Article

Universities' and Academics' Resources Shaping Satisfaction and Engagement: An Empirical Investigation of the Higher Education System

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Abstract: Higher education research has claimed that the successful future of the educational service is highly dependent on the competencies and observations of the participants in the system, where service quality, employee satisfaction and engagement play an essential role in organizational competitiveness. Therefore, to contribute to the scarce investigation of the role of the institutions' efforts in the support of engaged academics, we aim to assess the quality of higher education from an internal angle by investigating universities' and academics' resources as the antecedents of job satisfaction and engagement. The data from a survey with 322 academics from Macedonian public universities were analyzed using partial least squares structural equations modelling. The results of the estimated model reveal that institutional and educational capacities and academics' adequate competencies are essential for accomplishing favorable perceptions, leading to a committed community dedicated to improving the higher education system. The implications underline that it is vital to recognize the institution's potential by identifying and assessing the resources and capacities it possesses or can access. Moreover, to involve satisfied employees, universities must encourage academics' position and integrity in the institution and promote harmonious collaboration while motivating their capacities and excellence development.

Keywords: higher education; university professors; professional identity; educational quality; tangible resources; intangible resources; satisfaction; engagement; resource-based theory

1. Introduction

The differentiation of the companies has at all times been one of the most relevant elements for success, aiming at the employment of an exact combination of properties to accomplish a distinction. Thus, organizations differentiate from each other because of their resources at a given time and their heterogeneity [1]. Indeed, the relevant background on higher education claims that the prosperous future of the educational service is highly dependent on the competencies and views of the participants in the system [2]. Additionally, perceptions about the quality of the service and the employees' satisfaction have been identified as essential indicators of organizational competitiveness [3]. To fulfil users' necessities in the sense of the institutional resources, degree quality or employees' performance should be considered as the institutional drives towards creating satisfaction and commitment. Generally, individual observations about the setting they act in influence behavioral responses [4], emphasizing the higher education working environment as the key to empowering professional growth and dedication.

Substantial research has focused on organizations' activities in the marketplace, neglecting their internal capacities as the strength that positions them in the market. As a result, the need arises to investigate tangible and intangible resources simultaneously, provided those have been researched independently in many cases. With this in mind,

adhering to the resource-based theory (RBT) [5], we propose investigating higher education institutions' resources as the antecedents of academics' job satisfaction and engagement with their profession. We observe the academics' engagement as the critical driver of the university's competitive advantage, determined by the effective recruitment and retention of competent and motivated employees [6]. For this, we employ this relatively unexplored approach to the higher education sector perceptions and behavioral responses. Thus, we tend to generate insights that allow us to observe the investment in universities and academics' assets and competencies as one of the most critical implications offering a better-structured education system, which could mitigate brain drain in the long run. We focus the research on the case of the Republic of Macedonia, presenting a Western Balkan country with significant emigration, reporting this as a consequence of inadequate educational resources failing to provide the most effective learning environments for students [7].

Extensive research observes students' and academics' perceptions of the higher education system quality; however, it lacks the identification of the universities' tangible and intangible resources and the academics' competence as an additional influencing factor of institutions recognition [8]. With the intent to fill this gap, this study considers the university's tangible and intangible resources, namely, the physical assets' availability, educational quality and employees' identity regarding their self-based and skill-based principles. The implications driven by this research contribute to the more systematic observation of higher education services, looking at the quality of the educational resources as the improvable element in controlling brain drain tendency in Western Balkans in the long run.

The remainder of the study describes the theoretical foundation for the proposed research (Section 2), followed by the methodology (Section 3) and the results (Section 4), to close with the discussion of the conclusions and the implications of the investigation (Section 5).

2. Theoretical Background

2.1. Resource-Based Theory

The competitive advantage in the higher education sector is directly conditioned by employees' engagement and satisfaction, generated by their capabilities, attitudes and identification [9–11], enabling the institutions to stand out from the competition [12] and offer a reputable service [13]. Engagement, performance or success have been considered in the literature as avenues for achieving competitive advantage and, likewise, as part of the competitive advantage itself [6,14–16].

