

Las universidades y las instituciones de educación superior (IES) tienen como objetivo proporcionar el máximo apoyo a la comunidad. Por ello, para obtener resultados óptimos, las políticas educativas deben estar en consonancia con las necesidades y los requisitos previos de la sociedad. La presente investigación estudió las expectativas de los estudiantes de primer año de la universidad y el cumplimiento de esas expectativas antes y después de ser aceptados en la universidad. Se seleccionaron 600 estudiantes de primer año mediante un muestreo por conglomerados de entre 2.783 estudiantes de primer año de la Universidad Allameh Tabataba'i (Irán). Los datos se recogieron mediante entrevistas en profundidad y una encuesta transversal. Destacamos que el sistema educativo centralizado de Irán funciona como un obstáculo para conseguir los objetivos y las ambiciones que se describen en los lemas de las IES. Los resultados recuerdan a los responsables de la política educativa que el éxito no se produce en el vacío, sino que es una práctica conjunta de colaboración entre todos los miembros del sector de la ES. La novedad de la investigación es su aplicabilidad a los sistemas centralizados de elaboración de políticas en todo el mundo, específicamente con el compromiso de los estudiantes, lo que se suma a la literatura y puede instar a las autoridades del sector de la ES a modificar sus políticas anteriores a corto plazo; y a trabajar hacia un sistema descentralizado de liderazgo educativo como la principal panacea a largo plazo.

Palabras clave: Afrontamiento emocional; interacción profesor-estudiante; estrés relacionado con el estudiante; análisis factorial confirmatorio.

The motivation to get better job opportunities by entering university is the most important force that drives young people to universities. A look at the results obtained in other countries, including Adams (1997), Davis, et al., (2001), Maxwell et al., (2000), Canton et al., (2001), Presley et al., (2018), Priyadarshini et al., (2021), Hsiao & Lin (2018) shows that the increasing chance to get better job positions is highly motivating for students to pursue higher degrees in universities, and that motivation is also in line with the changes that have taken place in the global field of higher education. Lehmann's (2009) explored "working-class students' expectations for university" in Canada and illuminated

a) the [students'] hope for upward social mobility [where] participants not only talked about their parents' lifestyle disadvantages from working-class employment – being tired, getting dirty, and getting hurt – but also the limitations placed on their ability to escape from this lifestyle; and b) [considering] university as vocational education [reminds us that] from a rational-choice perspective, the value of a university education has to be measured against the return on the investment in it (pp. 141-143).

In another research, Menon et al., (2012) in discussing findings of their study about the difference between "students' expectations about earnings and employment" after graduation and what happens in reality in Cyprus explained that

The completion of postgraduate studies, the area of family residence and the department of study are the key factors affecting the graduates' employment probability, while the students' probability of expected employment is determined differently, namely by characteristics such as secondary education performance and studies in the business administration department (p. 805).

Briggs (2006) also investigated undergraduates' reasons for choosing universities in Scotland and ordered top 10 factors based on the students' responses as "Academic reputation, Distance from home, Location, Own perception, Graduate employment, Social life nearby, Entry requirements,

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Teaching reputation, Quality of faculty, Information supplied by university, [and] Research reputation” (p. 713). As it is evident in these research practices, the rates of employment after graduation, as well as the prestige which students receive within social community as students of higher education are prevalent ideals among respondents in almost all research as their expectations from universities. All these findings are again in alignment with Dole’s (1970) earlier study on “seventy-eight reasons for going to college” and found “Degree necessary for work was the most popular reason” (p. 373).

In addition, universities must have the opportunity to grow knowledge (in terms of truths, laws, theories and concepts), develop basic academic success skills, nurture intellectual skills, facilitate the learning of new thinking skills, promote learning how to learn, improve communication skills, aid individuals to understand how to apply what has been learned, provide students with the development of the attitudes necessary for effective thinking, and transform students into a learner of the leader (Jones, 2001). Others such as Laguía et al., (2019) believe that not only the above-mentioned cases, but entrepreneurship skills and creativity must also be at the core of university training plan.

Another issue is the effective presence in the community by studying at a university. One application of the academic system in today's world is to present the principles of psychology in finding new ways of life and preventing personal, familial, occupational and social issues (Wellford, 2005). For others such as firms and companies, education and knowledge is considered as a real investment. They do invest in university as a sustainable way of knowledge management to create sustainable competitive advantage (SCA) (Mahdi et al., 2019).

