

**Student satisfaction with quality assurance of academic programs: students' voice**

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STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC PROGRAMS: STUDENTS' VOICE

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Yours sincerely,  
Professor Ali Ait Si Mhamed

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**Student satisfaction with quality assurance of academic programs: students' voice****Abstract**

Over the past 11 years, Kazakhstani higher education has been involved in reforms of Bologna Process implementation. New amendments to the law on academic freedom, oriented universities to the consumers' voice, and accountability according to the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance. Consumer orientation is becoming a fundamental principle in organizing the educational process, with constant evaluation of student satisfaction with academic programs. Such an issue is unusually strict at private universities that do not present scholarships and wish to keep leading positions in terms of academic competition. This research presents the experience of one private Kazakhstani university in monitoring student satisfaction with academic experience, and the extent students' voice is accounted for in the quality assurance process. The study used a quantitative method, which included a survey focused on students' satisfaction of five areas, including program content and teaching process, assessment and feedback, and learning environment. In light of the ECTS, PLUM regression, and ANOVA analysis are conducted to determine the predictors that influence students' satisfaction and reveal the difference between the year of the study. The results showed that students are mostly dissatisfied with their academic experience as they have no clear instructions and rubrics before the assessment and clear feedback after it, together with the opportunity to implement their knowledge in real life. Moreover, students' voice is not heeded by the students' committees in quality assurance, as they exist mostly on paper in university' annual report. The results of the research will help the university authority understand students' needs and fulfill the gap between primary stakeholders and program designers in building mutual trust and recognition in internal quality assurance of academic programs.

*Keywords:* quality assurance, student satisfaction, academic programs, student's voice

**Студенттердің академиялық бағдарламалардың сапасына қанағаттануы:****студенттің дауысы****Аңдатпа**

Соңғы 11 жылда қазақстандық жоғары білім Болон үдерісін жүзеге асыру аясында көптеген реформаларға тартылды. Академиялық еркіндік туралы заңдағы жаңа өзгертулер ЖОО-ларды жоғары білім беру жүйесіндегі сапаны қамтамасыз ету бойынша нұсқаулық пен стандарттарға сай тұтынушының пікіріне бағдарлайды. Тұтынушыға бағдарлау, академиялық бағдарламаның сапасына қатысты студенттің қанағаттануын үздіксіз бағалау білім беру үдерісін ұйымдастырудың негізгі ұстанымдары болуы керек. Аталмыш мәселе көбінесе мемлекеттік гранттарға сүйене алмайтын, бірақ білім беру нарығында көшбасшылық позициясын сақтауы қажет жеке ЖОО-ларда туындайды. Бұл зерттеуде таңдаған бағдарламалары бойынша ұсынылатын білім сапасына қатысты студенттердің қанағаттануын бағалау саласындағы қазақстандық жеке университеттердің бірінің тәжірибесі, сонымен қатар академиялық бағдарламалар сапасын мониторингілеу үрдісіне өздерінің қаншалықты тартылғаны туралы студенттердің пікірі ұсынылған. Зерттеуде студенттердің бағдарлама мазмұнымен, бағалаумен және кері байланыспен, сонымен қатар ECTS ұстанымдарына сай оқу ортасымен қанағаттану деңгейін анықтауға бағытталған сауалнаманы қамтитын сандық әдіс қолданылған. PLUM регрессиясының реттік үлгісі және ANOVA тесті студенттердің қанағаттануына әсер ететін факторларды, әрі оқу жылына байланысты пікірлердегі айырмашылықтарды анықтауға бағытталған. Нәтижелер студенттердің төмен деңгейдегі қанағаттануына нақты нұсқаулықтар мен білімді бағалау өлшемшарттарының болмауы, оқытушылармен кері байланыс мүмкіндігінің болмауы, сондай-ақ алынған білімнің күнделікті өмірде қолдану мүмкіндігінің болмауы әсер еткенін көрсетуде. Одан өзге



студенттік комитеттер негізінен университеттің жылдық есебінде жазылған, қоғамдық жүктемені атқара отырып, білім беру қызметінің сапасын мониторингілеуде студенттердің қызығушылығын ескермейді. Зерттеу нәтижелері университет басшылығына студенттердің қажеттіліктерін түсінуге және академиялық бағдарламалар сапасын қамтамасыз ету бойынша ішкі үрдісте өзара сенім мен өзара ықпалдасу негізінде білім беру қызметтерін тұтынушылар мен бағдарламаны әзірлеушілер арасындағы алшақтықты жоюға көмектеседі.

*Кілт сөздер:* сапаны қамтамасыз ету, студенттің қанағаттануы, академиялық бағдарламалар, студенттің дауысы.

**Удовлетворённость студентов качеством учебных программ: голос студента****Аннотация**

За последние 11 лет казахстанское высшее образование было вовлечено во множественные реформы в рамках реализации Болонского процесса. Новые поправки к закону об академической свободе, ориентируют вузы на мнение потребителя согласно стандартам и руководству по обеспечению качества в системе высшего образования. Ориентация на потребителя, непрерывная оценка удовлетворённости студента качеством академической программы должны стать ключевыми принципами в организации образовательного процесса. Данная проблема зачастую возникает в частных вузах, которым не приходится рассчитывать на государственные гранты, но необходимо сохранять лидирующие позиции на рынке образовательных услуг. В этом исследовании представлен опыт одного из частных казахстанских университетов в области оценивания удовлетворённости студентов качеством представляемых знаний по выбранной ими программе, а также мнение студентов о том на сколько они вовлечены в процесс мониторинга качества академических программ. В исследовании использовался количественный метод, включающий опрос, направленный на выявление степени удовлетворённости студентов содержанием программы и процессом обучения, оценкой и обратной связью, а также средой обучения согласно принципам ECTS. Модель порядковой PLUM регрессии и ANOVA тест использованы для выявления факторов, влияющих на удовлетворённость студентов, а также разницы во мнениях исходя из года обучения. Результаты показывают, что на низкую удовлетворённость студентов повлияли отсутствие чётких инструкций и критериев оценивания знаний, отсутствие обратной связи с преподавателями, а также отсутствие возможности применить полученные знания в реальной жизни. Кроме того, студенческие комитеты не

учитывают интерес студентов в мониторинге качества образовательных услуг, выполняя в основном общественную нагрузку, прописанную в годовом отчёте университета. Результаты исследования помогут руководству университета понять потребности студентов и устранить разрыв между потребителями образовательных услуг и разработчиками программ, на основе взаимного доверия и взаимодействия во внутреннем процессе по обеспечению качества академических программ.

*Ключевые слова:* обеспечение качества, удовлетворённость студента, академические программы, голос студента

## Table of contents

<b>Chapter One: Introduction and background of the study.....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction.....	1
1.2 Background information .....	1
1.3 Problem statement.....	2
1.4 Purpose of the study.....	4
1.5 Research Question.....	4
1.6 Significance and contribution of the study.....	4
1.7 Outline of the thesis.....	5
<b>Chapter Two: Literature review.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 Introduction.....	7
2.2 Quality and quality assurance.....	8
2.3 Quality assurance in the European context.....	10
2.3.1 The Yerevan Communiqué. ....	11
2.3.2 The Paris Communiqué of 2018. ....	12
2.4 Student satisfaction as a tool of QA measurement .....	12
2.5 Student voice in policy reform of Higher education.....	16
2.6 Summary.....	18
<b>Chapter Three: Methodology.....</b>	<b>19</b>
3.1 Introduction.....	19
3.2 Research design.....	19
3.3 Research site.....	20
3.4 Sample .....	20
3.5 Research methods.....	22

3.6 Data analysis.....	24
3.7 Ethical issues.....	25
3.7.1 Anonymity and confidentiality procedures. ....	26
3.7.2 Risks of the research.....	26
3.8 Summary .....	27
<b>Chapter Four: Findings.....</b>	<b>28</b>
4.1 Introduction.....	28
4.2 Participants' demographics and background.....	28
4.3 Students' attitude to their major choice.....	30
4.4 Students' satisfaction with their academic experience.....	31
4.4.1 'Law' program. ....	31
4.4.2 'Foreign languages' program.....	34
4.5 Students' satisfaction components: a multivariate analysis .....	38
4.5.1 'Law' program. ....	38
4.5.2 'Foreign language' program. ....	40
4.6 Students' voice in the QA process .....	43
4.6.1 'Law' program.....	43
4.6.2 'Foreign languages' program.....	46
4.7 Summary.....	47
<b>Chapter Five: Discussion.....</b>	<b>50</b>
5.1 Introduction.....	50
5.2 'Law' program students' satisfaction.....	50
5.2.1 Program attractiveness and further recommendations. ....	50
5.2.2 Satisfaction with academic experience.....	51
5.2.2.1 Academic program content and teaching process. ....	51

5.2.2.2 Assessment and feedback. ....	52
5.2.2.3 Learning environment. ....	52
5.2.3 Student's voice in QA of the academic program. ....	53
5.3 'Foreign languages' program students' satisfaction.....	53
5.3.1 Program attractiveness and further recommendations.....	54
5.3.2 Satisfaction with academic experience.....	54
5.3.2.1 Academic program content and teaching process. T.....	54
5.3.2.2 Assessment and feedback.....	55
5.3.2.3 Learning environment. ....	55
5.3.3 Student's voice in QA of the academic program.....	56
5.4 Summary .....	56
<b>Chapter Six: Conclusion.....</b>	<b>58</b>
<b>References.....</b>	<b>62</b>
<b>APPENDIX A.....</b>	<b>69</b>

**List of tables**

Table 1. Frequencies for sample population.....	43
Table 2. Frequencies for major choice.....	44
Table 3. Descriptive statistics on Law students' satisfaction with academic experience.....	45
Table 4. Descriptive statistics on Law students' recommendation of the program.....	46
Table 5. Spearman's rho correlation matrix of Law program.....	47
Table 6. Descriptive statistics on FL students' satisfaction with academic experience.....	48
Table 7. Descriptive statistics on FL students' recommendation of the program.....	49
Table 8. Spearman's rho correlation matrix of Foreign languages program.....	51
Table 9. Predictors of Law student satisfaction with the assessment and feedback.....	52
Table 10. Predictors of Law student satisfaction with learning environment.....	53
Table 11. Predictors of FL student satisfaction with the program content and teaching process.....	54
Table 12. Predictors of FL student satisfaction with the assessment and feedback.....	56
Table 13. Predictors of FL student satisfaction with learning environment.....	56
Table 14. Frequency distribution on Law students' voice accountability in the QA process.....	58
Table 15. One-way variance of year of study in Feedback on the Law program.....	59
Table 16. One-way variance of year of study in law students' voice accountability in QA.....	60
Table 17 Frequency distribution on FL program students' voice accountability in the QA process.....	60

## **Chapter One: Introduction and background of the study**

### **1.1 Introduction**

This chapter aims to present the research topic of the study, focused on student satisfaction with quality assurance of academic programs. This section covers the research problem, the research questions and purpose of the study. The framework of the study is also identified and described in this section alongside the significance of the study.

### **1.2 Background information**

This research describes the reality of the internal quality of academic programs in one of the Kazakhstani private universities, student satisfaction with the quality of academic programs, and their views concerning the extent to which their voice as the main consumers heeded in programs' evaluation.

During 25 years of Kazakhstan's independence, the country has focused on being in the top 50 developed countries with a sustainable economy and world-class standards in higher education to prepare professionals in various spheres. In this regard, Kazakhstan has become one of 48 country-members that signed the Sorbonne Declaration in 1998, initiating a wave of coordinated higher education reform through the ECTS in the Republic. This process resulted in the establishment of the Committee on Control of Education and Science in 2004, and the National Accreditation Center (further NAC) of the Ministry of Education and Science in 2005. The main idea of such initiatives was to implement the Bologna Process procedures through accreditation of higher education institutions and their academic programs in accordance with the Guideline of European Higher Education Area (hereinafter EHEA). Both organizations were the founders of the development of the "Strategic Plan on Education 2020" aimed to implement the quality assurance (hereinafter QA) in elementary and secondary level as well as a higher education level (Yakubova, 2009, p. 2).



According to Kovaleva (2016), the first significant decision to support quality assurance formation started at the beginning of the 2000s when a complete transformation of the old education system to the European Credit Transfer System (ECTS) of education started under the order of the MES RK No. 753 in 2005. This process is completely described with ECTS User's Guide 2015 as "description, design, and delivery of academic programs" (p. 18). The involvement of ECTS criteria into the academic sphere helped higher education institutions to implement the QA procedure.

