Enhancing Student Social Care: Evaluating the Impact of the project "Support of Social Care Interventions for Students of the University of Piraeus"

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Abstract

The project "Support of Social Care Interventions for Students of the University of Piraeus" aims to enhance early completion rates and equal participation in higher education for students with disabilities and those from low-income backgrounds. This paper provides an overview of the project's objectives, survey methodology, theoretical background, survey results, and conclusions. A survey was conducted among students using a questionnaire after the June 2023 examination period to assess the effectiveness of the supportive programme. The theoretical background section discusses the guiding principles and concepts underpinning the support structures developed. The survey results highlight both successful areas and areas requiring further attention. The conclusions section consists of the findings, reflects on the effectiveness of the programme, and provides recommendations for future improvements in social care for University of Piraeus students.

JEL Classification: I23, I24

Keywords: higher education, social care interventions, autonomy, competence, and relatedness

1. Introduction

The project titled "Support of Social Care Interventions for Students of the University of Piraeus" aims to develop actions and reinforce support structures to improve the early completion rate of studies and promote equal participation in higher education for individuals with disabilities and those from low-income backgrounds. This abstract provides a summary of the project's objectives, survey methodology, theoretical background, survey results, and conclusions. To assess the effectiveness of the supportive programme, the authors conducted a survey among students using a questionnaire after the examination period of June 2023. The survey expected to determine whether the implemented interventions facilitated uninterrupted study and successful completion of semesters for the targeted students. The subsequent sections delve into the theoretical foundations that guided the design and implementation of

the project. Drawing from specific theories, the theoretical background provides insights into the principles and concepts that underpin the support structures developed for students at the University of Piraeus.

The research methodology and the survey results sections present the findings obtained from the survey. The analysis of the questionnaire data sheds light on the impact of the supportive programme. The results indicate the areas of success as well as the areas that require further attention. The last section summarizes the conclusions derived from the evaluation of the project. It synthesizes the survey findings and offers reflections on the overall effectiveness of the programme in achieving its objectives. Additionally, the section discusses the implications of the study and provides recommendations for future improvements to enhance social care for University of Piraeus students.

2. Theoretical Background

In order to develop the questionnaire that will help the researchers to reach their conclusions, the theoretical background on which the development of the questions will be based must first be developed.

Previous research has effectively used Self Determination Theory (SDT) to assess the extent to which student learners become highly motivated in an environment such as that of an amphitheatre and the ways in which this motivation performs positively on the psychology of these individuals (Filak & Sheldon, 2008). The theory suggests that meeting three basic psychological needs (autonomy, competence, and relatedness) will lead to positive outcomes, including knowledge acquisition, improved well-being, and significant life events that lead to high levels of positive emotional attitudes (Sheldon et al., 2001). In addition, research in this area has shown that higher levels of quality self-regulated motivation will predict overall need satisfaction (Deci et al., 1994).

This study uses SDT as a framework to better understand the relationship between student motivation, student need satisfaction, teacher ratings, and course evaluations across different methods (i.e., face-to-face and online) (Xiang et al., 2017).

Self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) proposes that autonomy, competence, and relatedness are three core psychological needs that serve as sources of motivation for engagement, performance, and learning in various contexts, including classrooms. Autonomy suggests that students get themselves involved in making decisions and choices in their own learning. Competence indicates that learners have a need to become competent and successful in learning activities. Relatedness suggests that students need to feel connected to their teachers, peers, and school (Deci & Ryan, 2000). When students feel satisfied with these needs (known as need satisfaction), they become motivated learners. This, in turn, leads to higher levels of engagement, performance, and learning.

SDT also argues that school represents a social context that meets or hinders students' needs for autonomy, competence and relevance. Both teachers and peers are considered important social actors in this context and what they say and do affects how well students feel and whether they are satisfied with the three needs (Filak & Nicolini, 2018). As a result, teachers are encouraged to support students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness by providing students with instructional choices, various activities in which to participate, adequate time for learning and success, individualized assessment, positive feedback, and opportunities to build social connections in the classroom (Agbuga et al., 2016).

The above theory consists of 3 pillars (autonomy, competence, relatedness) (Figure 1). All 3 pillars together should be analyzed through questions, and the combination will lead to the satisfaction of students' needs.