Job satisfaction, widely studied in the literature as influenced by different personal and environmental factors, explains the positive state of the employee arising from their experience in performing the job and affects their engagement, which reflects their efficacy and intense involvement with the job [17]. The significance of the focus on academic engagement lies in the fact that engaged employees are considered vital for organizations' success and performance [18]. Engagement arises from employees' pleasure and satisfaction with their working routines and tasks [19,20]. Employees who put more effort into building expertise will likely experience more job satisfaction and fulfilment [21]. In turn, work engagement is motivated by employees' keen perceptions and states, described by the insight into resources related to their job and the institution [22]. In this line, one of the most important incentives of individuals' engagement is considered to be their satisfaction with the setting, stimulated by the resources, i.e., academics' observations of themselves and the setting [23,24].

The RBT correctly supports the previous rationale, which presents companies' tangible and intangible resources as determinants of their identity, relationships and competitive advantage [5,25–27]. It argues that what distinguishes a company is the combination of purely tangible and intangible assets related to its capabilities and competencies arising precisely from its reputation, technology or employees [28]. In line with the RBT, organizations need valuable, rare and non-replaceable resources to achieve a competitive position [5].

Universities are organizations that rely on the competence and expertise of academics for evaluating institutional performance, which is why they must build an efficient structure emphasizing valuable resources and capacities [29,30]. Thus, RBT becomes crucial for recognizing these institutional capabilities and know-how [31].

According to the RBT, companies' resources are represented by imperfect mobility, meaning they are unavailable to all companies under the same conditions. The availability of valuable resources that are difficult to imitate will show the precise potential of the higher education institution's unique set of tangible or intangible resources [32]. The tangible resources describe elements of the physical capital, considered to be easily imitable. In contrast, intangible resources indicate the employees' knowledge, skills or strategies. Due to their heterogeneous nature, the latter is essential in building companies' superior position in the marketplace [33]. The tangible resources are elements owned or controlled and exist relatively independently of their specific use, while the intangible ones represent the capabilities to use the resources and perform activities. The RBT emphasizes intangible resources, considering them crucial for creating companies' distinctiveness. They represent valuable, rare, inimitable and non-substitutable assets to the organization [5,34]. Accordingly, companies' consolidated quality, employees' skills and improvement-related resources are critical to the anticipated distinction, underpinning the need to focus on those to generate favorable outcomes in the long run [35]. The quality of the intangible assets that represent the incorporation of intellectual knowledge into the different productive activities of the organization provides the foundation for distinctive competitiveness in the sector [36]. The resources contributed by human beings to the company refer not so much to people as such but to their knowledge, training, experience, loyalty, motivation, adaptability, reasoning and decision skills, all of which assume greater importance and effectiveness than the tangible resources in creating value for the company [37].

In this sense, the RBT explains why companies which carry out their activity in the same competitive environment and are subject to the same success factors identified in the sector present different output levels [32]. The cause lies in the postulation that employees' competencies and resources can directly enhance job satisfaction and further engagement, which are essential for a company's performance [33,38]. Thus, higher education institutions must especially highlight the intangible resources related to employees' performance and perception of organizational goals [39]. Those will be necessary for maximizing employees' satisfaction and engagement to offer enhanced value to consumers [40].

2.2. Development of Hypotheses

Although the literature affirms that experiencing higher levels of employee satisfaction will result in greater engagement, further exploration of this relationship in higher education is needed to determine the antecedents that directly lead to academic satisfaction [41]. "Job satisfaction is one's personal attitude towards one's job and has been described as the set of positive desires or positive feelings that people have toward their jobs and employment by their organization" [19]. Therefore, given their heterogenic nature, universities' resources, such as routines, information, skills or knowledge, must be addressed as the predecessors of this positive perception and fulfilment of employees [42,43]. These resources are assumed to produce asymmetries in the competition, making the existing resources a vital asset to build on to outperform and accomplish academics' satisfaction and engagement [26]. Managing and balancing the resources and capabilities of the higher education system has been deemed necessary for the institution to measure its performance [44].