As previously mentioned, the development of higher education and the quality enhancement of universities are possible through a precise understanding of the condition of higher education institutes. It needs to be highlighted that there is a must for policy-makers and educational planning bodies to direct attention toward students’ success and provide opportunities for them to obtain their desired expectations. Based on the discussion so far, it can be stated that students, upon entering universities, have certain expectations of these institutes based on social and familial backgrounds, economic strata, individual personalities, and the cities where they spent their secondary education. If we accept that a university can be considered as the

society's driving force through training efficient and useful human resources, the significance of allocating attention to one of the most important inputs of this system, that is higher education students, is an indisputable and obvious necessity.

Iranian HE: Ideals and Realities

Iranian educational system enjoys a centralized decision making structure where almost all policies and strategies are rendered and defined by the higher order corresponding state organizations. The Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology (MSRT), and the Ministry of Health and Medical Education (MOHME) govern the PreK-12 Education and Higher Education system of Iran. It also needs to be noted that fields of medical sciences and all other sciences are also supervised by the two different ministries (MOHME and MSRT). At the same time, there are some other organizations with much decision- and policy-making power than the ministries (Supreme Council of the Cultural Revolution, and Education Commission at the Parliament, for instance); so, our educational system is deprived of being leaded and governed under the identical plans and policies. However, training proficient competent graduates based on the job market outside the campus is always a key word in the speeches and debates by the authorities which can be obtained through constant collaboration between the corresponding ministries and organizations. Unfortunately, what happens in reality is that university studies, available job market outside the campus, as well as the students' ideals and graduates' expectations are far from each other in the real context. The main reasons behind such failure of the HE system and the labor market are the denial of the HE stakeholders' (students, in this case) voice, ideals, needs, and competencies on the one hand; and no real portrayal of job market in the long run. The former leads to the development of materials and curricula which fails to train competent new generation; and the latter is the result of multi-ownership of the HE and labor policy-makings.

Iranian students enjoy two levels of academic training as K-12 and Higher Education. Hopefully, there is a national interest among Iranian students to pursue their higher degrees at the universities. Hence, due to the high level of demand for higher education and the limited capacity of universities, the Iranian university entrance exam has become the most important educational event or, in other words, educational challenge, in the country. Although

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higher education is seen as the major path to upward mobility, fierce competition for university places has been a source of political, social and educational debates (Sakurai, 2004). In a recent research, Safari and Rashidi (2018, p. 127) investigated three high-stakes tests (University Entrance Exams) which are used in Iranian educational assessment cycle to monitor those students who enter higher education at all levels of bachelors, masters, and doctorate. They proposed “democratic testing as a way forward by which policy-makers can operationalize a just and fair exam whereby testing parties’ ideas, and intuitions are equally taken into account and their rights are protected”. So, the nature of such tests is one of those controversial issues among educational policy-makers and stakeholders at universities and higher education research centers. In such an event, a large number of people are spiritually and psychologically involved in the form of human resources. We discussed briefly about the national university entrance exam in Iran as it has its own pros and cons over the state. Recently, there is a national urge to remove such a gate as it is believed that students’ competencies and capabilities cannot be assessed through a one-shot high-stakes test which is administered annually in a competitive four-hour time slot. However, top-tier policy-makers of the state are not yet allowed to talk about total removal of such a high-stakes test as still there is no substitute or ideal policy to monitor students who aim to enter the universities to pursue their higher education degrees. The reason for policy-makers’ cautious stepwise preference to abolish such a test is that for decades- from early years of education (primary schools)- the clichéd belief among Iranian families is that the only way for a prosperous academic life and professional career in future is graduation from university with a degree in a prestigious field of study as engineering and medical sciences.

It might be the reason why the haven known as the university is the ultimate goal of many youth and their families. However, no one would show such greed and longing to enter a university provided that social and professional positions and permits – such as business and trading licenses; jobs in agriculture, different industries, animal husbandry, or service centers; as well as financial facilities and bank loans – could be easily achieved by having a skill certificate in a specific occupation, and if students felt they could achieve a good social status without entering a university (Sobhani & Shahidi, 2007, p. 167). Students and their families have various expectations from universities when they begin their studies. One of the expectations is

having a good job with a high social status after graduation (Brinkworth et al., 2009). Delaney (1998) stated that taking advantage of the academic environment is very important for students. However, its influence largely depends on the students' social status. Davis et al., (2001) also underlined the role of the university in supporting students to acquire not only job benefits but also citizenship capabilities. Anderson and Johnson (1988) consider social status, job opportunities, and personal interests as the motivation behind university studies. Balloo et al., (2017, p. 1377) also found that “personal development, Improved career prospect, to make friends, to change direction in my life, for the enjoyment of learning, to improve my potential future earnings, [and] to enhance my quality of life” were among the undergraduates' responses to reasons for going to university.