Figure 1: SDT theory
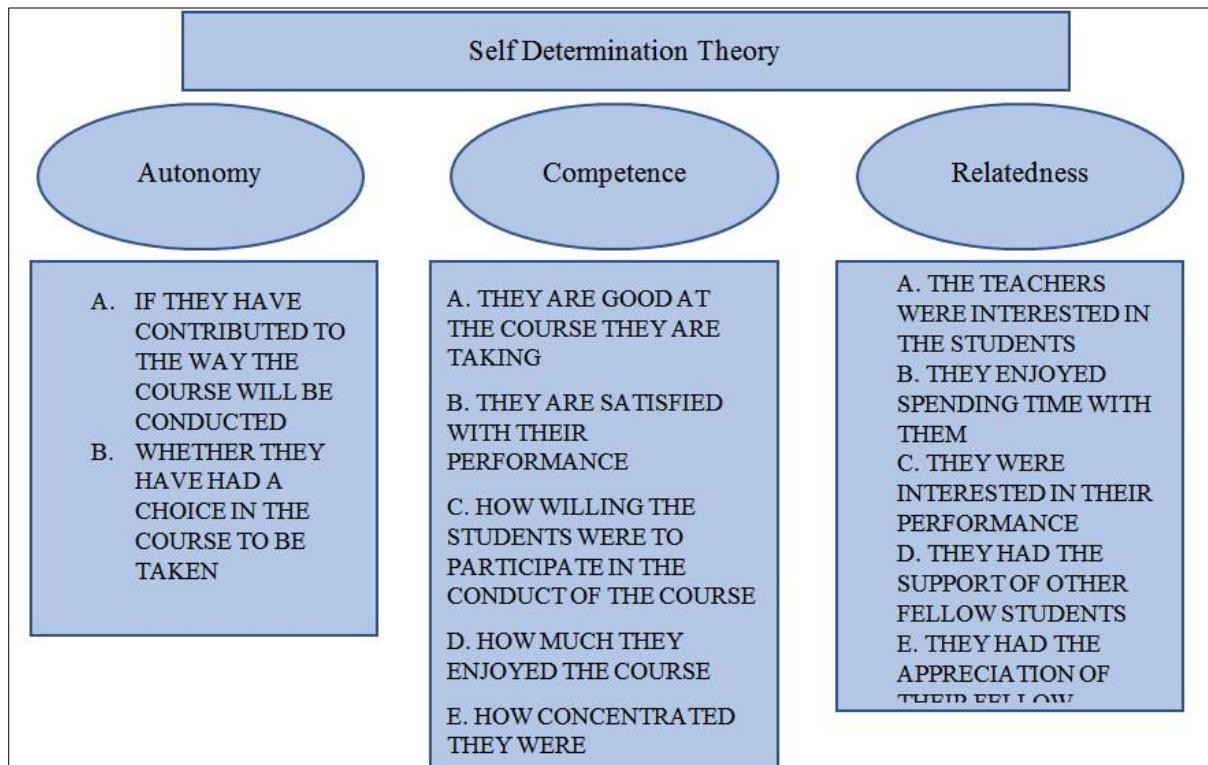
According to the above theory, the researchers in this section came up with the following theoretical framework (Figure 2), which was used to develop the questions.

Figure 2: Satisfaction of needs
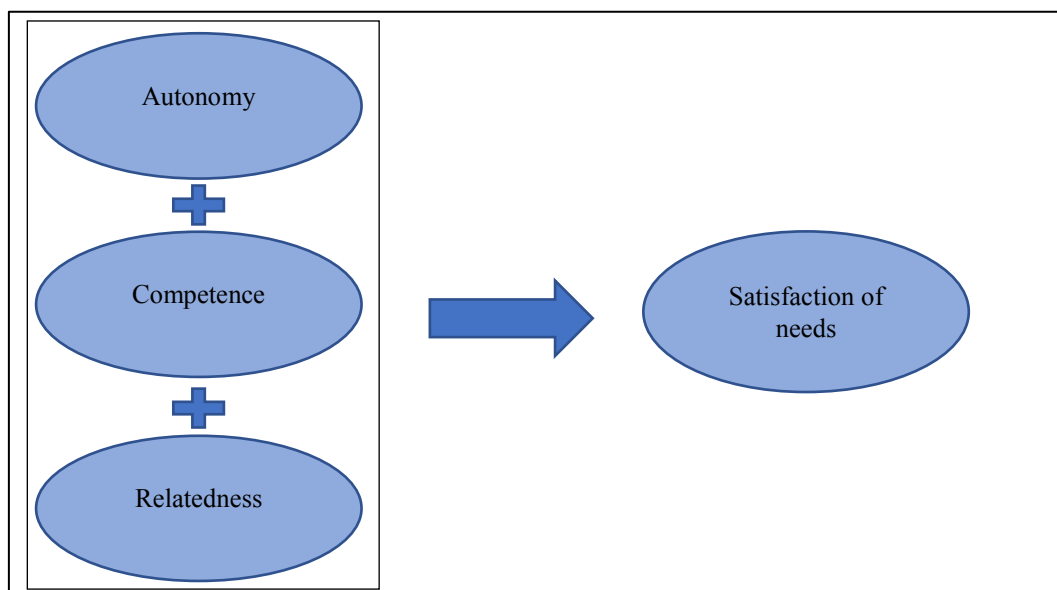
Based on the above, the questionnaire was developed and used for all three surveys. The questionnaire had some general questions at the beginning regarding the difficulties that students may face and then the questions were based on the 3 pillars of the theory.

3. Research Methodology

Surveys are widely utilized in various fields to gather data and extract valuable insights. Quantitative methods provide researchers with a structured approach to collecting, analyzing, and interpreting data from surveys (Johnson et al, 2018). Survey research plays a crucial role in generating empirical data and facilitating evidence-based decision-making in numerous fields. When designing and conducting surveys, researchers must carefully consider the methodology employed to ensure accurate and reliable results. Quantitative methods offer a systematic and rigorous approach to survey research, allowing for the collection and analysis of numerical data (Mohajan, 2020).

In addition, Quantitative methods contribute to survey validity by providing researchers with structured questionnaires and response options. By employing clear and standardized measures, researchers can minimize ambiguity and ensure respondents' accurate interpretation of survey items (Burns et al., 2008). Additionally, quantitative methods enable the use of random sampling techniques, which enhance the external validity of survey findings by representing the target population.

Numerous studies have successfully employed quantitative methods in survey research. For instance, Smith et al. (2019) utilized a large-scale survey with quantitative measures to examine the relationship between social media usage and mental health outcomes. Their study employed Likert-scale items, statistical analysis, and inferential tests to investigate the hypothesized associations.

Quantitative methods play a vital role in survey research, enhancing the validity, reliability, generalizability, and statistical analysis of survey data. By employing structured approaches, researchers can ensure robust findings that contribute to evidence-based decision-making. However, it is crucial to consider the specific research context and adapt quantitative methods accordingly. Through careful design, implementation, and analysis, quantitative methods significantly contribute to the success and impact of survey research (Abowitz & Toole, 2010).