Previous literature has concluded that employees' overall satisfaction is determined by complex situational and personal circumstances [45], integrating campus characteristics, organizational culture, relationships with colleagues or students, and job autonomy [46,47]. Institutional structure, climate and environment have been deemed vital in achieving employee satisfaction in higher education [48]. The higher education institutions' recognition, achievements, work environment, and the academics' personal working conditions, position and responsibilities determine how satisfied they feel with their job [19].

Similarly, the tangible resources, such as campus size, facilities, space and educational and recreational opportunities, and the intangible ones, related to the actual quality, responsibility and aim of the institution, have been well-known as factors with significant influence on academics' satisfaction [41,49]. Therefore, effective and qualified universities and high-quality educational programs generate satisfied employees [50]. Following the RBT presumption regarding the relevance of tangible and intangible resources for shaping constructive outcomes, we propose the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1. *Academics' perception of the university's physical assets will impact their satisfaction.*

Hypothesis 2. *Academics' perception of the university's educational quality will impact their satisfaction.*

Given the immobility of the resources associated with the organizational knowledge, making it impossible for this to be replicated by the competition [26], employees' identification and interaction factors are highlighted as essential for evaluating the higher education system [51,52]. Employees' dedication to their methods, core values and beliefs about their job characterize their professional identity [53]. Academics with a mature self-based identity show commitment to their profession, have a strong passion for teaching, appreciate experience sharing and promote collaborative working. They enjoy the social recognition received from their position in the higher education system and believe in their role in the university [53,54]. Additionally, the high level of academics' skill-based identity recognizes their enthusiasm for continuous education and skills enhancement and their desire for professional and personal growth [53,55].

Professional identity is considered vital for the development and effectiveness of the employees, conducing to their satisfaction and indicating a posterior commitment to the profession and institution they represent [51,56,57]. Hence, academics' characteristics, revealing their educational capacity and skills due to continuous academic development, are considered a substantial precursor of their satisfaction with the higher education institution [58]. Indeed, how academics identify with their role and perceive their teaching aptitude and knowledge makes a substantial domain of their satisfaction and continuing development [39,55,57]. Accordingly, adhering to the RBT, which proposes increased satisfaction as a result of employees' resources [33], it is assumed that:
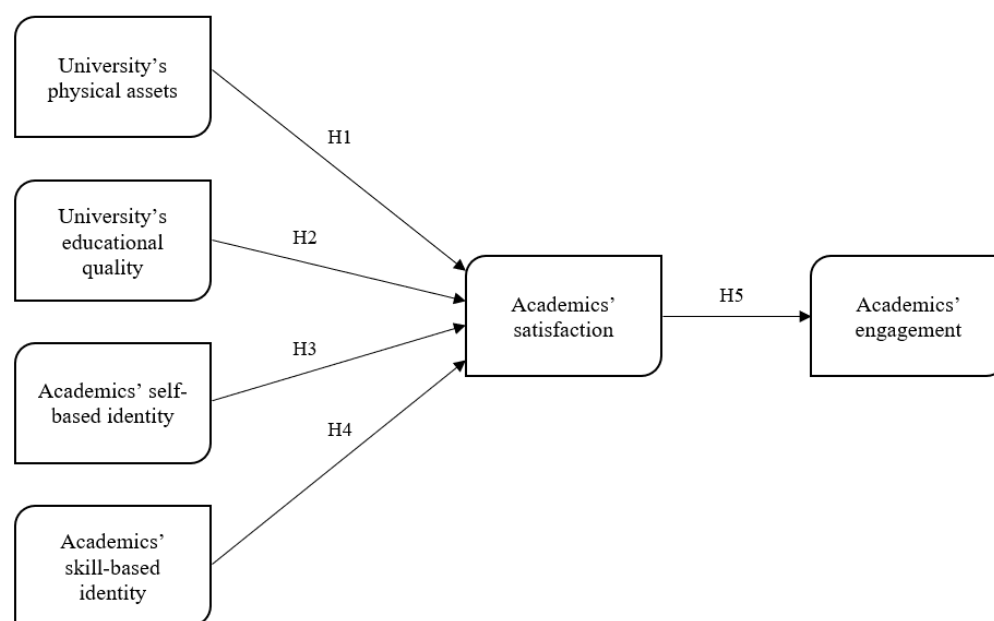
Hypothesis 3. *Academics' self-based identity will impact their satisfaction.*