The previous viewpoint toward the responsibilities of the university relied more heavily on educational services; however, following the growth of human communities, particularly after the industrial revolution, human demands and desires have increased considerably and become more diverse. For university students, such demands and requirements have become even more complex and sensitive. Consequently, the expectations of the society from universities have changed, and, thus, in addition to the previous responsibility (transfer of sciences and knowledge), a new role has been assigned to the university according to the new demands. It is now the responsibility of universities to educate people who are sensitive to issues such as poverty, inequality, and environmental pollution, feel socially responsible, are committed to maintain principles, and have a humane spirit (Cullingford, 2004).

In this regard, the purposes and research questions we take into account add to the available literature on students' expectations from higher education as well as the realities they confront during their studies and after graduation (Table 1). The available research, in most cases, are administered within the decentralized systems of policy-making; hence, the findings of the current research bridge the gap in the research that the main educational stakeholders' rights, voice, needs, competences and values must be observed if the optimum goals are success of educational policies through K-12 and HE; and university graduates' prosperous life outside the campus.

Table 1

Main/ Secondary Purpose(s) and Research Question(s)

Main Purpose:	Main Question:
Investigating students’ future expectations regarding the future of higher education studies	What are students’ expectations from the future of studying at university?
Secondary Purposes:	Secondary Questions:
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determining the components of students’ expectations of the future of studying at university • Investigating the expectations of students about their personal growth and development at university and measuring their realization rate • Investigating students’ expectations of their socialization and acculturation process at university and measuring their realization rate • Investigating the expectations of students about their future career by attending university and measuring their realization rate 	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. What are the main components of students’ expectations of the future of studying at universities? 2. What are students’ expectations of their individual growth and development at universities, and how far are these expectations realized? 3. What are students’ expectations of the process of socialization and acculturation at universities, and how far are these expectations realized? 4. What are students’ expectations for their career prospects after graduation, and how far are these expectations realized?

Methods

The current study is a mixed-methods research endeavor. From a qualitative perspective, semi-structured interviews with students were utilized in order to discover the different aspects of students’ expectations of their future after graduating from university. The population included the undergraduate students of Allameh Tabataba’i University, from whom 16 students were selected based on the purposive sampling method according to the students’ major, gender, and place of residence. The sampling was finalized based on theoretical saturation. We adopted coding method to analyze the qualitative

data. Three main concepts were emerged as “individual growth and development”, “socialization and acculturation process at universities” and “students’ career prospects” with 37 subcategories. After compiling the data through conducting specialized panels with some interviewees, concepts and items were re-examined and their validity was confirmed using field experts’ opinions and reviews of the responses. They were all academic staff (Assoc. Prof./ Prof. ranks) with educational psychology, educational policy, teacher training, human resource management, and economy of education as their fields of teaching-research interests. The field experts were affiliated with the ATU and one other university in Tehran.

From a quantitative perspective, the cross-sectional survey research method was utilized for data collection. In cross-sectional research, in order to describe the population from which the sample is taken, the information is collected from the sample at a particular period of time. With respect to the main purpose of this study which seeks to investigate a) students’ expectations before entering university, b) how far such expectations are realized after entering to their intended institute of higher education, and also c) considering the cross-sectional nature of this research, the population (2783 students) consisted of all undergraduate students who began their studies at Allameh Tabataba’i University (ATU) in 2011 (1317) and 2014 (1466). Considering the all-inclusive nature of participants in terms of faculties, entrance years, and majors, the multi-stage cluster sampling technique was utilized. According to Morgan’s table, 297 first-year students in 2011 and 306 first-year students in 2014 (altogether 600 first-year students of different majors) were selected as the sample of the study. ATU is among the top ten universities in Iran and is recognized as the first university with mere focus on Humanities and Social Sciences.

A questionnaire was also developed by the researcher with the 3 sub-scales of individual growth and development (16 items), socialization and acculturation at university (14 items), students’ job (career) prospects (7 items) based on the collected qualitative data. Due to the binary nature of questionnaires, two questions have been asked for each item, which are as follows: (1) How far have your expectations been realized and fulfilled at university? (2) Before entering university, how far did you expect your demands and desires to be met at university? For instance, regarding the item “I would like to learn how to communicate with other members of the society at university,” two questions were asked with respect to the realized

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expectations of students at the status quo compared with their expectations in the context of desirable conditions.

To finalize the questionnaire, the classical theory of measurement was applied, and for the purpose of confirming the validity of utilized instruments, the following was conducted: Analysis of questions, reliability studies, and validity studies. To assess the validity of this study, construct validity was considered, to obtain which, this study underwent confirmatory factor analysis (first order) using LISREL software (8.7).