The period of 2010 was remembered for the QA as one of the hot topics discussed not only in tertiary institutions and Ministry of Higher Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan (hence after MES RK), but in the National Register of quality assurance agencies and Independent Agency for quality assurance in education (Bologna process in Kazakhstan, <https://iqaa.kz>), that followed all the standards claimed in the Berlin Communiqué (2003), attempted to enhance the mutual recognition of accreditation and quality assurance decisions of Bergen Communiqué (2005), and adopted European professional frameworks to the national qualifications and outcomes of London Communiqué (2009).

### **1.3 Problem statement**

Over the last nine years, Kazakhstani higher education has been undergoing a series of reforms to implement the Bologna Process. These changes are regularly mentioned in the annual EHEA reports on the Bologna process implementation, where Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan established the successful adoption of the three-cycle system (BA, MA, Ph.D.), recognition of national qualification frameworks, focus on external quality assurance oriented on employability, academic mobility, international accreditation of academic programs, and international university ranking (European Commission/EACEA/Eurydice, 2015, p.17).

However, the last interest serves the new amendments to the law of higher education, where academic freedom of the universities became oriented to the national labor market where students are presented as the main consumers of education services. Thus, Sagadiyev (2018) in his interview to sputniknews.kz commented that "Consumer orientation is becoming a key principle in organizing the internal educational process with constant evaluation of student satisfaction with the quality of academic programs".

However, Kerimkulova and Kuzhabekova (2017), in their research on "Quality Assurance in Higher Education of Kazakhstan," noticed that the main rationale is that universities still limit student freedom in selecting courses, instructors, curriculum or feedback to the quality assurance process (p.105). Such actions could result in low student satisfaction and maybe even loss of interest in the university academic programs. In addition, the OECD Review 2018 points out students' poor background in quality assurance, and as a consequence, low participation in reviewing the learning process and evaluating academic programs (OESD 2018, p. 21).

Such an issue is especially strict with private universities that do not present scholarships and should keep leading positions in the academic attractiveness arena. Constant monitoring is one way to provide students with the opportunity to comment, to suggest improvements to the academic program, and to support the university. In addition, such kinds of feedback enables higher education institutions to benchmark the performance and track the academic program progress.

Despite the annual national reports to OESD, based on data presented by higher education institutions' officials and national agencies on accreditation, the absence of a clear picture of the situation related to student satisfaction with quality assurance is still a big part of the discussion (2018, p.23). These reports add discourse about the students' poor

attitude towards the QA process. Thus, it is crucial to explore the impact of student voice in the QA of academic program and their satisfaction with this process overall.

#### **1.4 Purpose of the study**

The present non-experimental case study aims to explore the QA procedure of academic programs in one of the private Kazakhstani universities by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the results of the survey on undergraduate students' satisfaction with this process. At the same time, this research study seeks to understand the position of student satisfaction with quality assurance and student involvement in this process.

#### **1.5 Research Question**

This quantitative study is guided by the following research questions and sub-questions:

The overarching research questions are:

1. To what extent are undergraduate university students satisfied with the quality assurance (QA) of academic programs at a private university?

Subsidiary questions include:

- 1.1 What attracts students to the chosen programs?
- 1.2 What predictors influence students' satisfaction with the QA?
2. To what extent is a student's voice accounted for in the QA process?

#### **1.6 Significance and contribution of the study**

This research will present the experience of one of the leading private Kazakhstani universities on monitoring how students are satisfied with quality assurance of its academic programs and the way they frame their voice in the quality assurance process.

The main hope is that the results from this research study will be able to assist in a variety of ways. First, the higher school authority will know more about students needs and expectations, take a stock of strategic planning on where and how they should move; and

provide the program with another perspective and performance. Secondly, university authorities can do a better job in the process of monitoring the internal quality assurance process within the framework of the next accreditation. Not only that but involving students and recognizing the importance of their voice is another vital aim of this study that will increase student satisfaction. Hence, students' voices alongside policymakers' opinions should be able to reduce the mismatch between what is written in annual Bologna reports and the real situation in universities.

### **1.7 Outline of the thesis**

To answer the main research question on how university students are satisfied with the quality assurance of academic programs, this research study has been managed in the following way:

Chapter 1 introduces the readers to the main topic providing the background information on the reality in Kazakhstani higher education system and identifying the problem of account of student's voice in QA of the programs followed by the purpose and benefits of the research.

Chapter 2 presents a discussion on student satisfaction with quality assurances from various perspectives, involving the results of the previous studies.

Chapter 3 explains the choice of quantitative design for the study and provides the author's overview of research instruments, sampling procedures, and data analysis procedures.

Chapter 4 discusses the findings that could shed light on students' choice of the program, experience on QA of academic programs and the to what extent their feedback is accounted for in one of the Kazakhstani private universities.

Chapter 5 matches quantitative findings to the literature review results to understand and to analyze the research results more deeply.

Chapter 6 concludes the research paper and revisits the main research question, providing a recommendation for further research and monitoring.

## **Chapter Two: Literature review**

### **2.1 Introduction**

This chapter is an overview of the research topic by means of a critical analysis and synthesis, summary, and challenges to prior research studies and reviews (Carolyn Kelley, 2011, p. 83) on the given topic. The purpose of the present study is to explore the quality assurance procedure of academic programs in one of the private Kazakhstani universities by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the results of the survey on undergraduates' satisfaction with this process.

There is a considerable number of sources of European origin which is devoted to the topic "quality" in education. This fact could be explained by the popularity of Total Quality Management (TQM), Service Quality Measurement (SQM), the Bologna convention, signed by twenty-nine countries on June 9, 1999, and the rapid growth of its participants (48 countries by 2019).

Recently, all Kazakhstani universities have been involved in the implementation of all the standards of that Decree (Kalanova, 2016, p.13). Moreover, the new amendments to the Law on Academic Freedom dated July 4, 2018, whereby academic freedom of Kazakhstani universities was expanded up to 85%, led university governments to revise academic programs, and to orient to the world labor market-based philosophy and Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area. Such competition, followed by both toughening the requirements on the part of consumers themselves to the quality of academic programs, and Kazakhstan's entry into the European Higher Education Area, has led that consumer orientation is becoming a fundamental principle in organizing the educational process. Moreover, satisfied consumers are more likely to be loyal to the program, thus supporting the image of the major after graduation.

In addition, students' voices in evaluation enables program coordinators to benchmark the program performance and track the information useful for new applicants.

The implementation of this principle involves the constant quality assurance monitoring system and should answer the question of to what extent undergraduate university students are satisfied with the QA of academic programs. Such a question is especially crucial with private universities that do not present scholarships and should keep leading positions in the academic retail environment.

To present the existing literature review comprehensively, the studies were grouped under the following sections: quality definition in the context of the Standards for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and Kazakhstani frames; student satisfaction as a tool of quality assurance (hereinafter QA) measurement; and role of students' voices in ongoing feedback that may result in academic program revision and reinvention. Before starting the discussion, it is vital to understand the nature of quality assurance.

## **2.2 Quality and quality assurance**

Though QA dates back more than 25 years (Harvey & Green, 1993) in the quality management system of the economic sector, it was adopted to the higher education system by the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) only in 2005 (Standard of QA, 2005). Initially, it was problematic to find an explicit definition or explanation of Quality Assurance as it was a subjective user-based approach that helped to determine the quality of a product or service. This general business definition appeared in the western business world within the boundaries of the late 1950s and early 1960s. The statistics of that period showed that the leading companies were those that met quality standards and were oriented to the customer's satisfaction with their services (HsuEmail, 2019, p. 352).

It is very significant to distinguish the multiplicity of QA philosophy that predominated both in manufacturing and in the non-manufacturing business. Although the manufacturing sector was mostly aimed at training employees how to solve the problems and improve performance, non-manufacturing business (education, in our case) was based on the "watchdog" approach, state control, professional obligations, internal audits, and standards<sup>1</sup>.

There are different approaches to the quality definition. Thus, Harvey and Green (1993) define quality as "exceptional perfection, fitness for purpose, and value for money, and transformative" (p.15) in comparison to Chandru (1999), who claimed that the QA concept has strict interpretation in the industry; however, it is still a challenge to interpret in higher education (p.18).

To contradict this idea, this research follows a new vision on the concept of quality assurance presented by Cardoso, Videira, and Amaral (2016), who offered to analyze QA in higher education from three different perspectives: "quality as culture, as compliance and as consistency" (p. 3). In their case, the first perspective includes both cultural and structural elements and constitutes the institution's values, expectations, and commitments, involving the academic community. The second perspective, quality as compliance, is linked to the institutions adhering to quality policies and guidelines that are externally defined by the legal requirements of the national system, sometimes leading to unintended consequences. That is the way institutions determine these policies, how they understand the quality, and how it is assured. To accentuate the main idea of the perspective, the authors agree with Cullis (2018), who also advances that the perspective is aimed at increasing transparency, effectiveness, and responsiveness of the universities to external

<sup>1</sup> See Kovács, Gábor, Bálint & Niel (2006) for more information on "watchdog" approach.  
[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266373049\\_Watchdog\\_-\\_A\\_Practical\\_Approach\\_of\\_Fault\\_Detection](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/266373049_Watchdog_-_A_Practical_Approach_of_Fault_Detection)



requirements (p.10). The quality of consistency, in this case, covers a recent notion of QA that is focused more on its academic processes and results. Moreover, it links to academic standards that help assess and validate the entire higher education process and their final results (Jessop, McNab, & Gubby, 2012, p. 144), including teaching, learning, and research outcomes (Kohoutek, 2013, p. 313). This concept is quite close to Harvey and Green's (1997) traditional QA mechanisms but aims to follow the academic standards, which are widely spread in the European Higher Education Area and defined by the Ministry of Education or accreditation agencies (p.17).

### **2.3 Quality assurance in the European context**

This section delineates the main tendencies and changes that the quality assurance phenomenon has undergone over the last few decades in the higher education system. Recent European QA analyst, Blackstock (2019), Dietrich (2019), and Navracsics (2018), underscore five critical periods of quality assurance policy formation that changed the existent vision on this phenomenon in education: meeting of the 29 ministers at the Sorbonne University (1998), the Bologna declaration signing (1999), the Prague Communiqué of the European education ministers (2001), the Yerevan Communiqué (2015) and the Paris Communiqué (2018) with the strategy of quality assurance development in European Higher Education Area for the years 2018-2020. According to the Bologna Implementation Report 2018, these events and the reforms affected the area of the 48 countries-participants, even those that are beyond Europe by 2018 (p. 8).

Navracsics (2018), in the European Higher Education Area in 2018 Bologna process implementation report, claimed: "This geographical evolution illustrates the impact the Bologna Process has had – and it highlights Europe's potential to set high standards for modern and relevant educational provision" (p. 5). To put it bluntly, this statement proves the fact that these meetings and documents initiated a European collaboration process that

has significantly changed the whole higher education process management. Moreover, the analysis of the chronology over the past years' results of 48 countries' collaboration helps us to look through the path of quality assurance formation in the European Higher Education Area.

**2.3.1 The Yerevan Communiqué.** The Bologna process is based on the issues of higher education quality improvement, which can be traced back to evolution of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA). It was the Yerevan Communiqué (2015), where two relevant documents were adopted to enhance quality assurance in European higher education systems (p.1). The first document presented "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG, 2015) that divided the quality assurance definition into internal and external standards. According to the standards, internal quality assurance is aimed at providing internal work of higher education institution in "quality policy; that is design and approval of the programs; student-teaching learning and teaching assessment; student admission and teaching staff; learning resources and student support; information management; on-going monitoring; and periodic review of programs" (ESG 2015, p. 8). External quality assurance standards consider "the issues with consideration of internal quality assurance; collaboration with employers and experts; criteria for outcomes; reporting; complaints and appeal" (ESG 2015, p.14).

The second document involved the new Guide on the European Credit transfer system (hereinafter ECTS). Both documents were meant to be implemented into the education system of all countries-participants of the Bologna process and aimed to give a new life to the quality assurance process.