Hypothesis 4. *Academics' skill-based identity will impact their satisfaction.*

Different research fields on employees' well-being in a company have highlighted the necessity to enhance the link between satisfaction and engagement [19,59]. Having employees who are satisfied with the university environment and quality results in the institution to standing out among the competition [60]. Therefore, given that individuals spend a significant portion of the day at work, the more favorable academics' perception of their job and working tasks, the greater their engagement with the same [21]. The positive impact of employees' satisfaction on their engagement has been extensively proved in the previous literature, including mentions in the higher education sector where academics' engagement with their job was determined by the level of their general satisfaction with the setting [61]. Hence, the next hypothesis suggests that:

Hypothesis 5. *Academics' level of satisfaction will impact their engagement with the educational tasks.*

Regarding the proposition of the RBT, explaining the impact of tangible and intangible resources on university academics' perceptions and performance, the following research model (Figure 1) is proposed to better explore the path toward capable and committed higher education institutions.

University's physical assets

University's educational quality

Academics' self-based identity

Academics' skill-based identity

H1

H2

H3

H4

Academics' satisfaction

H5

Academics' engagement

Figure 1. Proposed research model.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1. Procedure

In order to detect the critical aspects of higher education institutions' management and performance, we carried out a literature review. In this way, first, we designated academics' satisfaction and engagement as the elements the universities ultimately pursue in achieving success among competitors. Then, the literature review focused on the most influential originators of employee satisfaction from an institutional and personal perspective. Once we identified fundamental constructs, a pre-test was performed with ten managers and ten researchers from higher education institutions to determine the variables relevant to the research objective. We structured the questionnaire and refined the scale with the experts and additional 20 students, who double-checked the final survey to guarantee the declarations' precision. The original survey language was Macedonian. Three bilingual speakers, academics of Macedonian and English, were consulted for the translation and back-translation to clarify the concepts, assure readability and avoid possible misinterpretations [62].

3.2. Sample

A non-probabilistic method was employed; more precisely, the purposive sampling technique recommended when the researched sample is a predefined group of individuals—in our case, the specific sample of higher education academics [63]. An online questionnaire was distributed to the three biggest public universities in Macedonia, University Ss. Cyril and Methodius, University Goce Delchev and University St. Clement of Ohrid, after a previous agreement with the deans. According to the State Statistical Office, currently, there are 1985 teachers at these higher education institutions, 53% of whom are women, and 76.9% hold an associate professor or professor position [64]. While obtaining 322 valid responses, the survey's response rate was 16.2%. The sample presents an error of $\pm 5.46\%$ at a 95% confidence level for the case of maximum uncertainty. Power analysis with G*Power software validated the sample size's suitability. A power of 99.99% was obtained at $\alpha = 0.05$ standard level of significance, $f^2 = 0.15$ effect size and four predictors. Exceeding the recommended 80% power level, the sample size $n = 322$ was confirmed to be appropriate, enabling the continuation of the data analysis [65,66].

Academics from three public universities, principally the Ss. Cyril and Methodius University (68.6%), with associate professor and professor positions (80.1%) characterize

the participants in the survey. The sample is represented mainly by women (56.2%); the most common age is between 25 and 44 years (66.4%).