Table 2

Confirmation indicators of first and second order confirmatory factor analysis of student expectations

Index name	First-rate fitness adequacy	Second-degree fitness adequacy rate
χ^2	(0/05=p) 2476/41	(0/001=p) 2476/41
RMSEA	0/078	0/078
NFI	0/96	0/94
NNFI	0/96	0/93
CFI	0/96	0/94
GFI	0/92	0/91
AGFI	0/90	0/90

Results in [Table 2](#) emphasized that all indicators are reported as being highly desirable, and the model is tailored for the data, which shows the alignments of items with the theoretical constructs. In addition, Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient (0.98) was utilized to check the reliability of the research instrument.

Analyzing the quantitative data, both descriptive (frequency distribution tables, percentages, agreement tables, central tendency indicators, and dispersion indices such as mean and variance) and inferential indicators were calculated. For the inferential analysis of the data, Statistical 8, SPSS (21.0), and LISREL software were utilized, and based on research hypotheses; correlated t-student, single-mode t-student, and the repeated measurement of Repeated Measures Designs were applied.

Results

Qualitative Analysis

Three main categories including *a) individual growth and development, b) socialization and acculturation, and 3) students' career prospects* with 37 sub-categories were identified based on the interviews, the panels, and the coding process (Appendix). The analysis of interviews illuminated three main concepts that portray the main expectations of the students from studying at university which are discussed below:

Individual Growth and Development

Individual growth and development can be realized through flourishing its sub-scales such as social and life skills, individual independency and self-confidence, group work, analytical-rational skills, modern skills, development of interests, knowledge of religions and values, and physical activities. These are the ideals that almost all students aim to acquire during their academic life in the universities for success in their career as soon as they are graduated from the university.

As mentioned above, individual growth and development in different dimensions includes not only scientific development but also learning necessary social analytical and rational skills as well as considering personal interests. In other words, analyzing students' expectations in this field shows that development is not limited only to a specific scientific field, while other various dimensions are also included. Describing his expectations and perceptions of studying at university, one of the students stated: "I was considering university as a place where I was able to compensate all those artistic deprivations I had during my adolescent"; or another student said: "during school time, I did not even cough without my parents' permission; university provides me with an opportunity to become independent and increase my self-confidence to do my work.

This description indicates the student's attempt to gain his individual independency and increase his ability in personal planning and management. Students' empowerment with modern technologies is also considered as one of the students' expectations of studying at the university. One of the students from one of the deprived areas of the country claimed "In our city, we did not

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have access to the Internet and websites; the university provides me with the chance to know, learn and utilize new technologies.”

It needs to be mentioned that Iranian students are obliged to go through K-12 educational cycle where the main theme of teaching practice is teaching for the sake of testing. Hence, students experience assessment stress and families’ pressure from their early years at the school. It is because all teaching happens for the sake of National University Entrance Exam which students are supposed to take if they intend to enter the universities. So, development of students’ individual competencies and capabilities are dismissed and almost the whole teaching syllabi aim to empower students with techniques for success in their tests. However, students need and say something totally different from what educational policy-makers believe while working on policies in the parliament and ministries. The concept of individual growth and development is exactly what the students fail to acquire in their K-12 educational cycle. In this regard, students do their bests to shape/reshape their characters through their life in the university.

Socialization and Acculturation at University

One of the main functions of universities is to make students more socialized as students will have a chance to experience acculturation by living in a community of students from divergent ideologies and backgrounds. Our educational policy- and decision-makers must take into account the social responsibility of universities. They should be reminded that mere teaching practice is no longer the role of universities; rather, close and constant correspondence between university and society must be highlighted as in reality there should be no real wall between university campus and the city. It means what happens in the society should be the university administrators’ main concern. Hopefully, the main duties of universities in the current era are well portrayed in the students’ interviews concerning their goals and expectations for pursuing their degrees in the university. Analysis of students’ interviews illuminated that their expectations from universities are categorized as social roles, customs, identity, rules and regulations, and communication, which indicate that students inherently believe in the university’s role in their socialization and acculturation.

Many students are afraid of being in the society, and they prefer to experience effective social presence through the university’s channel. One of

the main future students' expectations from studying at universities is to learn to play their social roles. One of the students underlines the necessity of such an effective role of universities in the socialization process of students as "the university should make me familiar with the society and its organizations". Some other students were worried about abnormal behaviors and violation of others' rights in the society. For instance, one of the students said, "When I was going to an office or an organization, I was always worried how I should talk or follow up the issues so that others did not get upset or their rights were not violated". One of the main points raised by the students was to be acquainted with the national customs and traditions and find more information about social and cultural issues. One of the students stressed that "By entering university, I was pleased to have the chance to get familiar with students from other cultures and customs though I was also worried how I should talk with them". Getting familiar with the rules and regulations of the society, being attached to the country and identity were also among other points highlighted in the interviews with the students.