4. Survey Results

Based on the questionnaire, the survey was carried out to show the levels of satisfaction of the participating students and according to the questions, the authors can extract specific diagrams and some basic conclusions about their sample.

4.1 Graphic Analysis of the questions

Figure 3 illustrates that the largest proportion of respondents were male. Furthermore, the average age of the students who participated in the survey is 20.9 years.

Figure 4 shows the origin of the students and from which places they have come to Piraeus to study. With the largest percentage of respondents having come from the major metropolitan areas of Greece, Athens and Thessaloniki.
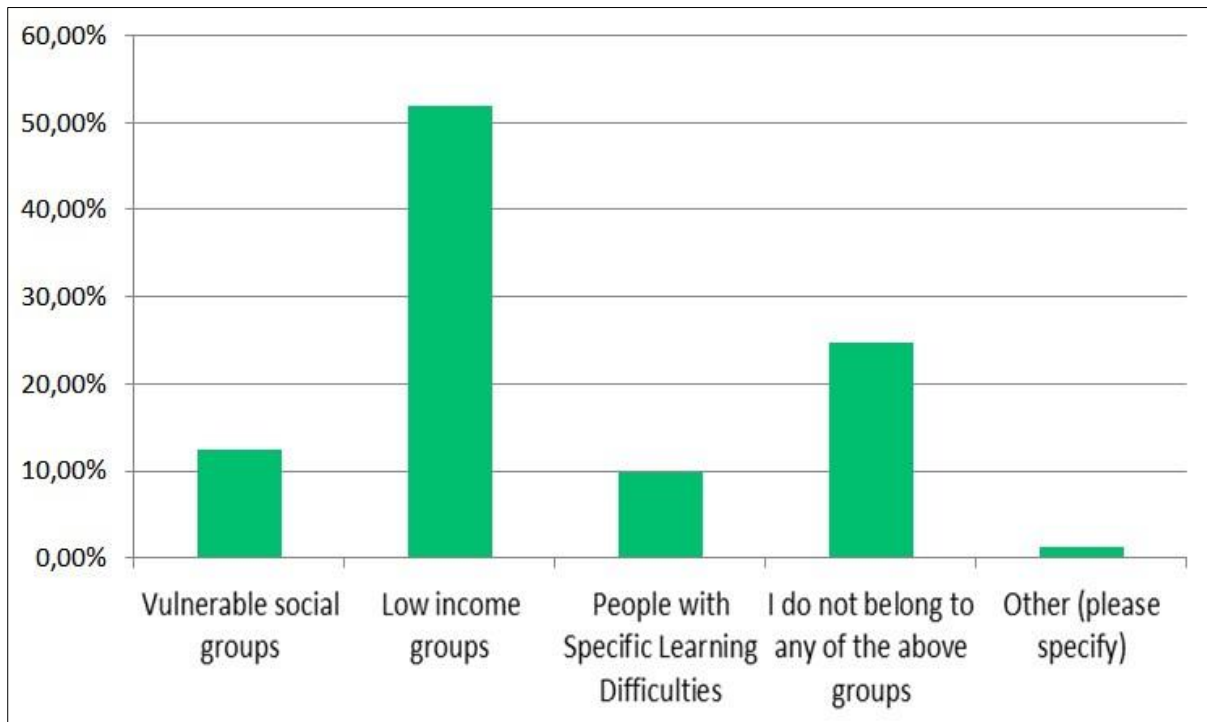
Figure 3: Gender – June 2023
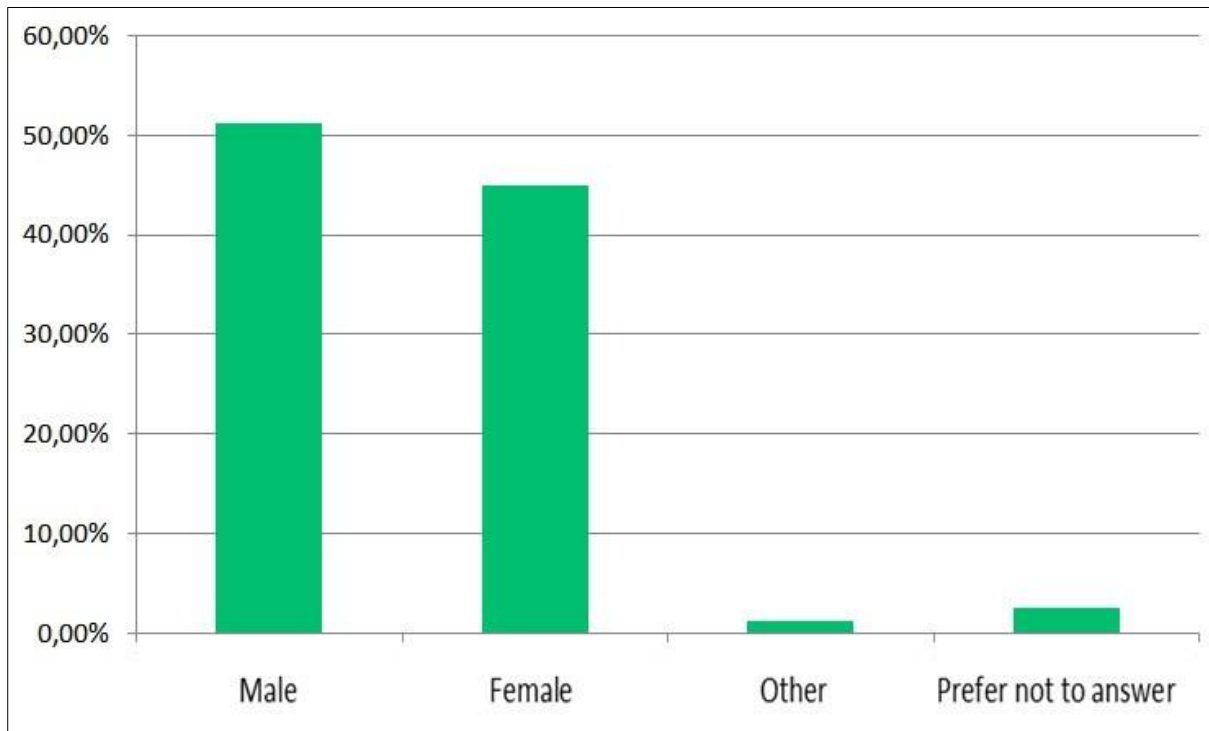