3.3. Measures and Analyses

The scales employed in the survey were validated in the previous literature and adapted to the context of higher education for the purpose of the research. They have their base in previous studies for assessing universities' tangible and intangible quality [67,68], academics' self and skill-based identification [53], satisfaction [69] and engagement [70,71]. We implemented 5-point Likert scale measurements to categorize participants' agreement with the statements, from 1—strongly disagree to 5—strongly agree.

The usual procedure for employing partial least squares–structural equation modelling (PLS-SEM) was followed, adhering to the established criteria for estimating scales' reliability and validity to check for the measurement model's robustness [72]. Next, the structural model explanatory and predictive power was confirmed, as well as the relevance and significance of the proposed relationships. The software used for the analyses was SmartPLS3 [73].

4. Results

4.1. Measurement Model Estimation

First, we refined the scales to estimate the measurement model, where two items were deleted from the construct defining the university's physical assets due to low or non-significant loadings. Next, it was confirmed that all remaining indicators have adequate loadings (>0.7), significant at a 95% confidence level (t > 1.96), proving appropriate item reliability [74]. Further, the reliability and internal consistency of the scales and the convergent validity were corroborated, obtaining satisfactory values for Cronbach's alpha ($\alpha > 0.7$), composite reliability (CR > 0.7) and average variance extracted (AVE > 0.5) [75], as presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Measurement model.

Construct Name and Measurement Items	λ
University's physical assets (AVE = 0.563; α = 0.807; CR = 0.865)	
Availability of library	0.703
Availability of social space/hub where students/academics can socialize	0.748
Availability of sports facilities	0.712
Additional not-compulsory events (e.g., conferences, seminars, meetings) for students/academics	0.809
Availability of adapted infrastructure and materials for persons with disabilities	0.787
University's educational quality (AVE = 0.786; α = 0.908; CR = 0.936)	
University accreditation	0.786
University educational quality	0.900
Faculty educational quality	0.942
Degree educational quality	0.911
Academics' self-based identity (AVE = 0.589; α = 0.902; CR = 0.920)	
I am committed to the profession.	0.719
I have a strong passion for teaching.	0.707
I enjoy sharing my ideas and experiences with other faculty members in the field.	0.743
I can only see myself as a faculty member working in a university setting.	0.773
I enjoy the social recognition I get as a faculty member.	0.787
My students and colleagues regard me as an effective faculty member.	0.815
I promote harmonious collaboration between employees to enhance the quality of work.	0.791
I feel part of the community of academics.	0.800
Academics' skill-based identity (AVE = 0.798; α = 0.916; CR = 0.940)	
I strive for continuous learning and excellence.	0.908

Table 1. *Cont.*

Construct Name and Measurement Items	λ
For me, it is important to develop my knowledge and teaching skills.	0.932
I demonstrate strong ongoing personal and professional growth.	0.870
I would like to be a more skilled faculty member.	0.862
Academics' satisfaction (AVE = 0.776; α = 0.856; CR = 0.912)	
Based on my experience, I am very satisfied with the quality of the degree programs.	0.875
My overall evaluation of the services provided by the university is very good.	0.906
Overall, I am very satisfied with the decision to choose this university.	0.862
Academics' engagement (AVE = 0.707; α = 0.895; CR = 0.923)	
To me, my job is challenging.	0.732
My job inspires me.	0.911
I am enthusiastic about my job.	0.886
I am proud of the work that I do.	0.858
I find the work that I do full of meaning and purpose.	0.806

Attending the Fornell and Larcker criterion [76] and the heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT) [77], the discriminant validity of the constructs was demonstrated (Table 2). Namely, AVE values were verified to be greater than their squared correlations with other constructs, while HTMT stated consistency with the predetermined threshold (<0.9). Lastly, estimating the standardized root mean square residual (SRMR), a good fit of the model was evidenced (SRMR = 0.075), following the recommended limit of 0.08 [78,79].