Accepting responsibility and being able to work with others are also among other know-hows that students expect to achieve after graduating from university. One of the students stressed the necessity of these know-hows as "At university, I should learn how to work in order to carry out the jobs the society expects me to so that I can properly deal with them; however, I know the university is not solely responsible for such training". Students also expect to get familiar with cultural and religious subjects and gain the necessary knowledge in these fields after graduation. Considering religious knowledge, one of the students said:

During school time, we did not have enough chance to increase our knowledge about religious issues; we were deeply involved in studying for the entrance exam. I hope now that I am studying at university, there will be some courses in which I can participate in order to increase my cultural and religious knowledge.

The above-mentioned statements derived from students' interviews underline their awareness about the main function of the university, that is, cultural socialization. Although cultural socialization is a broad concept, the aspects of which have been widely defined, the dimensions mentioned by the students in their interviews indicate that preparation for accepting responsibilities, doing things better, getting familiar with rules, understanding regulations of the society, and becoming aware of cultural and religious values

are the main requirements which universities should take into consideration in their planning regarding the students.

Students’ Career Prospect

When we talk about social responsibility of the universities; our main focus is on the pivotal role of universities to identify the evident immediate needs and shortages in the society. Hence, the university is to prescribe some solutions for the problems, challenges, and crises of the society where the university is located therein. Some years ago, there was an office in each university titled as University-Industry Cooperation where its main duty was to introduce undergraduate students to the available vacancies in the industry to work on a project (almost within a three-month period) and present its report to the university for approval of graduation. However, other students from faculties of Arts, Humanities, and Social Sciences failed to work in such a community of industrial experience. As already mentioned, our students experience academic life as total exposure to theories and teaching hours with a focus on testing and assessments. Hence, students join the university for a prosperous professional career in future and it was also evident in students’ responses to the question of what their expectation is for the future after graduation. The students’ main concern was their career and concepts have been categorized within topics as professional expertise learning, employability, and entrepreneurship. Analysis of the students’ feedback about getting a good job shows that they consider university as a place where they are trained in one field of expertise. One of the students said:

I really expect my university to train and develop my abilities in one particular major of study and help me in going through the appropriate track of my career in the future so that I can feel satisfied with the choice I make.

Some other students also highlight the university’s role in training them for professional expert skills and empower them for employment and application of their scientific knowledge, for instance: “At university, I am not supposed to only memorize theoretical ideas and topics; I should be empowered with a knowledge which can be applicable and practically used so that I can easily find the appropriate job”, and “If I cannot learn the skills and expertise in one specific job, I don’t continue my studying,” “the most

important function of the university is to prepare me for having a suitable job in the future”.

Students also had some other expectations than a simple job; for instance, some of the students expected universities to develop skills of finding a suitable job and entrepreneurial skills. One of the students said, “To find a good job, we should learn the ropes, and the university is responsible to train us in this regard”. He actually considers the university responsible in teaching Employability. Another student highlights entrepreneurship as the most important responsibility of the university and says, “The University should plan as such that we can establish a business and create jobs by ourselves”.

Quantitative Analysis

According to findings, the average mean and the standard deviation of the respondents’ age respectively equals 21.94 and 3.33, while the average mean and standard deviation of the respondents’ entrance exam ranks are respectively estimated as 3218.00 and 4769.17. In addition, 36.23% of the respondents are men while 60.92% are women. Such ratio is also seen in the total student population of universities. 55.95% of the students live in Tehran, 35.35% live in dormitories, and the rest are living with their friends. In terms of education, the GPA for 69.45% of the students is more than 16.00 (32.33% between 18-20, and 37.12% between 16-18). Such findings reveal the fact that most respondents have had a good academic status.

Considering the economic conditions and background of the respondents’ families, 71.58% of the respondents are considered as living in the middle economic class, and 13.68% are categorized as having poor lower economic levels. Thus, in analyzing the inferential findings that is largely based on economic conditions of the participants, the middle economic class should be explained. Considering the educational background of the respondents’ parents’, more than 52% of fathers had a diploma or lower while more than 70% of mothers had a diploma or lower. Approximately 4% of the fathers and 2% of the mothers had a Ph.D.

To answer the main question of the research, “What are students’ expectations from the future of their academic studies?”, firstly, the status quo and desired conditions (students’ expectations) are analyzed based on the mean of the indicators.