The report of 2015 provided the fact that quality assurance was growing dynamically. Thus, Loukkola (2015), in his article "A snapshot on the Internal Quality Assurance in EHEA," pointed out both positive and negative aspects in quality assurance

of that time. Thus, he mentioned "positive development of transparency requirements in state higher education systems and tendency in the development of quality assurance strategies in higher education institutions" (p. 16). Thus, according to OSGE 2015, 90% of the countries had institutional strategic documents or equivalent documents. However, analysts expressed their concern about the lack of stakeholders' participation in the quality assurance process. As it turned out, the students' participation has not been developed at all since 2001 (p. 308).

**2.3.2 The Paris Communiqué of 2018.** Three-year work practices have proven that "The Standards and Guidelines for quality assurance in the EHEA" are integrated into national quality assurance practices among two-thirds of countries (ESG 2018, p. 32). However, Paris Communiqué (2018) requires further development and implementation of the issues of involving students as the main stakeholders in quality assurance activities for the 2018-2020 period (p. 4). According to the report, students are less positive about their participation than ministers in their reports (p. 8). The above-presented results are discussed in the research on student satisfaction with services (Alani, Yaqoub, & Hamdan, 2014; Startup, 2015); with degree programs (Lemmer & Muller, 2011); with teaching assessment (Marks, Haug, & Huckabee, 2016); student satisfaction with curriculum and learning process (Smith & Worsfold, 2014).

## **2.4 Student satisfaction as a tool of QA measurement**

A vast competition among the admission offices to attract more potential consumers to their newly renovated programs resulted the amendments in Law "on education" in 2018 on academic freedom, and with a decreased number of those, who passed the United National Test in 2019 (44386 pupils out of 77 000 applicants among 144 089 pupils, i.e., 15 % less than in 2018). These challenges regarded education like a business industry where higher education institutions play the role of "service providers,"

and students are "main consumers" ("UNT starts in Kazakhstan on June 20, 2019" report; Grubert, at el., 2010, p. 108).

Undoubtedly, such a tendency in modern education may change "students' position into the consumer's, whose satisfaction will be vital for further development and functioning of academic programs, especially in the private education sector. That means that a student-centered learning approach is presented not only in the teaching process but also in quality assurance of the services presented by the academic program (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006, p. 259)

Over the past nine years, when the Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the EHEA presented an updated version with "1.3 Standard on student-centered learning, teaching and assessment", a significant number of studies were conducted to measure student satisfaction (p.15). Thus, 1.3 Standard points out: "Institutions should ensure that the programs are delivered in a way that encourages students to take an active role in creating the learning process and that the assessment of students reflects this approach" (ESG 2015, p. 8).

To put it another way, student feedback and active enrollment in academic program design are essential for universities in program revision, an avenue through which a competitive advantage can be gained with a stable positioning in the market of higher education.

Studies have shown that definition of satisfaction is interpreted in scientific literature as a measurable indicator of effectiveness (Lemmer & Muller, 2011, p. 422), short-term attitude to the experience (Frawley, Goh, & Law, 2019, p. 6; Han at el, 2018, p.114; Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker & Groggaard, 2002, p. 186); or judgment of expectation (Appleton-Knapp & Krentler, 2006, p. 256; Marks, Haug, & Huckabee, 2016, p. 285). The study supports the notion that satisfaction is a product of the perceived quality assurance of

academic services and student's experiences. Despite the variety of aspects of university life, such as experience with administrative services or social environment (Gibson, 2010, p.5) the term experience in this case connotes “academic experience” with program content, teaching process, assessment and feedback, and learning environment.

The existing literature suggests that there are various views on student satisfaction measurements. Thus, some researchers discuss students' expectations as the main predictors; the others highlight the dimensions that affect the experience and help measure satisfaction. In a study by Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006), two types of factors, personal and institutional, are presented that influence on student satisfaction. The first category of factors presents gender, age, religious beliefs, year of study, and grade point average, while the second category involves the instructor's teaching style, quality of assessment and instructions, clarity of feedback, and learning environment facilities (p. 255). Thus, Roff (2019) insisted that the year of study influences a student's attitude to the study. The senior students are the less satisfied than the freshmen. Tontodonato (2006), in her study on student satisfaction with criminal justice majors, revealed that GPA has an effect on student satisfaction. The more higher the GPA, the more satisfied the students are with their academic experience. Furthermore, female students with a higher GPA are more satisfied than men (p.169).

Four years later, Gibson (2010) insisted on academic and non-academic factors that have similar characteristics and contribute to overall satisfaction. Findings indicated that academic factors included quality of education process (teaching and learning), skills enhanced by the program; and non-academic issues included the learning environment, society and students' feelings. The author claims that such academic factors as student-faculty interaction during research projects or discussion of assessment criteria or feedback influence positively students' satisfaction as the more student discussed the criteria

together with the professor, the greater the student felt satisfied with the learning process (p.251).

Smith & Worsfold (2014) found that student satisfaction is best explained by the clear content of the curriculum and career skills orientation. Surprisingly, quality of instruction and class size used by the researchers as main predictors were not found to be significantly related to the students' satisfaction (p.1080).

Kara and DeShields (2004) investigated faculty and the methods they use while presenting the material as the main factors that impact student satisfaction with the program and university as a whole (as cited in Smith & Worsfold, 2014, p.1082). The researchers proved that the more positive an attitude to the faculty students have, the more often they choose their courses, especially elective courses. However, South Korean researchers Han, Kiatkawsin, Kim, and Hong (2018) insist on cognitive factors that influence student satisfaction. The authors agree with Kotler and Fox (2015), who suggested that despite the high rate of satisfaction with programs, students were not satisfied with the emotional environment in the class and other services such as consulting and academic advising (p. 114). In addition, Weerasinghe1, Lalitha, & Fernando (2017) assert that academic facilities like libraries, auditoriums, and social areas are the physical factors that strongly influence levels of student satisfaction (p. 539).

Despite the variety of claims, the student satisfaction concept, presented by Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker, and Groogaard (2002), is quite relevant to this case study as it measures satisfaction from three perspectives: psychological type, job-type, and consumer-type (p. 534). According to the concept, psychological type focuses on students' personal attitude to the program attractiveness, the job-type presents expectations and plans; and consumer-type represents regular experience in academia. This research will focus on the presented concept as it reflects both expectations and experiences that influence student

satisfaction and further program recommendation; that is student experience and attitude toward quality of academic programs (design, content, relevance); quality of teaching (student-centered learning, assessment, supervision, and feedback); academic staff (teaching activities); quality of support facilities; social climate; information access. The ideas of this concept became the standards of internal quality assurance in "Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in the European Higher Education Area" (ESG, 2015).

## **2.5 Student voice in policy reform of Higher education**

This section has discussed in length the importance of focusing on quality assurance from the students' perspective and their involvement in this process. The authors of the European Student handbook on QA in Higher education (2001) claim that students are the only regular experts of QA as they are the ones for whom education has been primarily designed (p. 44). According to Marris (1964), in his study on higher education: "Whatever allowance is made for their immaturity, students are still the best judges of a course of lectures, if only because they are generally the only people who listen to them" (p. 54). The essence of Marris's argument is that students are the only consumers involved in the education process and are those who are most interested in their results.

In a period of academic freedom, the higher education institutions cannot ignore students' voices; they must be the central participants who can give the real evaluation and feedback on internal quality assurance of the academic program (ESG, 2015, p.18). However, Wehlburg (2006), in her book "Meaningful course revision," insists on similar roles of both students and faculty for quality assurance and course enhancement. The author claims that students do not always know what they will need to know, while faculty knows how to create courses and learning environment that encourage students to work hard and to learn (p. 24). It is a contradictory statement as there has been a little empirical investigation of the student role in quality assurance assessment. Thus, only a few

European sources comment on this issue: Comparative Study on Students Involvement in Quality Assurance (2015) and European Student handbook on QA in Higher education (2001). Both legal documents present the idea of the importance of student involvement in quality assurance assessment. The first one describes the experience of Student quality committees in such countries as Latvia, Estonia, Romania, Prague, Portugal, the UK, Serbia, and Spain, together with neighboring countries Georgia and Moldova. In these ten countries, these committees are part of the whole structure of the higher education institution TQM with the primary purpose of assisting in internal QA evaluation that is to present necessary information about actual and perceived strengths and weaknesses of the program. Members of these committees are not appointed but elected by student communities and are independent of the university authorities.

Moreover, Sears et al. (2017) persisted on the necessity of senior students' membership in such communities and defending freshmen's voices in courses feed-backs and revision with university authority (p.156). Green, Hood and Neumann (2015) invoked to amplify student voice accentuating on social and academic maturity of senior students.

Independent Student quality committees of the European countries (Germany, Poland, Bulgaria, Spain, Norway and Italy) are attended with such participants who conduct various questionnaires or surveys, based on their own experiences or using managerial theories. The UK universities tend to follow the annual National Student Survey, developed by the national student committee, and includes an assessment of academic programs with the following rubrics: learning opportunities; assessment and feedback; academic support; organization and management; learning resources; learning community; and student's voice (ESHBQAHE, 2001, p.37). The main idea of such survey is not only to present students' opinion but to involve them into the process of internal quality assurance (QAA, 20117, p. 10).



Latvian and Estonian higher education institutions prefer the SERVQUAL framework, based on the quality management theory assessing the services offered to the consumers (CSSIQA, 2015, p.75) .

Another 38 countries together with Kazakhstan are at the stage of student involvement. In most countries, university services responsible for internal assessment are responsible for student social life in reality. Although Kazakhstani universities mention in their reports that students are involved in the assessment process, the statistics of the National Accreditation Center of Kazakhstan do not reject that these results of the majority of them are only on paper and students are frequently ignored (National Report of the Republic of Kazakhstan regarding the Bologna Process Implementation 2012-2015, 2012, p.32).

## **2.6 Summary**

The present literature review revealed a variety of concepts related to the topic of quality assurance and student satisfaction. However, there is still an issue that runs like a golden thread through the presented articles on student satisfaction with quality assurance and student voice in quality assurance evaluation. The plethora of authors such as Appleton-Knapp and & Krentler (2006), Lemmer & Muller (2011), Marks, Haug & Huckabee (2016), Weerasinghe<sup>1</sup>, Lalitha & Fernando (2017) in the different periods discussed the phenomena of student satisfaction with quality assurance. The documents developed by the European Student union and European Higher Education Area claim that satisfaction with quality assurance of academic programs contributes to further development of these standards.

### **Chapter Three: Methodology**

#### **3.1 Introduction**

This chapter will provide the researcher's philosophical view on the methodological aspect of the presented study, followed by the research design, sampling procedures, data collection instruments, data analysis, and limitations of the study. The quantitative research design will find the best answer on how university students are satisfied with the quality assurance (QA) of academic programs at a private university, as it is the best model of systematic collection of data (Tolmie, Mujis, McAteer, 2011, p.3) that values breadth, statistical description, objectivity and causal relations and correlations (Leavy, 2017, p.87).

#### **3.2 Research design**

The philosophy of this study is based on the pragmatic view, which generates the use of quantitative non-experimental research. This choice is justified by the fact that it allows examining the relationship between variables in real circumstances (Cresswell, 2009, p. 27).

To understand the QA of academic programs as a process, I considered participants' major choice, academic experience and further program recommendation, and the extent undergraduate students' voice heeded in the QA procedures, employing the survey design. According to Mujis (2011), surveys are typically used for ascertaining an individual's attitudes, opinions, or the reporting of the experiences (p.30), asking standardized questions that can be analyzed statistically. Moreover, cross-sectional methodological design in survey research was used, as the information was sought from one sample and at one point in time to investigate one private university case-study.

The chosen method has its origin in the conceptual framework of Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker, and Grogaard (2002), who used three perspectives on the phenomenon of satisfaction: psychological, job-type, and consumer types perspectives (p. 185); and

Gibson's (2010) academic and non-academic factors that contribute to overall satisfaction (p. 252). The concepts of these authors are retraced in the Standards of Quality Assurance of the European Higher Education Area.

### **3.3 Research site**

The Kazakhstani higher education system has undergone radical changes over the past decade. The academic policy has altered significantly because of the Bologna convention membership and academic freedom, presented by the Ministry of Education in 2018. These changes encouraged many university programs to compete in terms of attractiveness of their revised programs. Universities have become more corporate in their outlook and objectives, entrepreneurially establishing new subject areas and programs to increase the number of consumers and to generate revenue, where students are promised high-quality teaching, excellent facilities, and high standards of the organization throughout their experience. Moreover, unlike publicly funded institutions, private institutes' income stems primarily from student enrolment, and that can be traced back to the quality they offer (Han, Kiatkawsin, Kim, & Hong, 2017, p. 117).