Table 2. Latent variables correlation matrix vs. heterotrait–monotrait ratio (HTMT).

	PA	EQ	SF	SK	S	E
University's physical assets (PA)		*0.721*	*0.499*	*0.232*	*0.650*	*0.269*
University's educational quality (EQ)	0.629		*0.577*	*0.384*	*0.749*	*0.307*
Academics' self-based identity (SF)	0.457	0.541		*0.812*	*0.653*	*0.613*
Academics' skill-based identity (SK)	0.205	0.351	0.709		*0.349*	*0.504*
Academics' satisfaction (S)	0.555	0.664	0.596	0.312		*0.424*
Academics' engagement (E)	0.237	0.287	0.552	0.462	0.376	

Note: Lower diagonal shows the correlation matrix, and the upper diagonal (italic) presents HTMT values.

4.2. Hypotheses Testing

After validating the measurement model, we estimated R^2 to confirm the model's explanatory power [78], with values exceeding the recommended 0.1, namely, 0.549 for satisfaction and 0.141 for engagement. Then, we proceeded with the hypotheses testing, where all the proposed relationships were supported (Table 3), proving that intangible resources are considerably more important for academics' satisfaction than tangible. Next, the predictive relevance of the model was likewise corroborated with Q^2 values of 0.411 and 0.101 for satisfaction and engagement, respectively.

Control analysis assessed the potential alterations of the significance of the model's interactions [80,81]. In this way, the model's explanatory power could be controlled, and the investigation of higher education academics with similar perceptions guaranteed [82]. Hence, we affirmed that gender (β = 0.140, t = 2.654), age (β = −0.058, t = 1.104), position (β = −0.012, t = 0.190) and university (β = −0.076, t = 1.346) did not amend the proposed relationships, proving homogeneous allegations for the study of higher education employees' behavior.

Table 3. Structural model estimation.

Hypothesized Relationships	Coefficient β	t Value	Result
H1: Academics' perception of the university's physical assets will impact their satisfaction.	0.139	2.857 ***	Supported
H2: Academics' perception of the university's educational quality will impact their satisfaction.	0.400	7.662 ***	Supported
H3: Academics' self-based identity will impact their satisfaction.	0.430	6.674 ***	Supported
H4: Academics' skill-based identity will impact their satisfaction.	−0.162	2.316 **	Supported
H5: Academics' level of satisfaction will impact their engagement with the educational tasks.	0.376	7.427 ***	Supported

Note: ** $p < 0.05$; *** $p < 0.001$.

Finally, bearing in mind the structure of the proposed model, the mediating role of satisfaction has been measured. Following previous literature recommendations [83], indirect effects were observed (Table 4). As observed, the relationships of all the resources with academics' engagement are mediated by their satisfaction, endorsing the importance of academics' satisfaction in creating engagement with their work.

Table 4. Mediation analyses.

Indirect Effect	Coefficient β	t Value
Physical assets → Satisfaction → Engagement	0.052	2.608 *
Educational quality → Satisfaction → Engagement	0.150	5.776 *
Acad. self-based identity → Satisfaction → Engagement	0.162	4.476 *
Acad. skill-based identity → Satisfaction → Engagement	−0.061	2.162 **

Note: * $p < 0.001$; ** $p < 0.005$.

5. Discussion

Higher education quality has been studied mainly in light of students' perceptions of the university's excellence and the consecutive selection or continuance, which position the institution in the marketplace [8,84,85]. Moreover, teachers' perceptions of quality in higher education, quality of teaching or good teaching practices have likewise been an object of research, providing insights into mechanisms for improving educational quality [86–88]. However, the institutional image, superiority and competitiveness could not persist without employees' effort to realize the university's goals. Higher education institutions have addressed educational quality and resources as the indicators for universities to determine quality elements they should focus on [41]. Indeed, universities' educational properties and employees' capabilities represent the resources that, in the long run, will provide value to the institution through satisfied professionals who deliver quality education. Employees' engagement is an essential aspect of the institution's success, given its consideration as a product of job satisfaction perceptions and motivations related to the academic contribution of the academics [89]. Therefore, it becomes critical to understand the employees' perception of the organizational performance and the result of their competencies and practices as distinguished assets for building a commitment [39]. With this in mind, this study's objective is to observe universities' resources regarding educational quality and academic's aptitudes as the antecedents of their job satisfaction and engagement.