Figure 4: Student origin – June 2023
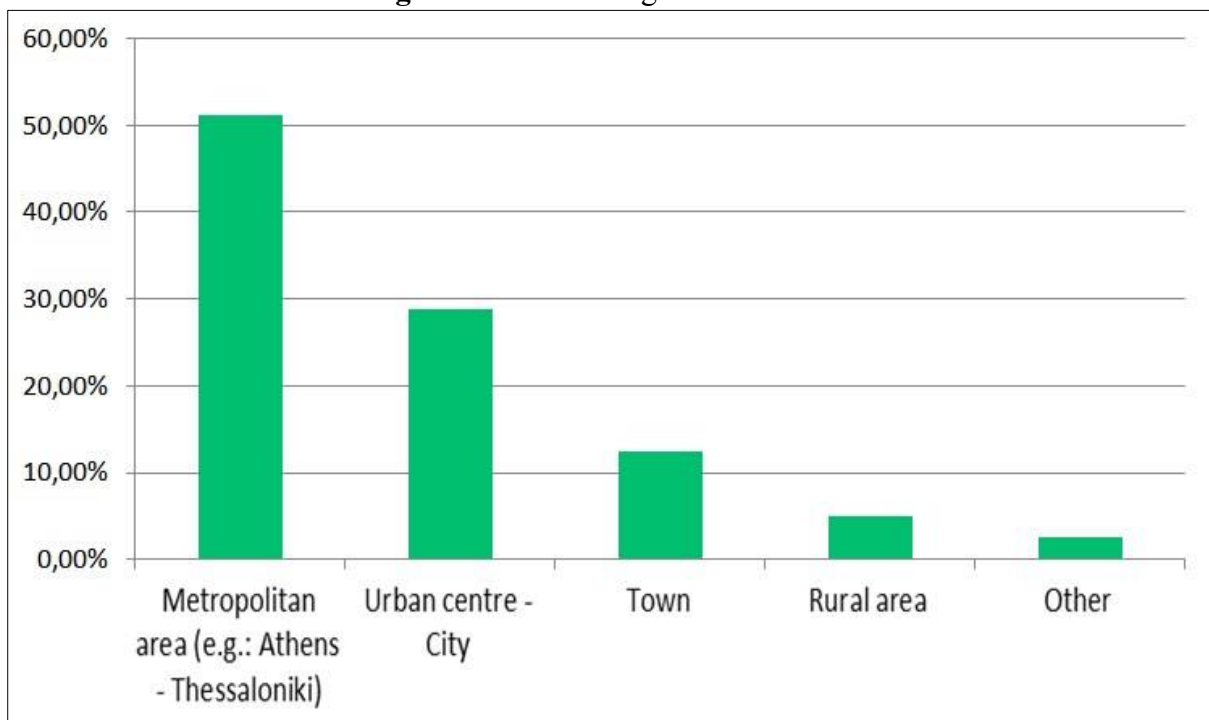
According to **Figure 5**, the groups of students, with the highest proportion, that attended the programme, belong to category of low family incomes.

Figure 5: Student categories - June 2023

In addition, Figure 6 shows that most of the students who participated in the survey were from the departments of Information Technology and Finance and Banking, and then followed by Business Administration and Management.