The survey will be conducted in one of the private Kazakhstani universities with 21 years of education experience and one of the first higher education institutions that adopted Magna Charta Universitatum in Bologna (Italy) in 2007; qualified with recognition of the Independent Accreditation-rating Agency in 2017; and provided with the academic right to issue its diplomas and certificates since 2017. The institute realizes training in the field of national law, economics, humanities, and pedagogical sciences is highly competitive in the modern professional labor market.

### **3.4 Sample**

To identify the participants for the survey, sampling techniques were used to involve "those who will be and are available to be studied" (Teddlie & Tashakkori, 2009, p.

170). Undergraduate students of the 2d, 3d and 4th year enrolled in one Higher School that offers two academic programs: 5B030100 "Law" and 5B011900 "Foreign languages" were invited to complete the online Qualtrics survey uploaded in the Platonus platform with the assurance of full confidentiality and use of the information solely for academic research purposes. Platonus is the learning management platform used by the university to inform, assess, and engage students in the educational process. To ensure anonymity, participants were advised to omit their names and the ability to leave if they felt at all uncomfortable about the questions or topic.

The choice of the programs was initiated with the Provost as the most prosperous in academic studies and in admission. Some rationales that pertain to such a choice include the fact that these students:

- have enough experience in core and elective courses and are able to evaluate the content, teaching process, assessment, and learning facilities offered by the programs;
- are acquainted enough with the Higher School academic policy and standards, research, and instruments.
- are offered by the university authorities as an outcome assessment and part of strategic plan of further accreditation process. The high school where these prosperous programs are housed has a considerable number of students (380 students of the "Law" program and 320 students of the "Foreign languages" program) with high GPA (2.67-4.0) and “outcome assessment” requirement mentioned in the Academic Catalog.

The survey resulted in the participation of 174 respondents of both programs (n=87; 87). Among them, 104 students with the Kazakh language of instruction and 70 students with the Russian language of instruction.

### 3.5 Research methods

To answer the research question on how university students are satisfied with the quality assurance of academic programs, a cross-sectional survey study among undergraduates was used to obtain the information. I employed this form of design for two reasons: the relative ease to administer the variables and the design of the questions (Groves et al., 2009, p. 37).

Survey procedure was carried out at one point in time by the respondents of the 2d through 4th year of study within a cross-section of the target population. The survey included potential dependant and independent variables that were examined subsequently in a tighter fashion as they were found to be correlated.

Response items of the survey are divided into positive responses when students are offered to choose from several alternative possibilities. Likert scale items predominate with five explicit points: strongly disagree (1), mostly disagree (2), neither agree or disagree (3), mostly agree (4), strongly agree (5).

The survey instrument was created to get background information, to measure student satisfaction with quality assurance of academic programs, to determine the factors that could influence this satisfaction, and to elicit the extant students' voices are accounted for in the evaluation process.

The survey was the primary instrument, based on the UK National Student Survey (hereinafter NSS), and on the Standards and Guidance of Quality assurance in Higher Education Area, renewed and adopted by the European Student Association in the 2015 year on the items of the Yerevan Communique. The survey aims to assess internal quality assurance, to improve the student experience and to inform students' choices ("Office for students," n.d.). As the chosen university follows the European standards of Quality assurance, it seems obvious to implement the ready-made instrument to measure student

satisfaction with quality assurance of academic programs in our case. This choice proves the validity of the instrument.

The survey depicted the respondents' answers according to five sections: participants' background (gender, academic program, year of study, the language of the primary instruction, GPA) and four blocks according to the internal QA criteria (academic program content and teaching process; feedback and assessment; learning resources and environment; and student's voice) (see Appendix A).

The survey was translated and conducted in three languages according to the language of the study (Kazakh, Russian, and English) and passed the pre-test procedure. The e-format of the survey was designed in the Qualtrics platform. The reliability of the instrument was ensured by employing Cronbach alpha procedures in the SPSS. The thirty items of the survey possess internal consistency with  $\alpha=0.72$ .

The survey implementation process seemed to stick to some limitations. Having presented survey questions to the university authorities, it was challenging to convince them to leave items on evaluating "the feedback and assessment" block, as well as the students' opinion on to what extent their interests are taken into account in ensuring quality. As a result, questions were left, but the academic programs of only two specialties "Law" and "Foreign Languages" were recommended for the survey.

The next problem was related to the motivation of students to participate in the survey. Respondents did not participate in the online interview within ten days after its publication on the Platonus platform. As a result, it was decided to conduct the on-paper survey. Having learned the timetable of undergraduate students, the on-paper survey was conducted at the beginning of the lectures or during the long breaks. During the paper questionnaire, it turned out that many students did not participate in the online version because of anonymity, fearing that their IP addresses would be determined; another group

of respondents mentioned they do not regularly visit the platform and are not interested in the information.

### **3.6 Data analysis**

This section will describe the procedure of data analysis and assessment, interpretation and representation, ethical issues, and limitations.

Having been awarded ethical approval from the Nazarbayev University GSE Research Committee to conduct the research, the data collection process was organized through several stages. Following the comments of the Committee, some corrections were discussed with the supervisor and changed. After revisions, I organized the cover letters and sent them to the private higher education institutions all over the Kazakhstan. The search for the research site was not a secure way. Seven higher education institutions refused to participate in the survey, mainly because they did not want to share their experience in current academic freedom conditions, and only one private university agreed after survey questions discussion. A cover letter on the request form JSC Nazarbayev University together with the letter of appreciation, was sent to the institute authorities. Then the deans and program coordinators of “Law” and “Foreign languages” academic programs were contacted and discussed how to administer surveys among students.

Having gathered data on paper, I entered it to the Qualtrics platform and saved the cover version in the adviser’s office. One hundred seventy-four respondents out of a planned 206 students, participated in the survey.

Thus, having entered the data into the “Statistical Package for Social Science” software (SPSS) version 1.2, suggested by JSC Nazarbayev University, and cleaning the missed answers, the data analysis was conducted.

I used descriptive statistics to analyze the background of the sample and noted the response bias (Creswell, 2014, p. 201). It should be noted that participants with missing

scores were eliminated from the data analysis. The study uses ordinal variables that are presented with experience. The variables used in the study are ordinal (Lickert scale experience), nominal (gender, major, the language of instruction, payment), and continuous (year of the study, students' GPA).

The second stage involved parametric inferential statistics in looking at the students' choice of the major, experiences and students' role acceptance in the QA process, where Spearman Rho correlation coefficients were measured.

Thus, to compare the nominal variable of gender and ordinal variables of students experience, I utilized Cross-tabulation (Muijs, 2011, p. 118). I also used the Pearson Chi-square test to reveal the differences between fluctuation and correlation coefficient to explore whether there is a relationship between the ordinal variables of academic experience (Muijs, 211, p. 134).

The bi-variate analysis helped find the relationship between variables and determine those that have significance with student satisfaction and academic experience.

Finally, I applied a multivariate analysis to explore the predictors that could influence student satisfaction. In this case, Polytomous Universal Model (hereinafter PLUM regression) was conducted. The analysis revealed six factors that influence student satisfaction in 3 different blocks of the survey. Moreover, to reveal to what extent students' voice is heeded in the QA process by year of study within two programs, I used a three-way ANOVA and Scheffe test as "the analysis of variance" (Tolmi, Muijs, McAteer, 211, p.255) where the effect of a year of study factor differed according to the case's variable on two other factors of the year of study.

### **3.7 Ethical issues**

To commit to the mixed methods research, and not to marginalize the participants, ethical issues were taken into consideration. The ethical principles were maintained during



the whole process of the research and followed the norms of the NU GSE Ethical Committee.

Once the approval was confirmed, the process of data collection was initiated. As the survey was organized with e-version and on-paper, the purpose, procedures, and consent form were included before the question part. Having agreed with the conditions, participants were able to continue the survey.

The letters of permission, together with Ethical Approval, were sent to the Chancellor and Provost. Additionally, personal meetings with the Provost and Chancellor were conducted in order to explain the purpose and details of the research.

Getting the oral and written permission, the survey link was sent via the Platonus learning platform to the recipients. The survey access was open from December 1, 2019, until January 15, 2020. The On-paper process was organized from December 18 to December 28, 2019. Raw data of the surveys is stored only in the researcher's personal computer that has security with a strong password and will not be shared with any third parties. The paper version is saved in the adviser's office.

**3.7.1 Anonymity and confidentiality procedures.** The survey was anonymous and did not need email addresses or any personal identification. As mentioned earlier, students were invited with the advertisement uploaded via the Platonus platform with the link to the survey and during personal visits to the lectures and long breaks. The data is used only for research purposes and will not be shared with any third parties.

**3.7.2 Risks of the research.** There is a minimal risk for the participants of this research as we have no vulnerable participants. All names of the participants are anonymized. Minimal risks could be about identifying the name of the university, as there are a few private universities in Kazakhstan. To minimize this risk, the researcher avoided any descriptive details that might direct readers to the name of the university.

### **3.8 Summary**

In summary, the quantitative method design and tools presented above clarify the research process and present the nature of the planned case-study research. The results will be discussed in the Findings and Results chapters.

The results of the research will help the university authorities to monitor the internal quality assurance process and to involve better recognition of students' voice in it. Policymakers will be able to reduce the mismatch between what is written in the annual Bologna reports and the real situation in universities.

## **Chapter Four: Findings**

### **4.1 Introduction**

This chapter presents the findings of the quantitative data analysis utilized in this research. The findings are derived from the survey of undergraduate students of two different academic programs from one private Kazakhstani university. The chapter is aimed at revealing student satisfaction with the academic programs and students' voice accountability in the quality assurance procedure.

Thus, to address students' background, major choice and satisfaction with academic experience, a descriptive analysis, along with a Spearman Rho's correlation model, was conducted. The PLUM regression helped identify predictors that could influence students' satisfaction with academic experience. Cross tabulation with Chi-square and ANOVA analysis were used to calculate the effect of the year of study on students' voice accountability in the quality assurance process.

### **4.2 Participants' demographics and background**

The descriptive analysis of the data (Table 1) revealed that the number of undergraduates who participated in this research was 174 of which 39,3% were from 5B04201- Law academic program and 41,3% were consumers of 5B011900 - Foreign languages academic program (hereinafter FL).

The analysis showed that among 174 respondents, more than half (66,7%) were female students, with only 26,9% male representatives, while 4% chose to conceal their gender priority. The age of the participants was not requested in this survey and was out of the scope of the study; however, the year of the study was more crucial because students of the 2d, 3d and 4th year have enough experience to understand their role and give dimension to the quality of the academic program in particular. Thus, 52,2% of the students were the representatives of the third year of study, 29,4% of the students were

halfway through their academic path, as they have been studying for two years, and 16,4% of the respondents were fourth-year graduates of academic programs. The undergraduates surveyed within this research were from various language programs of the university. The undergraduates studied the program where the Kazakh language or Russian language were the primary language of academic instruction. Precisely, 46,8% of students with the Kazakh language and 48,3% of students with the Russian language were surveyed.

**Table 1***Frequencies for sample population*

Variables	Labels	Majors				<i>Total</i>
		Law		FL		
		<i>N</i>	%	<i>N</i>	%	
Language of the study	Kazakh	17	21	70	84	87
	Russian	62	78	12	14	74
	Total	78	89	82	98	160
Gender	Males	41	52	4	5	45
	Females	35	44	79	95	114
	Total	76	96	83	100	159
Year of the study	2d year	10	13	42	36	52
	3d year	40	51	39	31	79
	4 <sup>th</sup> year	29	36	1	31	30
	Total	79	100	82	98	161
GPA	4.0-3.67	31	39	31	37	62
	3.3-2.67	37	47	47	57	84
	2.33-1.67	11	14	5	6	16
	Total	79	100	83	100	162
Funding	state scholarship	0	0	2	2	2
	self-payment	76	96	76	91	152
	other	2	3	3	4	5
	Total	78	99	81	97	79

Almost two-thirds of the respondents have a successful academic performance with a GPA of 2,67 to 4,0. Thus, the independent variables used in this part of the demographic analysis gave credibility to data collection.