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Table 3

Characteristics of the dispersion of students' expectations of the status quo, the desirable status, and the gap status

Components	Indicators	Status Quo	Desirable Situation	Gap State
Individual Growth and Development	Mean	43.73	81.86	21.74
	Median	44.24	86.81	21.74
	Standard deviation	21.20	18.14	26.39
	Standard error of the mean	0.89	0.76	1.11
Socialization and Acculturation at University	Mean	42.58	79.58	20.70
	Median	44.44	85.65	20.37
	Standard deviation	21.76	20.62	25.60
	Standard error of the mean	0.92	0.87	1.08
Students’ Career Prospect	Mean	39.34	84.14	28.66
	Median	40.28	88.89	27.78
	Standard deviation	21.53	16.83	26.35
	Standard error of the mean	0.91	0.71	1.11

According to [Table 3](#) for the current status quo, the mean for “individual growth and development” is reported to be higher than other components of the students’ expectations while the mean for “career prospect” is reported to be lower. Based on the findings in this table, the confidence difference of 95% is reported for each component. In addition, there is a significant difference between “individual growth and development” with other components at 95% confidence level. However, for desired condition (students’ expectations), the “career prospect” is reported to be higher than other components while the mean for “socialization and acculturation” is reported to be lower than others. In other words, there is a significant difference between “career prospects” and other components of students’ expectations for their future after being graduated from the university at 95% of confidence level. Based on the findings in [Table 4](#), the mean for “career prospect” is reported to be higher than other components while the mean for “socialization and acculturation” is lower. In other words, the gap between the students’ expectations and reality is much larger for “career prospects” and quite smaller for

“socialization and acculturation”. This means there is a significant difference between “career prospects” and other components of students’ expectations at 95% confidence level.

In order to determine whether there is a significant difference between the current conditions and the desired one, the students’ correlated t-test was also applied and its results are presented in [Table 4](#).

Table 4. The mean of the status quo, the desirable status, and the gap status of the components, and the results of the t-test

Concepts (Categorise-Components)	Subcategories	Means of Status Quo	Means of Desirable Situation	Means of Gap State	The difference between the status quo and the desired situation	t-Student correlated		
							Significance level	
Individual Growth and Development	Social and Life Skills	42.50	81.19	22.77	-38.69	-32.87	0.001	
	Individual Independency and Self-Confidence	45.50	81.03	20.15	-35.53	-26.63	0.001	
	Rational-Analytic Skills	44.60	82.62	22.36	-38.03	-38.13	-33.34	0.001
	Interests Development	40.35	79.13	21.67	-38.78	-32.02	0.001	
	Religious knowledge and Values	43.19	77.19	19.03	-34.00	-24.21	0.001	
Socialization and Acculturation at University	Social Roles	42.00	81.12	23.36	-39.12	-32.33	0.001	
	Customs and Traditions	40.62	78.52	22.76	-37.91	-29.67	0.001	
	Identity	41.09	78.93	22.19	-37.84	-37.00	-32.18	0.001
	Rules and Regulations	43.07	78.89	20.81	-35.82	-27.21	0.001	
	Communicating with Others	44.15	81.38	22.00	-37.23	-29.07	0.001	
Students’ Career Prospect	Acquiring Professional Expertise	38.16	82.19	28.20	-44.03	-32.36	0.001	
	Employability	37.74	84.58	30.97	-40.97	-44.81	-38.54	0.001
	Entrepreneurship	40.36	83.50	27.43	-43.13	-34.95	0.001	

First secondary question:

“What are students’ expectations for their individual growth and development at universities, and how far do they expect them to be fulfilled?”

According to the results in [Table 4](#), the mean for sub-scale “individual independency and self-confidence” is reported to be higher than other sub-scales of “individual growth and development” while the mean for sub-scale “developing interests” is calculated to be lower than other sub-scales. In other words, there is a significant difference between some sub-scales of “individual growth and development” at 95% confidence level. In addition, based on [Table 4](#), according to the expectations of the students, the mean for “rational-analytic skill” sub-scale is reported to be higher than other sub-scales of “individual growth and development” while the mean for the sub-scale of “developing interests” is reported to be lower. Thus, there is a significant difference between some sub-scales of “individual growth and development” at 95% confidence level for the desired status.

Based on the results mentioned in [Table 4](#), the mean for the sub-scale of “social and life skills” is reported to be higher than other sub-scales of “individual growth and development” while the mean for the sub-scale of “individual independency and self-confidence” is calculated to be lower than others. There is also a significant difference between the sub-scales of “individual independency” and “social and life skills” at 95% confidence level. Accordingly, the results of the correlated t-test are meaningful in all sub-scales of “individual growth and development” at 99% confidence level. This means there is a significant different between the current situation of the university and the desired status (students’ expectations) for all the sub-scales of “individual growth and development” which is in alignment with the results of research by Barnes (2007) and Jones (2001).