**Figure 6:** Department of studies - June 2023
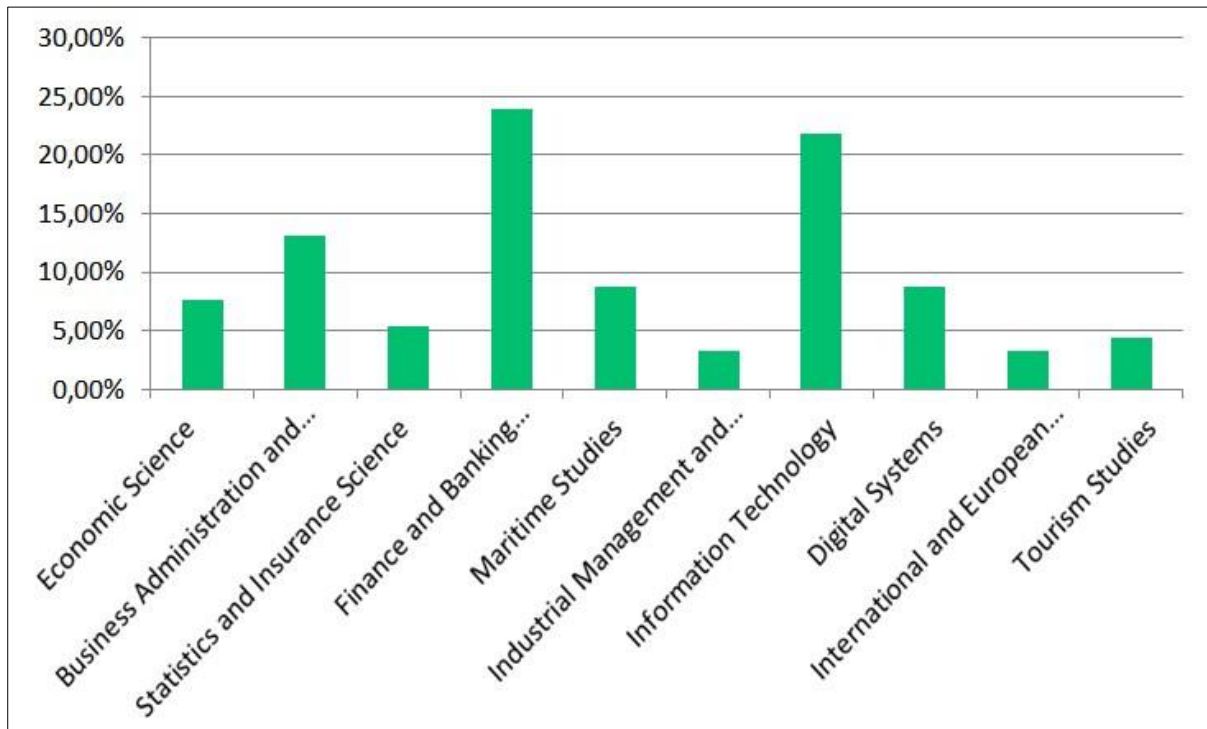
Additionally, most of the students are in the 2nd year of their studies (as it can be observed from the average age of the participants).
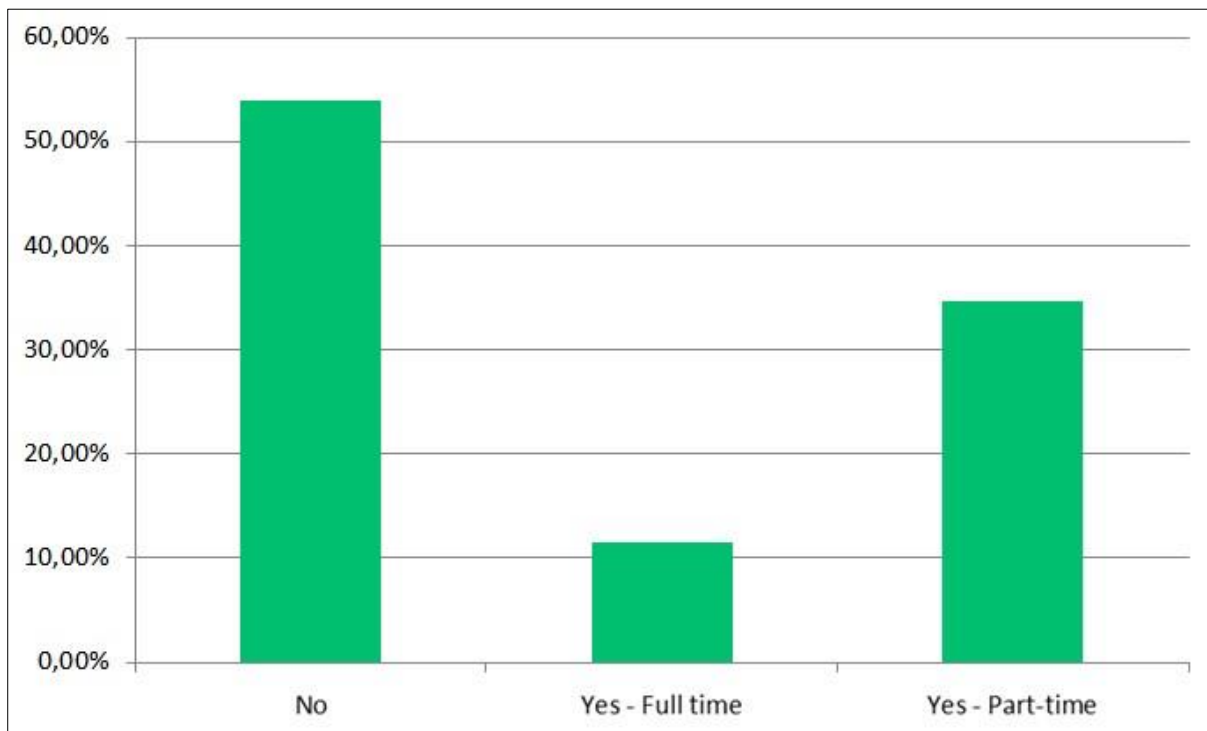
Figure 7: Year of studies - June 2023
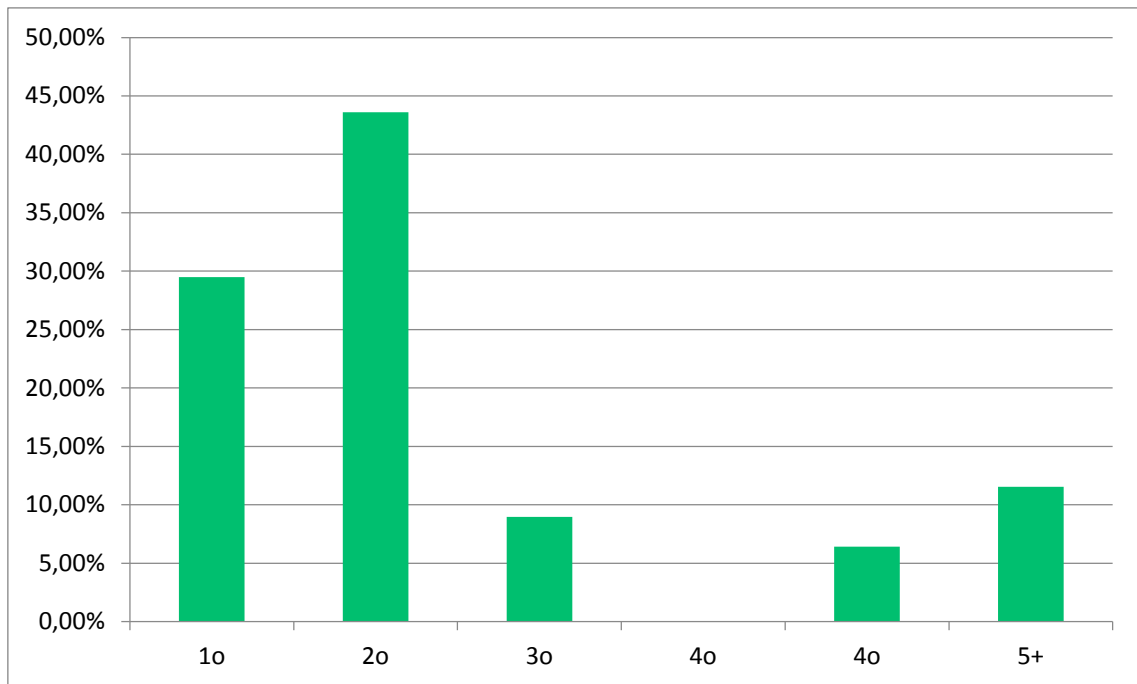
It seems that the majority of the students, almost 40%, that have participated in the programme, have successfully passed most of the courses they have registered for so far (Figure 8).