### 4.3 Students' attitude to their major choice

Students of both programs were asked to choose more than one offered answer to the question on why they chose their program (Table 2). The results revealed from the univariate analysis that the most common reason was to gain skills and knowledge (69,6% and 65,1%). Other frequent answers included that it is 'to be a qualified specialist in their field' (51,1% and 61,4%) or that this choice 'helps to get into future work' (46,7% and 35,2). About one-fourth of the Law students are sure that their future job is well-paid.

**Table 2**

*Frequencies for major choice*

Variables	Law		FL	
	N	%	N	%
to gain skills and knowledge	64	69,6	54	65,1
to be qualified as a specialist in this field	47	51,1	51	61,4
to help me get into future work	43	46,7	37	35,2
to follow my parents choice	71	82,3	43	46,7
to have a well-paid job	40	42,4	29	31,4
to progress onto another course or higher education	33	32,6	25	17,4
to help other people	19	14,1	6	7,2
to meet people and make new friends	19	14,1	19	14,1

However, the number of students noted that they have selected their major to help others (14,1% and 7,2%). Beyond these seven top reasons, students also explained their choice because their relatives had already studied these programs or they could be accepted even with low national test scores. Surprisingly, over half of the respondents (82,3% and 71,2%) appeared to have chosen their majors because of family influence. That might mean that students of these two programs have a lower level of self-autonomy in their choice of the field of study. This result is like anecdote evidence that prosperous students frequently choose their programs because of the parents' choice. However, it seems interesting to measure both fields of students' satisfaction with academic experience and to reveal whether they recommend their programs to other future applicants.

#### 4.4 Students' satisfaction with their academic experience

**4.4.1 'Law' program.** These findings from the survey are about the level of satisfaction with QA among students of the Law program. The descriptive statistics of academic experience demonstrated that the majority of the participants are satisfied with their academic experience and would recommend their academic program to the next generation of applicants (Table 3). Strongly satisfied students constituted the large share of students' population of the Law program (51,7%); these statistics are followed by those who are satisfied (32,2%).

**Table 3**

*Descriptive statistics on student satisfaction with academic experience*

Labels	Law academic program	
	<i>f</i>	%
definitely disagree	3	3,4
mostly disagree	5	5,7
neither agree nor disagree	6	6,9
mostly agree	28	32,2
definitely agree	45	51,7
Total	87	100,0

The next step was aimed to measure whether students recommend their program if they are satisfied with their academic experience (Table 4). Thus, the students of the Law program would recommend it (76,7%), and only 9,4% of the respondents would not recommend applicants choose this program in the future. Such distributions within the answers could be the result of students' academic experience. However, Spearman's Rho correlation model gives us more information about students' experience as it calculates the correlation coefficient and statistical significance (p-value) between ordinal variables. A preliminary correlation matrix was constructed to analyze the data. The output, presented in a symmetrical table (Table 5), exhibited a moderate relationship among some survey items.

Thus, it showed that there is a positive and strong relationship between the variables of grading according to the criteria and their clear explanation ( $r = .73$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 85$ ). In other words, the more clearly students are explained about the criteria about assessment, the more they are satisfied with their grading. I also became curious of the positive relationships between students' satisfaction with constructive feedback and assessment criteria that were explained in advance. That means that, the better students discuss the criteria the more clear is the feedback to them ( $r = .61$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 87$ ). Besides, there is a positive moderately relationship between students' satisfaction with constructive the comments and opportunities to gain knowledge ( $r = .60$  and  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 86$ ). That means the more constructive the comments are for students, the more knowledge they gain within the framework of their academic program.

**Table 4**

*Descriptive statistics on Law students' recommendation of the program*

Labels	Law academic program	
	<i>f</i>	%
definitely disagree	4	4,7
mostly disagree	4	4,7
neither agree nor disagree	12	14,0
mostly agree	23	26,7
definitely agree	43	50,0
Total	86	100,0

Access to the internet and library resources variables have a good moderate relationship ( $r = .59$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 85$ ). This shows that the better the learning environment is, the more satisfied students are with the quality of academic assurance provided by the university. It is worth to add that there is a significant positive strong relationship ( $r = .76$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 87$ ) between satisfaction with academic experience and further recommendations of the program to those who apply for it.

Table 5

*Spearman's rho correlation matrix of Law program*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1 The program is logically structured.	-																			
2 Program has provided with opportunities to explore knowledge.	,43**	-																		
3 Program has provided with opportunities to enhance professional competences.	,42**	,56**	-																	
4 Program has provided with opportunities to apply the knowledge I gained in practice.	,38**	,46**	,55**	-																
5 The content of the courses is clearly and availably described in the academic catalogue.	,36**	,34**	,36**	,39**	-															
6 This program required much of my effort to complete it	0,02	0,16	,31**	,28**	0,13	-														
7 My schedule works well for me.	,44**	,37**	,38**	,45**	,36**	0,19	-													
8 Any changes in the program have been communicated duly.	,39**	,34**	,39**	,33**	,28**	,32**	,48**	-												
9 Instructors and lecturers explain things clearly	,44**	,41**	,33**	,34**	,51**	0,15	,46**	,56**	-											
10 Instructors and lecturers use various methods of teaching the material	,22*	,24*	,32**	,31**	,30**	,25*	,33**	,46**	,53**	-										
11 The assessment criteria are clear and explained (or communicated) in advance.	,50**	,52**	,44**	,36**	,31**	0,1	,38**	,42**	,43**	,36**	-									
12 Course assignments are graded according to the criteria.	,45**	,53**	,55**	,43**	,42**	0,13	,52**	,50**	,56**	,42**	,73**	-								
13 Instructors provided me with timely feedback on my assignments.	,35**	,49**	,35**	,40**	,37**	0,11	,38**	,32**	,47**	,45**	,50**	,68**	-							
14 My instructors are available to discuss feedback.	,39**	,33**	,34**	0,2	,31**	0,12	,27*	,41**	,44**	,55**	,50**	,52**	,48**	-						
15 I have received constructive comments on my papers.	,41**	,60**	,36**	,37**	,46**	0,12	,42**	,48**	,55**	,43**	,61**	,57**	,55**	,56**	-					
16 I have had access to technical resources that supported my learning well or that helped me to complete the course successfully	,27*	,31**	,30**	0,2	0,07	0,05	,33**	,29**	,30**	,34**	,49**	,36**	,23*	,46**	,49**	-				
17 The library resources have helped me to complete the course successfully.	0,2	,28*	0,15	0,17	0,08	-0,07	,28**	0,17	,25*	,22*	,34**	,34**	,27*	,27*	,38**	,59**	-			
18 I had an access to course-specific resources	,36**	,30**	,30**	,24*	,24*	-0,03	,29**	0,18	,41**	,26*	,42**	,44**	,28**	0,19	,34**	,37**	,40**	-		
19 I am satisfied with my study experiences.	,53**	,42**	,36**	,33**	,46**	0,09	,54**	,27*	,48**	,25*	,52**	,54**	,47**	,50**	,60**	,50**	,37**	,40**	-	
20 I would recommend this program to my relatives and friends.	,36**	,43**	,38**	,28**	,41**	0,14	,43**	0,21	,48**	0,14	,49**	,54**	,54**	,43**	,48**	,33**	,26*	,29**	,76**	-

Note. N = 88. \*p&lt;.05; \*\*p&lt;.01



A positive moderate relationship was also discovered among the student satisfaction with academic experience and both the way lecturers explain the material ( $r=.542$ ,  $p=.00$ ,  $N=80$ ) and the variety of methods they use to present knowledge ( $r=.551$ ,  $p=.00$ ,  $N=82$ ).

**4.4.2 ‘Foreign languages’ program.** This set of findings derived from the survey about the level of satisfaction with academic experience among FL program students. The descriptive statistics of students’ academic experience in Table 6 showed that strongly satisfied students constitute the largest share of the student population of the program (35%); these statistics are followed by those who are satisfied (31,3%).

**Table 6**

*Descriptive statistics on FL students’ satisfaction with academic experience*

Labels	Foreign languages academic program	
	<i>f</i>	%
definitely disagree	4	5,0
mostly disagree	12	15,0
neither agree nor disagree	11	13,8
mostly agree	25	31,3
definitely agree	28	35,0
Total	80	100,0

However, the analysis showed that 20% of students are unsatisfied with their academic experience, which means that there are some threats, and we should determine them in our further analysis.

The results of the frequency distribution on whether students recommend the program to the future applicants proved the predictions on positive correlation, as 58,5 % of the respondents would definitely recommend whereas another half of the respondents would hesitate (24,4%) or do not recommend at all (17,1%) (Table 7).

**Table 7***Descriptive statistics on FL students' recommendation of the programs*

Labels	Foreign languages academic program	
	<i>f</i>	%
definitely disagree	5	6,1
mostly disagree	9	11,0
neither agree nor disagree	20	24,4
mostly agree	22	26,8
definitely agree	26	31,7
Total	82	100,0

Further analysis attempts to determine the predictors that could influence students' satisfaction with QA. The same principle as with the Law program was used to determine the degree of the relationship between the variables according to Spearman's rho formula (Table 8). It helps us understand whether there was a relationship between respondents' experience and the level of satisfaction. The correlation analysis showed that there is a statistically significantly positive and strong relationship ( $r = .829$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N=83$ ) between received constructive comments and availability to discuss feedback. Moreover, the students are satisfied with the opportunity to discuss feedback and the promptness of its provision. There is a positive moderate relationship between these ordinal variables ( $r = .629$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 82$ ). There is also a positive moderate relationship between prompted feedback and the detailed criteria that students were explained in advance ( $r = .661$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N=87$ ). That means that students are satisfied with the clear criteria and teachers' feedback. That is one of the significant issues of internal QA, according to the Bologna process. The better and more clear the criteria of assessment are, the more clear is feedback to the students.

One more important aspect of QA is the program content and teaching process. The conducted correlation elicited a significant positive, moderate relationship between the opportunities to explore knowledge and to enhance professional competences ( $r = .664$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 84$ ); among enhancement of professional competences and their involvement in

real practice ( $r = .629$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 83$ ). That might mean that the more opportunities students are provided with, the more satisfied they are with their academic experience, and the more relevant content of the program is planned ( $r = .676$ ,  $p = .00$ ,  $N = 83$ ). That might mean that when more newsworthy material is presented, the more students are satisfied with their academic experience.

Overall, bi-variate analysis of both programs suggests that there is a relationship between the variables of academic experience, program content and teaching process, assessment, and feedback blocks. Moreover, respondents are satisfied with the learning environment that was created by the university: access to technical resources, library resources, and course-specific resources that support students' learning and helped to complete courses successfully.

Despite the analysis, it is still hard to deduce whether those who hesitate are satisfied with their academic experience and quality assurance and what factors influence their level of satisfaction. Multivariate analysis will attempt to answer this question. Moreover, Polytomous universal model (PLUM) will consider the probabilities of reaching a threshold of the dependent variable counting on the response to the independent variable (Mujis, 2011, p.165).