Five hypotheses propose their effects on academics' job satisfaction and further engagement, all supported by the empirical analysis. The RBT [5,25,26] have been applied to explain the resources as the essential drivers for employees' satisfaction and further engagement. We contemplate academics' perceptions of the university's tangible and intangible assets and their self-based and skill-based professional identity. The findings are in

accordance with the RBT, proposing the tangible and intangible resources as distinctive [90]. However, until now, the RBT has been related mainly to the value of the higher education system and institutions' sustainable competitive advantage [91–93], barely suggesting the academics' satisfaction due to the resources' distinction.

Moreover, the results reveal that academics' perception of the university's physical resources related to the accessibility and convenience of facilities (H1) and the institutional quality endorsement (H2) positively affect academics' job satisfaction. That explains the importance of the working conditions and the value of academics' choice to be part of the institution. This study is in line with the previous literature that evidences the importance of higher education quality [92], yet adds value by validating the role of institutional resources as determinants of academics' fulfilment.

Furthermore, the study provides evidence for the impact of academics' self-based identity (H3) and skill-based identity (H4) on their job satisfaction. In effect, self-efficacy elements observed as professional identity with the work have been deemed necessary for job satisfaction [94], partly supporting this research's findings. Nonetheless, the literature has more generally observed the professional identity through different constructs, often isolating its reflection as a measure of employees' commitment [55] instead of contemplating it as a predecessor. With this in mind, the investigation observes the higher education institutions' assets as the means of professional development and growth. However, contrary to our assumption, the study's results show a negative effect of skill-based identity on academic's satisfaction. Previous findings explain the reason for this, suggesting that academics who define themselves by their abilities and skills related to their work may struggle with challenges and setbacks in their work, collaboration and teamwork, which can lead to a decreased sense of satisfaction [95]. This sensation might be additionally emphasized since the pandemic, because of the possibility that academics feel overwhelmed by the pressure for continuous upgrading, advancement and use of new technologies, sometimes complicating the communication and work flow.

Current literature claims that service satisfaction is indispensable, yet not necessarily the unique requirement for future commitment [96], suggesting the possible effect of antecedents related to higher education service characteristics [97,98] and commitment behaviors important for employees' retention and future competitive advantage [92]. We further measure the mediating role of job satisfaction, underlining academic satisfaction as the vital requirement for employee engagement. In this way, we empirically demonstrate academics' satisfaction's critical role in the relationship between environmental perceptions related to higher education resources and behavioral responses regarding academics' engagement. Finally, the recognized relationship between job satisfaction and engagement has been confirmed (H5) for the higher education system in the Republic of Macedonia, offering this impact as a clarification for the difference in universities' success based on the traits of their tangible and intangible resources.

5.1. Theoretical and Managerial Implications

In the last decade, the higher education system in Western Balkan countries has been pointed out as the critical wheel of young people's tendency to move abroad [99]. It has been described as the reason for perceived higher education in the Republic of Macedonia as inferior to European Union countries, resulting in scarce possibilities for professional realization and improvement in the country. University academics occasionally share similar opinions, emphasizing educational quality as key to student retention [100], hence the importance of contemplating higher educational institutions through self-reflection as a tool to identify and pursue meaningful continuing professional development [57].

Moreover, RBT has rarely been applied in higher education research, provided that most studies exploring higher education quality observe it from the students' perspective [90], and therefore not focusing sufficiently on the institutional organization intrinsically. Along the same line, the higher education assessment is associated with students' experience with the quality of the university, such as the course, faculty and university

service and accreditation [101], underlining the importance of addressing those elements as the means for providing more excellent service value. Still, employees' resources and effort are an element that can additionally improve the general image of the quality of higher education, positioning the consecutive employees' satisfaction and engagement as the essential measures for providing an improved educational service.