**Figure 8:** Courses passed - June 2023
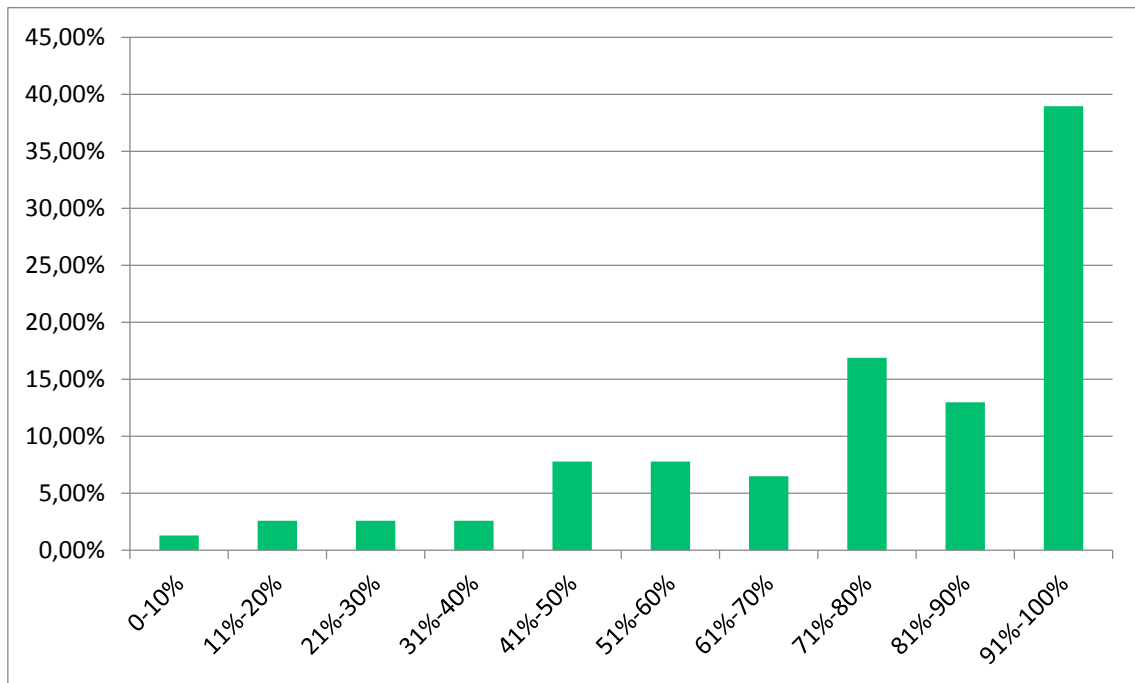
Figure 9: Employment - June 2023

Besides, almost 1 in 2 students in the programme work either part-time or full-time (Figure 9).

As can be seen so far from the graphs above, the largest proportion of participants are people with learning difficulties and low incomes, who are mainly in their 3rd year of study. In addition, most of them come from areas outside Athens and work full or part-time.