**Table 8***Spearman's rho correlation matrix of Foreign languages program*

Variables	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20
1 The program is logically structured.	1																			
2 Program has provided with opportunities to explore knowledge.	<b>,676**</b>	-																		
3 Program has provided with opportunities to enhance professional competences.	<b>,507**</b>	<b>,664**</b>	-																	
4 Program has provided with opportunities to apply the knowledge I gained in practice.	<b>,550**</b>	<b>,524**</b>	<b>,629**</b>	-																
5 The content of the courses is clear and available as described in the academic catalogue.	<b>,558**</b>	<b>,383**</b>	<b>,493**</b>	<b>,409**</b>	-															
6 This program required much of my effort to complete it	<b>,433**</b>	<b>,284*</b>	0,173	<b>,339**</b>	<b>,426**</b>	-														
7 My schedule works well for me.	<b>,398**</b>	<b>,467**</b>	<b>,457**</b>	<b>,444**</b>	<b>,395**</b>	<b>,381*</b>	-													
8 Any changes in the program have been communicated duly.	<b>,387**</b>	<b>,231*</b>	<b>,220*</b>	<b>,284**</b>	<b>,406**</b>	<b>,313*</b>	0,2	-												
9 Instructors and lecturers are good at explaining things clearly	<b>,468**</b>	<b>,442**</b>	<b>,480**</b>	<b>,441**</b>	<b>,327**</b>	<b>,264*</b>	<b>,519**</b>	0,215	-											
10 Instructors and lecturers use various methods of teaching the material	<b>,273*</b>	<b>,282*</b>	<b>,370**</b>	<b>,528**</b>	<b>,296**</b>	0,078	<b>,407**</b>	0,108	<b>,611**</b>	-										
11 The assessment criteria are clear and explained in advance.	<b>,246*</b>	0,081	0,177	0,164	<b>,321**</b>	0,13	0,196	0,127	<b>,286*</b>	<b>,282*</b>	-									
12 Course assignments are graded according to the criteria.	<b>,343**</b>	0,215	<b>,261*</b>	0,198	<b>,312**</b>	0,173	<b>,361**</b>	0,199	<b>,384**</b>	<b>,281*</b>	<b>,607**</b>	-								
13 Instructors provided me with timely feedback on my assignments.	<b>,343**</b>	0,183	<b>,278*</b>	<b>,417**</b>	<b>,252*</b>	0,173	0,174	0,202	<b>,399**</b>	<b>,398**</b>	<b>,661**</b>	<b>,568**</b>	-							
14 My instructors are available to discuss feedback.	0,202	0,162	<b>,283*</b>	<b>,247*</b>	<b>,317**</b>	0,028	<b>,290**</b>	0,009	<b>,486**</b>	<b>,448**</b>	<b>,554**</b>	<b>,454**</b>	<b>,629*</b>	-						
15 I have received constructive comments on my papers.	<b>,255*</b>	0,213	<b>,364**</b>	0,167	<b>,402**</b>	0,041	<b>,346**</b>	0,072	<b>,530**</b>	<b>,412**</b>	<b>,619**</b>	<b>,476**</b>	<b>,611**</b>	<b>,829**</b>	-					
16 I have had access to technical resources that supported my learning well or that helped me to complete the course successfully	0,193	<b>,228*</b>	<b>,321**</b>	<b>,289**</b>	0,179	0,187	<b>,309**</b>	0,214	<b>,415**</b>	<b>,380**</b>	<b>,438**</b>	<b>,327**</b>	<b>,430**</b>	<b>,617**</b>	<b>,627**</b>	-				
17 The library resources have helped me to complete the course successfully.	<b>,271*</b>	0,144	<b>,315**</b>	<b>,340**</b>	0,213	0,218	<b>,407**</b>	0,186	<b>,435**</b>	<b>,339**</b>	<b>,385**</b>	<b>,440**</b>	<b>,509**</b>	<b>,517**</b>	<b>,517**</b>	<b>,672*</b>	-			
18 I have been provided with access to course-specific resources	<b>,344**</b>	<b>,392**</b>	<b>,417**</b>	<b>,367**</b>	<b>,226*</b>	0,064	<b>,324**</b>	0,003	<b>,396**</b>	<b>,353**</b>	<b>,426**</b>	<b>,353**</b>	<b>,399**</b>	<b>,530**</b>	<b>,538**</b>	<b>,609*</b>	<b>,44**</b>	-		
19 I am satisfied with my study experiences.	<b>,446**</b>	<b>,415**</b>	<b>,337**</b>	<b>,491**</b>	<b>,353**</b>	<b>,290*</b>	<b>,551**</b>	0,15	<b>,623**</b>	<b>,542**</b>	0,211	0,215	<b>,389**</b>	<b>,495**</b>	<b>,431**</b>	<b>,447*</b>	<b>,41**</b>	<b>,466**</b>	-	
20 I would recommend this program to my relatives and friends.	<b>,336**</b>	<b>,290**</b>	<b>,362**</b>	<b>,331**</b>	<b>,349**</b>	0,039	<b>,258*</b>	0,204	<b>,374**</b>	<b>,298**</b>	<b>,231*</b>	<b>,247*</b>	<b>,413**</b>	<b>,426**</b>	<b>,428**</b>	<b>,271*</b>	<b>,33**</b>	<b>,285**</b>	<b>,589**</b>	-

Note. N = 87. \*p&lt;.05; \*\*p&lt;.01

#### 4.5 Students' satisfaction components: a multivariate analysis

This section is aimed at calculating regression and revealing the factors that affect the students' satisfaction responses with QA of the programs.

**4.5.1 'Law' program.** According to the analysis, the model fits better than the baseline model with no predictors ( $p\text{-value}=.000$ ) and has a strong level of fit (Nagelkerke  $R^2 = .797$ ).

The results of PLUM regression analysis elicited that not all ordinal variables have a significant relationship, and as a result, could be the predictors that influence student satisfaction with QA in this case-study (Table 9). Thus, there was no confirmation for significance among the program content and teaching process variables. However, there is a significance with assessment criteria, grading, and feedback.

To understand the predictors better, the Lickert scale gradation of the responses, where 1 is "strongly disagree," 2 is "mostly disagree," 3 means "neither agree or disagree," 4 means "mostly agree," and five means "strongly agree" was applied. The results suggest, for example, that those who mostly agree ( $p=.04$ ) that the assessment criteria were clearly explained are less likely satisfied with their academic experience.

**Table 9**

*Predictors of Law student satisfaction with the assessment and feedback*

Effect	Estimate	SE	W	df	p	95% CI	
The assessment criteria are clearly explained in advance =2	-3,448	1,689	4,169	1	.041	0,138	6,758
Assignments are graded according to the criteria=4	-2,988	1,497	3,982	1	.046	-5,922	-0,053
I received constructive comments on my papers =2	-5,808	2,435	5,689	1	.017	-10,58	-1,035

Although, surprisingly, there is also a significant negative relationship between grading according to the criteria and students' satisfaction. The more students agree that the assignments are graded according to the criteria, the less they are satisfied (estimate = -

2.98,  $p = .04$ ). It was also interesting to know that those students, who mostly disagree ( $p = .01$ ) that they have received a constructive feedback on their paper, are less satisfied.

The regression analysis of the predictors of students' satisfaction with the learning environment and services revealed a significant relationship among students with a high GPA (Table 10). The students with a high GPA, from 4.0 to 3.67 ( $p = .05$ ), are more satisfied than those whose GPA is from 3.3 to 2.67 ( $p = .04$ ). That means that the higher the GPA, the more students are satisfied with the academic learning environment and services that are provided in the framework of the program.

**Table 10**

*Predictors of Law student satisfaction with learning environment*

Effect	Estimate	SE	W	df	p	95% CI	
GPA 4,0-3,67 =1	2,507	1,29	3,777	1	.052	-0,021	5,036
GPA 3.3-2,67 =2	2,324	1,172	3,93	1	.047	0,026	4,621
state scholarship =2	4,223	1,812	5,431	1	.02	0,671	7,774
library resources = 2	-4,229	1,912	4,894	1	.027	-7,976	-0,482

Moreover, a significant positive relationship was found between the State scholarship variable and responses on student satisfaction ( $p = .02$ ) with the estimate = 4.233. That predicts that those students who have state scholarships are more likely satisfied with their learning environment than those who pay for the study themselves.

Meanwhile, the category 2 of the variable "library resources helped to complete the course successfully," that corresponded to those who mostly disagree was determined to have a significant relationship with the responses on students' satisfaction ( $p = .027$ ) with the coefficient of -4,229. That shows that the more students disagree that library resources helped them to complete the course successfully, the less they are satisfied with its services.

Overall, it should be noted that from initially testing 18 factors, only 6 were elicited to predict Law student satisfaction with a quality experience. Students with high GPA and state loans tend to be more satisfied with their learning environment than the others.

Assessment criteria are essential for students, as they feel satisfied when they know that grading was conducted according to rubrics. The most surprising was the fact that the factors of Law program content and teaching process did not show significance at all. That could be explained by two causes: the large sample or students of this program are not ready to give feedback to the quality of program content.

**4.5.2 ‘Foreign language’ program.** The ordinal PLUM regression was performed to reveal the predictors that could influence the FL students’ satisfaction with their academic experience. Significance of Chi-square ( $p = .000$ ) together with Cox and Snell  $r = .727$  constitute the model that fitted the data. The regression analysis of this program identified the predictors in the main components of internal QA: program content and teaching process, assessment and feedback, and learning environment and services (Table 11).

**Table 11**

<i>Predictors of FL student satisfaction with the program content and teaching process</i>							
Effect	Estimate	SE	W	df	p	95% CI	
Logically structured program =4	69,76	29,786	5,485	1	.019	11,381	128,139
Opportunities to explore knowledge =3	-86,765	34,951	6,163	1	.013	-155,268	-18,262
Content of the courses is clearly described in the academic catalogue =4	-38,279	18,205	4,421	1	.035	-73,959	-2,598
Much of effort to complete the program =1	-51,534	22,688	5,16	1	.023	-96,001	-7,067
Instructors and lecturers use various methods of teaching =4	-128,133	46,349	7,643	1	.006	-218,974	-37,291

Remarkably, there is a strong significance between students’ opinion that the program is logically structured and their satisfaction with QA ( $p=.019$ ). On the contrary, another result of whether it allowed them to explore knowledge, shows that the more students hesitate about their attitude, the less they are satisfied ( $p=.013$ ). This could mean that students may not understand the structure and content of the program. This fact is

proved by the result of another independent variable where the more students agree that the content of the courses is clearly described in the academic catalogue, the less they are satisfied ( $p=.035$ ). We could predict that students may not be acquainted with the academic catalogue or the content of the program itself.

Much effort to complete the program was also found to predict the students' satisfaction with academic experience significantly. PLUM regression analysis showed that the fewer time students spend effort on program completion, the less they are satisfied with it ( $p=.035$ ). This could mean that either the level of students' knowledge does not constitute the program, and it is easy to complete, or the criteria to the assessment, presented by the teachers, are decreased.

The analysis also revealed the significant relationship between teaching process and student satisfaction; the more students agree that instructors and lecturers use various methods of teaching the less satisfied they are. This might mean that students are unmotivated to be taught with various methods and are dissatisfied to nonstandard ways of presentation.

The regression analysis determined four independent variables that predict student satisfaction with assessment and feedback (Table 12). Thus, it was found that the more students agree that the assessment criteria are clearly explained in advance, the more they are satisfied ( $p=.058$ ). In addition, it is useless to claim that timely feedback and access to its discussion influence students' satisfaction. Despite the significance, both positive and negative relationships contradict each other. Moreover, students who disagreed that their instructors are available for feedback are less likely satisfied. This means that there is an issue of qualitative and constructive feedback that teachers should provide, and this predictor negatively influences students' satisfaction.



**Table 12***Predictors of FL student satisfaction with the assessment and feedback*

Effect	Estimate	SE	W	df	p	95% CI	
The assessment criteria are clearly explained in advance =4	2,503	1,318	3,608	1	.058	-0,08	5,086
Instructors provided me with timely feedback on my assignments =2	-8,919	3,328	7,183	1	.007	-15,442	-2,397
Instructors provided me with timely feedback on my assignments =4	-2,59	1,289	4,04	1	.044	-5,116	-0,064
My instructors are available to discuss feedback =2	-5,442	1,921	8,025	1	.005	-9,207	-1,677

The regression analysis of the learning environment and services identified three predictors to have significance with students' satisfaction. These predictors include GPA, library resources, and access to the course-specific resources such as linguistic laboratory or computer-assisted translation tools (Table 13). The research revealed that the higher the students' GPA is, the less they are satisfied with their academic experience ( $p = .049$ ).

**Table 13***Predictors of FL student satisfaction with learning environment*

Effect	Estimate	SE	W	df	p	95% CI	
GPA 4,0-3,67=1	-2,461	1,248	3,888	1	.049	-4,908	-0,015
library resources = 1	-3,41	1,678	4,132	1	.042	-6,698	-0,122
course-specific resources =1	-2,538	1,146	4,902	1	.027	-4,785	-0,291

Moreover, the results suggest that the more students disagree that library resources helped them to complete the courses successfully, the less they are satisfied with their academic experience. Surprisingly the independent variable "access to the course-specific resources" revealed that the more students disagree that they use special equipment in the study, the less they are satisfied ( $p = 0.05$ ). It could mean that whether students do not know about the existence of such laboratories or they haven't used it yet in the frames of their academic program.