Therefore, we observe tangible and intangible resources, with a particular emphasis on intangible assets, as those can be the main ones responsible for providing a unique position for the institution. The originality of the intangible resources highlights the necessity to focus on the human resources, i.e., the academics' enactment. The RBT suggested that employees' resources might be especially relevant for their perception of the working tasks [33]. Indeed, how academics perceive their role in educational service delivery, regarding their resources covering higher education service provision [49], may designate the core of the educational quality. These assets can represent the professional identity, which usually has been researched through individual concepts describing motivation, self-efficacy, self-image or task perception [55]. Nevertheless, the extant research does not sufficiently present it as a complete set of personal perceptions of their capacity and relation to the tasks as indicators of academics' job satisfaction; this is where the value of the self-based and skill-based identity, as the counterpart of the university's quality, comes into focus as the driver of academic's satisfaction, confirmed by the findings of this study.

Considering the outcome of this investigation, there are practical implications for universities to create a competitive advantage in the already critical higher education service offered in the Republic of Macedonia. Recognizing the institution's potential is vital through identifying and assessing the resources and capacities it possesses or can access [67]. At the first level would be the tangible resources or company's assets, and at the second, the organization's intangible collective capacities, competencies or abilities. The characteristics of those resources enable them to distinguish themselves from the rest of the universities in the country. Therefore, the primary convenience of the physical conditions that universities provide for service delivery is essential, as employees will evaluate it as a motivating environment and supportive infrastructure, facilitating the process of building job satisfaction. The advantageous working and learning settings and the quality of universities' intangible resources create the foundation for building up academic's fulfilment. In this sense, the perceived educational quality of the university and the faculty, as well as their endorsement and the degrees' content quality, are elements that institutions have to respect, as they add to academics' gratification with their choice to form a part of the university.

Furthermore, employees' critical thinking regarding their performance can be a powerful instrument for institutions to recognize and encourage professional advancement [57]. Accordingly, professional identity requires serious contemplation when universities develop engagement and progress-related strategies and guidelines in higher education. On this point, academics' perception of their role in the educational process, communication with and recognition of the employees and passion for teaching shape their self-based identity. Thus, to involve satisfied employees, universities must encourage academics' position and integrity in the institution and promote harmonious collaboration while carefully motivating their capacities and excellence development without the urge or tension for evidence.

Finally, academics who show satisfaction with the institution and their work decisions are more likely to feel inspired, enthusiastic and proud of their job, as the components that describe a committed community. Those deductions are a valuable indicator of how the higher education system is perceived in a developing society. Western Balkan universities should rely on such evidence in explaining their employees' experiences and perceptions to meet students' expectations regarding superior higher education services worth attending.

5.2. Limitations and Future Research Lines

The limitations of this study offer valuable opportunities for future research. The fact that the investigation focuses on only one country bounds the possibility for generalization. In order to overcome this issue, the study could be replicated in other Western Balkan countries to contrast the results and detect the similarities and variations of the higher education systems. Furthermore, future research could incorporate students' perspectives and even the universities' administrations' view of the resources and possibly get deeper into precise demands for enhancing the overall educational quality as the factor determining young people's brain drain intentions [102]. Additionally, public versus private universities could be assessed to compare institutions with potentially different involvement [103]. In this context, institutional or personal triggers, such as organizational support or work-family balance, could be observed as antecedents of academic's satisfaction [104,105]. Similarly, different explanatory variables, such as the organizational practices or teaching efficacy, could be integrated into the model to describe more meticulously the elements that shape academic engagement [106]. Finally, given the learning and teaching transformations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, special attention could be paid to the electronic provision of the service, where elements of e-learning quality and academics' ICT skills would form a more detailed picture of higher education [107].

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