Second secondary question:

“What are students’ expectations for the process of socialization and acculturation at universities, and how far do they expect them to be fulfilled?”

According to [Table 4](#), the mean for the “communication with others” sub-scale is reported to be higher than other sub-scales of the “socialization and acculturation” component while the mean for sub-scale “customs and traditions” is calculated to be lower than other sub-scales of the same category. In addition, as per the information in [Table 4](#), there is a significant

and meaningful difference between some of the sub-scales of “socialization and acculturation” at 95% confidence level.

According to [Table 4](#), the mean for the sub-scale “social roles” is reported to be higher than the other sub-scales of “socialization and acculturation” while the mean for sub-scale of “Values” is calculated to be lower than the other sub-scales of the same category. As reported in this table, there is a significant difference between the “Values” sub-scale with other sub-scales of “socialization and acculturation” at 95% confidence level”. In order to see if there is a significant difference between the status quo and the desired one, the students’ correlated t-test has been applied, the result of which is reported in [Table 4](#). The results of correlated t-test indicate the meaningful difference for all the sub-scales of “socialization and acculturation” at 95% confidence level. In other words, there is a significant difference between the status quo and the desired one (students’ expectations) in all the sub-scales of “socialization and acculturation”.

Third secondary question:

“What are students’ expectations for their career prospects after being graduated, and how far do they expect it to be fulfilled?”

The mean for the “job procurement” sub-scale is reported to be lower than other sub-scales of “career prospect” while the mean for the “entrepreneurship” sub-scale is calculated to be higher than other sub-scales of the same category ([Table 4](#)). There is also a significant difference between the sub-scale of “entrepreneurship” and other sub-scales of “career prospect” at 95% confidence level, which can be easily observed in each diagram. The mean for the sub-scale of “job procurement” is also expected to be higher than other sub-scales of “career prospects” while the mean of “professional expertise acquirement” is lower than other sub-scales of this component. Thus, there is a significant difference between the sub-scales of learning expertise and job procurement at 95% confidence level.

The mean for the sub-scale of “job procurement” is higher than other sub-scales of “career prospect” and the mean for the sub-scale of “entrepreneurship” is lower than other sub-scales of this component. Thus, there is no significant difference between the sub-scales of “university environments” at the confidence level of 95%.

According to [Table 4](#), the results of the correlated t-test are significant with the confidence level of 99% for all the sub-scales of “career prospect”. This

means there is a significant difference between the current conditions of the university and students’ expectations (desirable condition) in all sub-scales of “career prospect”. This result is also in alignment with the findings of the available study in international level such as Moreau and Leathwood (2006), Adams (1997), Davis et al., (2001), Maxwell et al., (2000), and Canton et al., (2001), and Money et al., (2017). It shows that job motivation along with motivation acquired from academic interests is the most important motivation for the youth to enter university.

Discussion and Conclusion

In today world, we have concepts as human capital and human asset. First of all, it aims to highlight the important and well-acknowledged place of human resources in policies and decisions of the states. Total acknowledgement and appreciation of human resources are exercised almost in all developed countries and it still needs much attention in developing countries and Iran is also not an exception. In our country, there is much focus on testing and assessment during the educational cycles of each student’s life. Hence, much attention is paid to prepare students for tests which they are supposed to take if they intend to participate in universities for pursuing their higher degrees. On the other hand, (un)fair educational policies of the state (un)consciously caution the students and their families that the true path toward a successful future career is through university studies. In this regard, the main endeavor will be to train students to be proficient test-takers than a proficient competent human being with their specific individual capabilities.

With such an endeavor to enter the university, students aim to receive professional training in the universities for immediate employability as soon as they are graduated with a bachelor degree. However, what happens in reality is totally different which might be due to ill-made decisions and policies where there is no mutual correspondence between available job vacancies in the society professional market and number of graduates from universities. The main theme of our present research was to investigate students’ expectations from university after a twelve-year learning experience. It is one of the innovative research practices in the realm of higher education in Iran which can also contribute to the needs and requirements of educational policy-makers in regional scope (middle-east) as well as

enrichment of available literature concerning university graduates' employability. The present research adopted mixed-method design where quantitative findings support the analysis of our data within the qualitative phase of research. One of the important issues at universities is assumed to be the development and growth of individuals, which is crucial to all university stakeholders, including students. In the same line, Tohidian, et al. (2021) in their research remind educational policy-makers that

there is an urgent call for reform and change in educational policies of Iran (for instance, students and teachers' engagement in materials development both at the K-12 and HE levels, engagement of parents in school leadership through K-12, review of the available job vacancies out of the schools and campuses to avoid students' registration in fields of study with no chance for employment, giving more authority to school principals and university leadership team in terms of their self-financing plans and financial support sources based on their regions, balance between ministries responsible for education (K-12, HE, Medical education), and etc.). (p. 3419)