**Figure 10:** Autonomy - June 2023
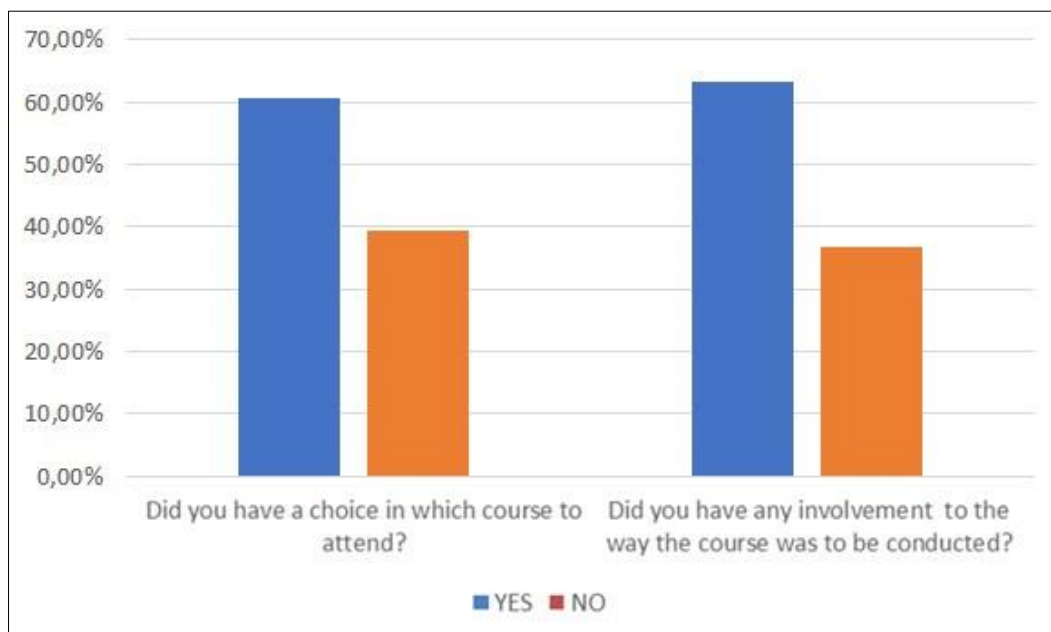
Based on Figure 10, it seems that students got involved in the way the programme was delivered as well as in the choice of courses they would attend.
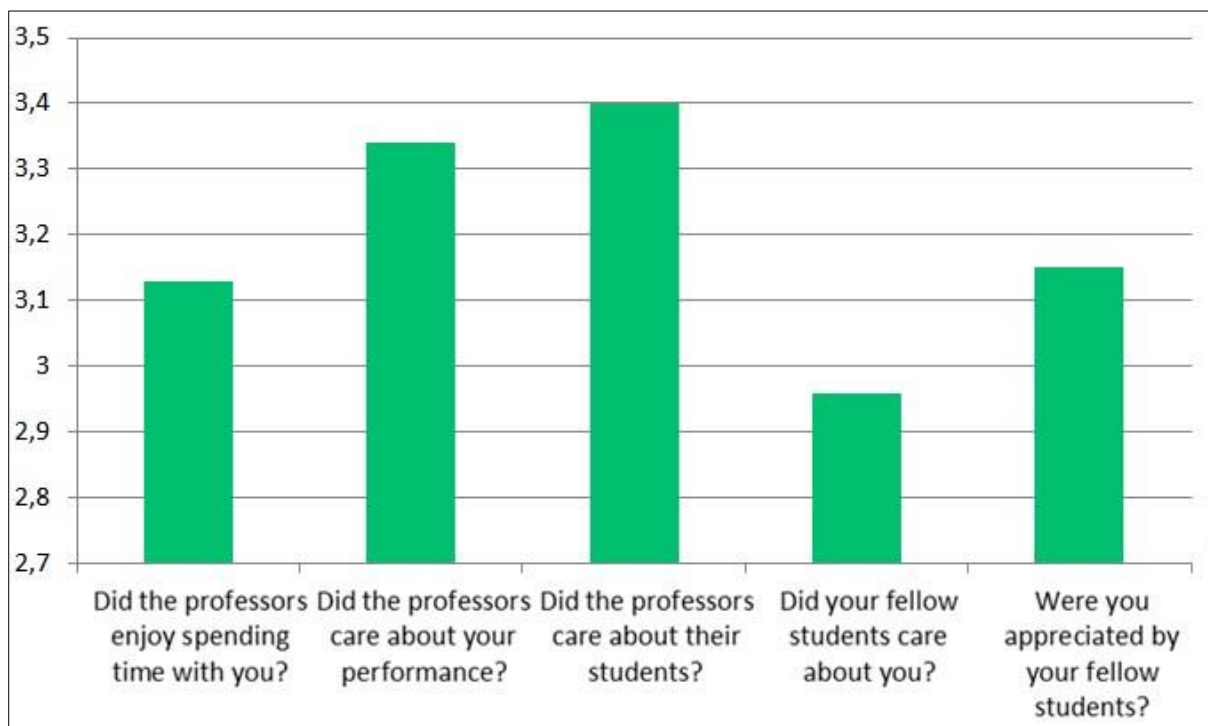
From Figure 11, it can be clearly seen that students were primarily quite willing to participate in the course they were taking, in which they were very keen on, were focused on it and were quite satisfied with the way it was run.
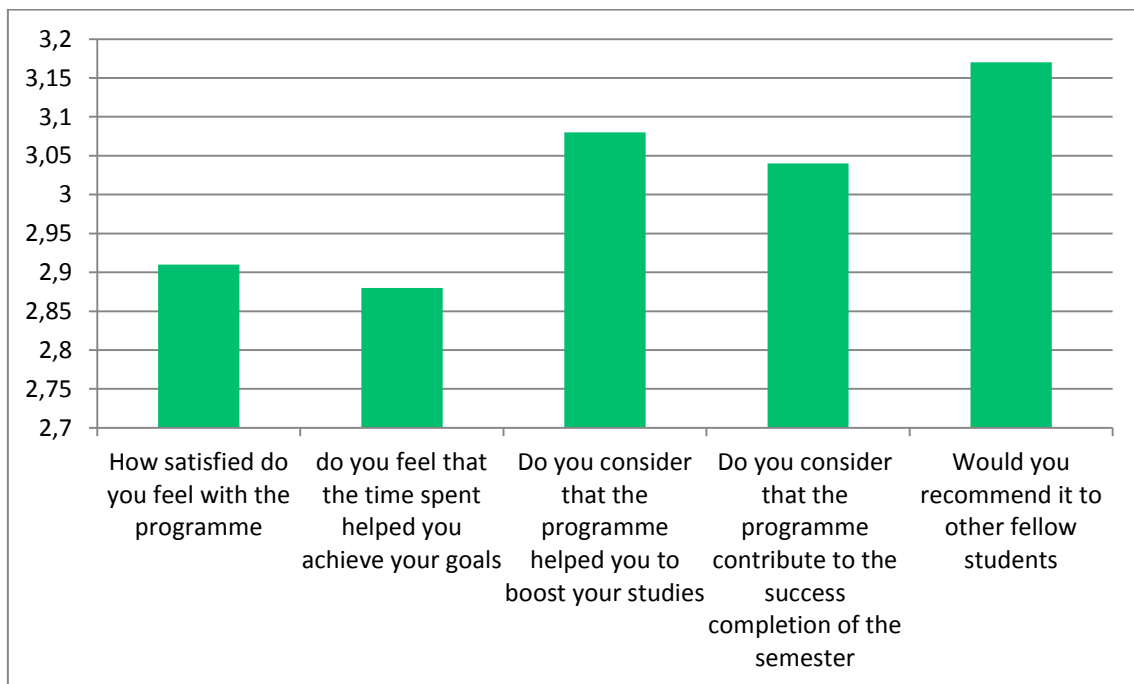
Figure 11: Competence - June 2023
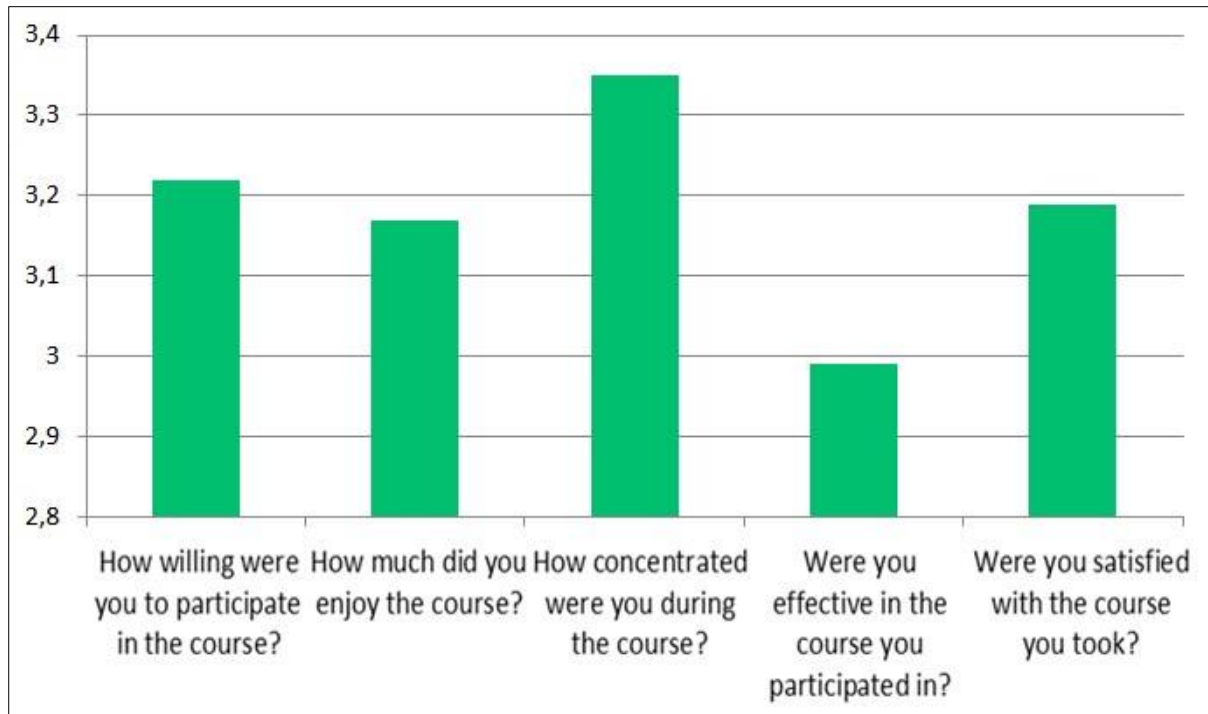
Figure 12: Relatedness - June 2023