Having conducted both descriptive and inferential analysis, it is necessary to conclude that firstly, the students are most satisfied when they have clear assessment criteria and available constructive feedback from their lecturers. Secondly, students are mostly satisfied with traditional methods of teaching. Thirdly, student hesitate about the the logically structured content of the program and an opportunity to explore knowledge. Finally, the research participants with a high GPA are less satisfied with learning environment. Students are not satisfied with library resources and major-specific facilities and are sure that they were not provided with an opportunity to complete the courses. These independent variables are an integral part of the quality of any programs.

#### **4.6 Students' voice in the QA process**

Marris's statement that students are and will always be "the best judges" of any course (1964, p.54) together with the statistics of National Accreditation Center of Kazakhstan that student's voice in quality assessment mostly exists on paper (2012, p.32) led to the idea to determine to what extent students' voices are heeded in QA process in this particular private university. To answer this question, descriptive statistics, together with Cross-tabulation and ANOVA tests, were involved to reveal the influence of the year of study on students' opinion.

**4.6.1 'Law' program.** Thus, Table 14 shows that the majority of students (71,5%) think they had an opportunity to participate in each after-course assessment; however, there is a significant minority who do not think that their feedback was available (29,8%).

Moreover, half of the students are sure that Law school faculty consider students' opinions about the quality when they revise the courses or program itself (71%). Besides, a significant number of students (67,1%) insists that the Student Committee protects their academic interests and represents their ideas to the program coordinator and school faculty.

**Table 14**

*Frequency distribution on Law students' voice accountability in the QA process*

Variable	Label	<i>f</i>	%
I have had the opportunities to provide feedback on each course of the program upon its completion	definitely disagree	3	3,4
	mostly disagree	5	5,7
	neither agree nor disagree	18	20,5
	mostly agree	19	21,6
	definitely agree	43	48,9
	Total	88	100,0
School Faculty value students' views and opinions about the quality of the courses	definitely disagree	4	4,3
	mostly disagree	7	7,6
	neither agree nor disagree	13	14,1
	mostly agree	23	25,0
	definitely agree	40	46,0
	Total	87	100,0
The Students' Committee represents Ss' academic interests	definitely disagree	7	8,0
	mostly disagree	10	11,4
	neither agree nor disagree	12	13,6
	mostly agree	16	18,2
	definitely agree	43	48,9
	Total	88	100,0

To compare the effect of the year of study on students' understanding of their voice accountability in the QA process, the ANOVA test was conducted. That is ANOVA test calculated the variance of three independent variables, mentioned above, with the year of study, and measured the variance of four mean scores and then determine whether the variance of these three means is more significant than we predict from looking at the year of study variances. In this research study, the respondents are the students of the 2d, 3d, and 4th year of study (Table 15). The box 'Between-Subjects lists 87 respondents in the three groups. There was a significant effect of the year of study on students' opinions that they had an opportunity to provide feedback on each course completion and program itself at the  $p \leq .05$  level for three conditions [ $df=2$ ;  $p=.049$ ;  $F=3,13$ ]. Post hoc comparisons using the Scheffe test in Table 15 indicated that the mean score for the 2d- year students significantly differs from the 4th year students ( $p = .057$ ).

**Table 15***One-way variance of year of study in Feedback on the Law program*

Source	SS	df	MS	f	p
Corrected Model	7,461a	2	3,730	3,130	.049
Intercept	1044,854	1	1044,854	876,578	.000
Year of study	7,461	2	3,730	3,130	.049
Error	100,125	84	1,192		
Total	1548,000	87			
Corrected Total	107,586	86			

a. R Squared = ,069 (Adjusted R Squared = ,047)

*Multiple Comparisons: Scheffe test*

YS	YS	<i>MD</i>	<i>SE</i>	<i>p</i>	<i>95% CI</i>	
2d year	3d year	-,75	,345	,099	-1,61	.11
	4th year	-,88	,363	<b>,057</b>	-1,79	.02
3d year	2d year	,75	,345	,099	-,11	1.61
	4th year	-,13	,259	,881	-,77	.51
4th year	2d year	,88	,363	<b>,057</b>	-,02	1.79
	3d year	,13	,259	,881	-,51	.77

The error term is Mean Square(Error) = 1,192.

Taken together, these results suggest that the year of study does affect on students' opinion on provided feedback after each course completion. Specifically, the results suggest that the year of the study is essential when students express their opinion about their satisfaction with the quality.

Moreover, the year should be high in order to see an effect. However, the ANOVA test did not reveal a significance between the year of study variable and both, students' opinion that the faculty accept their views in the process of program revision ( $p = .330$ ) and representation of their opinion by the Students' Committee ( $p = .568$ ) (Table 16). That means that the year of study did not affect students' responses about faculty who represent their opinion in QA process.

**Table 16***One-way variance of year of study in law students' voice accountability in QA*

Source	SS	df	MS	f	p
Feedback on the program	7,461	2	3,730	3,130	<b>.049</b>
Faculty value students' views about QA	3,084	2	1,542	1,124	.330
Ss' Committee represents Ss's academic interests	1,984	2	,992	,569	.568

**4.6.2 'Foreign languages' program.** The same tests were offered for the analysis of the responses given by the FL students. The conducted bivariate analysis showed that there appears to be more students who agree (62%) that they had the opportunities to provide feedback on each course of the program than those who disagree (21,3%) (Table 17).

**Table 17***Frequency distribution on FL program students' voice accountability in the QA process*

Variable	Label	f	%
I have had the opportunities to provide feedback on each course of the program upon its completion	definitely disagree	9	11,3
	mostly disagree	8	10,0
	neither agree nor disagree	13	16,3
	mostly agree	28	35,0
	definitely agree	22	27,5
School Faculty value students' views and opinions about the quality of the courses.	definitely disagree	8	10,0
	mostly disagree	7	8,8
	neither agree nor disagree	21	26,3
	mostly agree	24	30,0
	definitely agree	20	25,0
The Students' Committee represents Ss' academic interests	definitely disagree	8	9,8
	mostly disagree	9	11,0
	neither agree nor disagree	20	24,4
	mostly agree	20	24,4
	definitely agree	25	30,5

Furthermore, half of the respondents (55%) are sure that school faculty values and invests in students' opinions about the quality while revising the courses or the program

itself. However, more than one-third of students (26,3%) hesitate. That means that the authorities of the school together with the program coordinator should better communicate with students and give them access to the results of the changes officially as there is a similar situation with students' view on the representation of students' opinion in the Student Committee, where 59,5% of the respondents agree and nearly 25% hesitate.

To elicit whether there is a difference in understanding the the extent of students' voice accountability in the QA process, the ANOVA test was planned because of the continuous dependent variable that consisted of three groups (2d, 3d and 4th year students). Although, according to frequency distribution statistics, there is only one respondent of the 4th year of study (Table 1). That means that this model does not suit, but Cross-tabulation test with the Chi-square test of independence will be useless.

#### **4.7 Summary**

Overall, this chapter presented the findings of the study on students' major choice, satisfaction with their academic experience and their voice being presented accountability in the QA process within two academic programs.

Thus, the first set of analyses revealed that law students chose their major because of parents' choice, opportunity to gain new knowledge and to find a well-paid job. The Spearman's rho correlation between variables of student satisfaction and the academic environment, teaching process, and assessment and feedback determine the relationships; however, PLUM regression test found out that students felt unsatisfied with the program content and teaching process. Moreover, law students did not feel satisfied with grading when they were not clearly explained about the criteria of the assignments. As a result, logically, they felt significantly unsatisfied with feedback provided by the instructors. Despite the correlation between the variables of constructive comments of the faculty and

clearly explained criteria in advance, regression analysis showed that students were unsatisfied when they were graded according to the criteria.

Moreover, the findings revealed that students are mostly agreed that the learning environment supported them in academic experience. Such strong evidence was found among the students with a high GPA, who felt more satisfied than students with a low GPA. It should be noted that according to the descriptive statistics, 79 students out of 87 had a GPA from 2.67-4.0.

ANOVA test showed the relationship between the year of study and students' understanding of their voice accountability in the QA process. Thus, the test revealed the differences between the 2d and 4th Law students and the other three variables that answer for students' attitudes to the extent their voice was heeded in the QA process.

Similar results were shown in the analysis of FL students' satisfaction. It is apparent that there were significant relationships between feedback and promptness of its provision. In addition, students were satisfied with the new methods teachers had used to present the material; the more newsworthy the material was presented, the more satisfied they were. The most striking result to emerge from the data was that students' opinion that even though the program was logically structured and the content of the courses was clearly described, it did not allow them to gain knowledge, and they are more satisfied with this fact. Moreover, despite the significance, both positive and negative relationships were revealed between timely feedback and access to its discussion. It was also indicated that students with a high GPA are less satisfied with their academic experience (72 respondents out of 87) as the learning environment did not provide them with an opportunity to complete the courses of the program. Frequency distribution revealed that FL students are sure that their voice is accounted for by both faculty and student's committee in the QA

process; however it still needs additional analysis as the sample included mostly students of the 2d and 3d year of study.



## **Chapter Five: Discussion**

### **5.1 Introduction**

In this section of the study, discussion on the relevant findings of the research study will be reviewed in terms of its significance, influence, and support by other researchers. Referencing the prior literature, the results provide new insight into the QA satisfaction on behalf of students' feedback and the importance of their involvement in this process. To help organize the discussion and present it well, the chapter is divided into three sections. First, I discuss the Law program and reasons that motivated students to choose their major and their attitude to it. Next, I present the factors that influence students' satisfaction with academic experience. Last, I speculate on the students' voice accountability by the program representatives. A similar content will be presented in the section for 'Foreign languages' program results in comparison to other research.

### **5.2 'Law' program students' satisfaction**

The revealed data on the Law program contribute to the literature on student opinions and program assessment. It is interesting to note some similarities in the results from different studies that help answer the main research question of this case study.

**5.2.1 Program attractiveness and further recommendations.** According to the statistical data, Law program students are motivated by their parents' decision to choose the program. It is supported by the results of Tuni (2009), who insisted that law majors are chosen by those students whose parents are working in this field, and such choice has been made from generation to generation (p. 10). However, it contradicts Tondonato (2006) who accentuated on students' year of study in her research. The author claimed that senior students tend to assess their program choice by skills and knowledge. We disagree with the researcher as the findings point out that students were imposed on by their parents, mostly in their choices. It is also evident that students also follow their choice with the idea to gain

new knowledge and to be a qualified specialist. These findings are consistent with those of Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006), where future career plans and well-being after graduation were the main predictors of the future career choice (p.173).

**5.2.2 Satisfaction with academic experience.** This section presents the discussion of the findings following the conceptual framework of Wiers-Jenssen, Stensaker, and Groogaard (2002), based on the students' attitude to the program, academic experience, and learning environment (p. 534).

Thus, the study revealed that law students are satisfied with their academic experience and would recommend their program to future applicants. It also coincides with Gibson (2010), Marks, M., Haug, J., & Huckabee, A. (2016), who insisted that satisfied students are the best program recommenders for the future. Moreover, university authorities should involve such students during the admission period as volunteers who could present the program advantages.

Another sub-question that piques my interest is what predictors influenced student satisfaction with the QA process. As mentioned by Frawley, Goh, & Law (2019), and Kotler and Fox (2015), student satisfaction is measured with academic and non-academic factors; that is student experience in the teaching process, assessment and feedback, learning and social environment.

**5.2.2.1 Academic program content and teaching process.** The results of this block have been unable to demonstrate evidence on the significance of satisfaction and program content variables. This finding differs from the ideas of European standards and guidelines for QA in the EHEA (2005) and ECTS Users' Guide (2015) that prescribe that any academic program should not only provide students with an opportunity to explore new knowledge but also apply it in practice. This result may be explained by the fact that

students are not informed or not acquainted with the learning outcomes of the program that are usually presented in the Academic Catalog and syllabi.

**5.2.2.2 Assessment and feedback.** Another significant findings demonstrated the full contradiction between students' perceptions and experience. Thus, students noted that they are satisfied when the assessment criteria and constructive feedback is made on time, and these findings could be supported by Marks, Haug, and Huckabee (2016), who insisted that students feel satisfied when they are clearly explained the 'assignment vs. assessment vs. feedback' procedure. Surprisingly, the findings of the current study do not support it as the more students disagree that they had a clear explanation of the assessment criteria and got constructive feedback, the less they were satisfied. It is evident that timely feedback is highly valued and influence students' further skills enhancement together with reaching the learning outcomes of the program. Moreover, the students are less satisfied when they are graded according to the criteria. A possible explanation for these negative results might be the lack of adequate feedback and rubrics to the assignments that could be clearly explained or prescribed in a syllabus before the assessment.