Personal growth and development can be defined in relation to other concepts such as self-confidence, individual freedom, and life skills. According to research studies, those students with a higher self-confidence are more likely to be successful in tackling issues and facing problems in their lives. The higher education system can define new lifestyles for individuals in order to enable them with the necessary skills to avoid problems. Such types of cases can be derived from analyzing personal development and growth, which is considered as a gap to be addressed in further research efforts.

We also expect universities to develop students' socialization and acculturation. In the early years of youth, when students see themselves being separated from their families, the university plays its very significant role. Social policy makers believe that for the realization of a developed society with high social and human values, the development and expansion of scientific institutions, and the training of efficient human resources familiar with the processes of working with modern methods of science is strongly felt and required. In the meantime, the process of students' involvement and adaptation in universities is very important for the sake of science production.

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The motivation to enter universities is largely influenced by the attitudes toward universities and is shaped in interaction with the function of universities in different societies. Currently, higher education should be accountable for the career prospect of graduates and the high costs of their education. One issue should clarify: What successful results have been obtained for the society by the higher education sector? Will graduates be able to gain the necessary skills required for the key positions in the society? Or, on the other hand, is the number of unemployed increasing every year? Is it not the time to direct attention toward quality with regard to accepting students and highlight quality-based outputs rather than paying attention to the quantitative aspects in accepting students at universities?

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Appendix

Categories and predicates extracted from the interviews

Concepts (Categories- Components)	Subcategories	Items
Individual Growth and Development	Social and Life Skills	<p>At university, I would like to acquire life skills in addition to gaining knowledge and science.</p> <hr/> <p>I would like to learn how to manage larger communities at university.</p> <hr/> <p>I would like to acquire planning and management abilities of my own affairs at university.</p> <hr/> <p>I would like to learn how to work with a team at university.</p> <hr/> <p>The university should provide me with opportunities that include modern technologies.</p>
	Individual Independency and Self- Confidence	<p>I would like to acquire the ability for personal independency and how to deal with new challenges at university.</p> <hr/> <p>I would like to increase my self-confidence at university.</p> <hr/> <p>I would like to increase my tolerance against criticism at university.</p>
	Rational-Analytic Skills	<p>I would like to acquire the capability of analysis at university.</p> <hr/> <p>I would like to learn how to solve problems and issues at university.</p> <hr/> <p>I would like to acquire rational thinking skill and capability at university.</p>
	Interests Development	<p>I would like to enhance my interests at university.</p> <hr/> <p>I would like to enhance my artistic abilities and knowledge at university.</p> <hr/> <p>I would like to increase my general information on physical health at university.</p>
	Religious Knowledge and Values	<p>I would like to expand my religious knowledge at university.</p>

Concepts (Categories- Components)	Subcategories	Items
Socialization and Acculturation at University		The university should explain social, cultural and religious values of the society to me.
		The university should hold religious ritual ceremonies for students.
	Social Roles	The university should make me ready for accepting social roles in the future. The university should provide me with opportunities to enhance my social skills. I should be able to enhance my abilities in accepting responsibilities at university.
	Customs and Traditions	The university should explain national customs and traditions. The university should hold appropriate cultural and artistic programs for students.
	Identity	The university should increase by sense of patronage. I should be able to become familiar with different social, political and cultural perspectives in the academic environment. I should acquire an identity at university.
	Rules and Regulations	I should learn about the rules and regulations of the society at university. At university, I should learn how to respect and observe others' social rights.
	Communicating with Others	After graduating from university, I should be able to work with others. I should learn how to communicate with others in the society.
	Acquiring Professional Expertise	At university, students should be helped and guided to be employed as experts in the future. The university should train me for procuring a specialized career. The university is the place where professional expertise is acquired.
	Employability	The university will educate students with high capabilities and necessary requirements for employment.
	Students' Career Prospect	

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Concepts (Categories- Components)	Subcategories	Items
		The university will teach <u>Employability</u> and <u>how to easily seek good job opportunities</u> .
		The university will teach applicable and practical subjects related to the jobs in the market.
	Entrepreneurship	The university will enhance entrepreneurship skills in students.