According to Figure 12, the researchers noted that their fellow students in the programme did not show enough interest in their performance, but the teachers seemed to enjoy learning with them as well as caring enough about their own students.

Figure 13: Satisfaction of needs - June 2023

Generally, they seem to be quite satisfied with the programme (Figure 13), which is reflected by the fact that they would recommend it to other fellow students.

5. Conclusion

According to the analysis of the graphs that preceded in the previous sections, it appears that the students who participated were mainly from low-income groups and students mainly from large cities. They are, also in the 1st and 2nd year of their studies, which indicates their need to participate and the understanding of the university's concepts. In addition, students who are willing to participate in the programme have a high success rate in the examinations. It is observed that many of the students that participate in the programme work in order to meet their needs (which is related to their low-income category).

Moreover, an important fact regarding "autonomy" is that while at the beginning of the research, students were not involved in how to participate in the delivery of the course, slowly this started to change and the project researchers in collaboration with the respective professors started to improve it for the benefit of the students. In terms of " relatedness", it was observed that both professors and fellow students showed a lot of interest towards the participating students, which enhance the level of productivity.

In terms of "competence", the students (if they had the choice to be in the course) were quite willing to be actively involved during the course and also to remain focused throughout the course. Furthermore, a very interesting finding is that they were satisfied with their professors, who were responsive to their role. Finally, in terms of overall student "satisfaction", the highest percentage said that they would recommend the programme to other students to benefit, and they also consider that the programme led them to complete successfully their exams, enhanced their knowledge and developed their skills. In conclusion, the programme plays an extremely supportive role in the education of students, who come from different social groups and need extra effort in an environment that has the same needs as they do and with teachers who are interested in their progress.

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