**5.2.2.3 Learning environment.** Another critical finding was about students' satisfaction with the learning environment. The learning environment is supposed to present students' responses to their satisfaction with library sources, internet sources, and specialized laboratories such as criminal and ballistic laboratories. Moreover, the higher the GPA students had, the more satisfied they were with this support. This result is in disagreement with Tontodonato's (2006) findings, who claimed that "sex, race, GPA, and financial factors are not significantly related to the learning environment satisfaction" (p. 175). However, Grayson (2006), in his research "Relationship between grades and academic program satisfaction over four-year of study," proves the fact that the higher GPA, the more satisfied students are with the learning environment. The author compared

students' satisfaction by the year of study. This tendency might be related to the year of study of our respondents as they use exclusive resources mostly after the first year of study; further research is needed to test this possibility.

**5.2.3 Student's voice in QA of the academic program.** The third question in this research was to what extent the students' voice was heeded in the QA process. This test has found that the majority of the respondents agreed that they had had the opportunities to provide feedback on each course of the program upon its completion (70.5%). Moreover, students are sure that faculty value their opinions about the quality of the course (67,1%), and the students' committee represents their academic interests. This finding is an agreement with the European Student handbook on QA in Higher Education (2001) and Standards of Institutional accreditation in HEIs (2015) that suggest students' involvement in the quality assurance process through the after-course feedback, personal meetings with program coordinators or students' committees contribute positively to the QA . One possible explanation for this might be that the Higher schools attempt to follow the standards of QA of academic programs. Furthermore, there are similarities between the findings that revealed the difference among the second-year and the fourth-year undergraduate students' opinions on the extent their voice was heeded in the QA process and ideas described by Green, Hood, and Neumann (2015) and Sears et al. (2017). This could mean that senior students could be invited to lead students' committees, become involved in program evaluation and revision processes, and in quality policy promotion among freshmen.

### **5.3 'Foreign languages' program students' satisfaction**

Findings of the FL program analysis contribute to the literature and are supported with similarities in the results from different studies.

**5.3.1 Program attractiveness and further recommendations.** Simple statistical analysis showed that FL students are motivated by their own decision in program choice as they wish to gain skills and knowledge and to be a qualified specialist. It is supported by the results of Gray, J., & DiLoreto, M. (2016), who insisted that many prestigious majors like languages, economics and accounting and medicine, are mostly chosen by the students because of their attractiveness on the labour market (p. 14). Moreover, Appleton-Knapp and Krentler (2006) claimed that those students, who are focused on learning outcomes and career plans, might be the best professionals (p.182).

**5.3.2 Satisfaction with academic experience.** Despite revealing that FL students are unsatisfied with some spheres of their academic experience, students in this study still would recommend their program to future applicants. It partially contradicts to Gibson (2010), Marks, M., Haug, J., & Huckabee, A. (2016), who insisted that satisfied students are the best program recommenders in the future. It might mean that there are some threats that should be deflected to reach “healthy” students’ feedback.

**5.3.2.1 Academic program content and teaching process.** The results of this study indicated that students are satisfied with the logically structured program. This finding corroborates the ideas of European standards and guidelines for QA in the EHEA (2005) and ECTS Users' Guide (2015) that any academic program should be logically structured and have prerequisites and post-requisites with clearly prescribed learning outcomes in the academic catalog. However, students are not sure that the program has provided them with an opportunity to explore new knowledge and to apply it in practice. This result may be explained by the fact that program coordinators and faculty do not inform students about the content of the program and its learning outcomes.

Another finding in this block revealed that students felt unsatisfied with the new methods of teaching. However, they are sure that the program was easy for them. It is

supported by Suerman (2015), who claimed that quite often, students view traditional methods of learning as the primary basis of the academic experience and students' satisfaction with it (p. 628). It might mean that students got used to seeing the lecturer as the center of the process, the person who gives the new knowledge and information. Modern pedagogical theory, together with ECTS policy, prescribes student-centered learning, where a student is a center of information who independently searches for the information with the lecturer's support. This could mean that traditional methods make the students feel that they do not require much effort to complete the program or the level of students' knowledge does not constitute the program, and it is easy to complete, and the criteria for the assessments presented by the teachers are decreased.

**5.3.2.2 Assessment and feedback.** Other significant findings demonstrated the corroboration between students' experience and assessment criteria. Thus, students corresponded that they are satisfied when the assessment criteria are clearly explained, and these findings could be supported by Marks, Haug, and Huckabee (2016), who insisted that students feel satisfied when they are clearly explained with 'assignment vs. assessment vs. feedback.' Surprisingly, the findings of the current study do not entirely support it as the more students disagree that the instructors provided them with timely feedback on the assignments, the less they are satisfied. Moreover, students disagree that instructors were available to discuss feedback. A possible explanation for these negative results may be the lack of academic relationships between students and faculty or the overload of the faculty.

**5.3.2.3 Learning environment.** Another critical finding was about students' satisfaction with the learning environment, which includes library sources, internet sources, and specialized laboratories, such as simultaneous translation laboratory or written translation programs like TRADOS, Omega T, Wordfast, or MetaTaxis. The higher the GPA students had, the less satisfied they were with this support. This result is in

disagreement with Grayson (2006), who found that the higher the GPA, the more satisfied students were with the learning environment. This tendency might be related to the year of study of our respondents as they use exclusive resources mostly after the first year of study or the lack of such specialized resources at the university. Further research is needed to test this possibility.

**5.3.3 Student's voice in QA of the academic program.** The third question to answer was to what extent the student's voice was heeded in the QA process. This test has found that the majority of the respondents agreed that they had had the opportunities to provide feedback on each course of the program upon its completion (62.5%). Moreover, students are sure that faculty value their opinions about the quality of the course (55%). This finding is an agreement with the European Student handbook on QA in Higher Education (2001) and Standards of Institutional accreditation in HEIs (2015) that suggest students' involvement in the quality assurance process through the after course feedback, personal meeting with program coordinators or students' committees. That might mean that the Higher school attempts to follow the standards of QA of academic programs. Furthermore, there are similarities between the findings that revealed the difference among the third-year students and undergraduate students' opinions on the extent their voice was heeded in the QA process and ideas described by Green, Hood, and Neumann (2015) and Sears et al. (2017). That might mean that, like law students, senior students of FL program better understand the importance of their feedback and presentation of their voice at program revision meetings with program coordinators and faculty.

## **5.4 Summary**

This chapter discussed the explored findings of the case-study that largely corroborates the existing research in this field. It was found that the satisfaction of students of both programs is contingent on the GPA, teaching methods, timely given feedback

together with teachers' availability to provide it, clear assessment criteria, and appropriate resources. Together with these findings, this section attempted to provide an understanding of the extent students' voices are heeded in the QA process of both academic programs in one private university. These findings will be summarized in the next, final chapter, that revisits the purpose and questions of the research.



### **Chapter Six: Conclusion**

This chapter revisits the research questions, summarizes the findings, and provides recommendations for university administrators, program coordinators, student's committees, and faculty and for policymakers of the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Kazakhstan. The purpose of the study was to explore the QA procedure of academic programs in a private Kazakhstani university by conducting a comprehensive analysis of the findings on students' satisfaction with this process. Together with this, the study aimed to examine to what extent undergraduate university students are satisfied with the QA of the academic program and to determine the extent that a student's voice is heeded in this process. The following chapter will present the conclusions of the findings and discussion part, recommendations, and plans of the research.

The survey results identified that most law students were attracted to the program because of parents' decision and an opportunity to gain new knowledge. Bivariate analysis of predictors of program satisfaction yielded differing results. Although the number of factors was significantly related to the academic experience, the regression analysis of program satisfaction was less successful in uncovering predictors. Thus most students are not satisfied with grades when the assessment criteria are not clearly explained. Besides, they do not feel satisfied with the feedback provided by the tutors. However, library resources, together with specialized laboratories, helped students to gain knowledge and complete the courses. The students with a high GPA felt more satisfied with their academic experience. Students regularly have an opportunity to give feedback after each course completion; they are sure that faculty value their opinions and contributes to program revision, despite the Student committee, that does not represent their opinion on such issues. Such differences in answers were revealed among the 2d year and 4th-year students. Overall, they would recommend the program to future applicants.

The analysis of the survey results of FL students' responses revealed that they are motivated with the enhancement of skills and knowledge and plans to be a qualified specialist. However, despite students' satisfaction with the logically structured content of the program, they are not sure that the program provided them with an opportunity to explore new knowledge and apply it in practice. Moreover, students are sure that the program is easy for them. Furthermore, students are satisfied when the criteria are clearly explained, and they are assessed accordingly, but students are not satisfied with the timing of feedback and the tutor's availability to get it. Another critical finding is connected with special facilities and library resources. Students disagree that they helped them to complete their courses successfully.

The findings of this quantitative case study and literature analysis allows us to prepare some constitutive recommendations for the higher school authorities to understand student needs and expectations, to improve the existing internal QA process, and to revise the duties of the student committee.

Firstly, it should be essential to organize academic awareness-raising campaigns among all the students. Students should be educated about academic policy, academic catalogs with program content, and learning outcomes. Moreover, students should understand the importance of this knowledge. It is well-documented in the literature of the European Commission on higher education and ECTS policy. This campaign should be the main attribute of academic culture.

Secondly, it is necessary to revise the assessment criteria for the assignments and reorganize and rethink policies on feedback. Additional consulting hours when the faculty is at the university could help students to collaborate with the faculty. Moreover, clear rubrics, together with the level of difficulty in the syllabi, will help students to manage their assignments. The university authority should think about the assessment policy. For

example, competency assessment or Bell curve assessment could motivate students to compete and prepare their assignments with better quality.

Thirdly, it is crucial to use student-centered learning policy and let students gain new knowledge and implement it in practice. The more students participate in various forms of teaching, the more independent they will be in the future.

Fourthly, it is necessary to develop students' literacy by participating in various campaigns organized by the library. Higher schools should use the resources of the library in their assignments together with special laboratories. Such meetings should encourage students to work independently with literature and improve their knowledge.

Finally, the previous findings, together with the present research results, revealed the lack of students' committee support of students' voices in the QA process. Therefore, higher school authorities, together with the students' committee, should organize campaigns on how to attract students to become members in this process. Thus, monthly reports of the students' committee in social pages on how their voice is heeded could inform students about its activities.

Despite the similarities of the findings with the literature on previous research, there are still efforts needed to further explore QA in the future. Possible variables to measure could involve student satisfaction with the QA of the program and university services (see Vines 2009), quality of services (see Shahi 2019), students' interaction with faculty and peers (see Diken 2013), instruction quality, and social environment (see Schin 2002).

Lastly, it should be noted that information taken from the students is just one component to be considered in assessment efforts. Thus, this research will be more complicated if the results of the research are discussed with the faculty and program coordinators. Such mixed-method research will help assess the case in more detail.

Moreover, the results of this case-study could be experienced among the higher education institutions with different legal status.

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**APPENDIX A****STUDENT SATISFACTION WITH QUALITY ASSURANCE OF ACADEMIC  
PROGRAMS: STUDENT'S VOICE****Dear students!**

Please take no more than 10 minutes to complete this questionnaire to assess your satisfaction with the quality assurance of academic programs in your department.

The questionnaire includes 4 sections which I would really appreciate for you to answer:

- 1) evaluation of academic programs content and teaching process,
- 2) assessment and feedback provided,
- 3) the learning environment and learning services together with
- 4) your participation in the academic life of the school.

***The link is available until February 15, 2020***

The survey is anonymous and your identity will be strictly protected. Your participation in this research will have no effect on your studies because all the data will be aggregated.

The main advantage for you will be the opportunity to share your academic experience, views and problems that you encountered during your study process by your academic program. Your participation will contribute to improve the internal quality assurance of our education services and make your academic program a more 'competed' and satisfactory for further applicants.

By clicking on this link

[https://nukz.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV\\_9AytEdlySsLkU2F](https://nukz.qualtrics.com/jfe/form/SV_9AytEdlySsLkU2F)

and completing the survey, you have officially agreed to participate in this study. No further signature is needed. You have the right to discontinue participation at any time.

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