SOCIAL WORK STUDENTS’ ATTITUDES TOWARDS PILLARS OF SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT: THE CASE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF SHKODRA, ALBANIA

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ABSTRACT

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to measure the attitudes toward sustainable development among students enrolled in the Bachelor’s program in Social Work and to explore the relationship between students’ course of study, and their attitudes towards the pillars of sustainable development.

Method: This research is a mixed-methods study, incorporating both quantitative and qualitative descriptive approaches. The participants were recruited using a purposive sampling method. The population for the study comprised 104 students in the Bachelor’s program in Social Work. It is used “Attitudes toward Sustainable Development Scale” (ASDS) developed by Biasutti & Frate (2017). Open and closed questions were also incorporated. The data obtained were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS). The analysis encompassed both descriptive and inferential statistics. A thematic analysis was also conducted.

Results and Conclusion: The study concludes that students’ attitudes toward the environment, economy, society, and education components are positive, with a particular emphasis on their attitudes toward society and education. In general, students express a desire to acquire additional knowledge in this field throughout their university education.

Research Implications: The study highlights the need to enhance social work education to strengthen students’ commitment to sustainable development. Although students have a basic understanding of sustainability, they require more in-depth education. Integrating specialized sustainability topics into the curriculum will better prepare them for professional roles. This approach ensures future social workers can effectively advance sustainable development goals.

Originality/Value: The originality of this paper lies in its dual quantitative and qualitative analysis of social work students’ attitudes towards sustainable development. It provides valuable insights into the necessity of integrating specialized sustainability education within social work programs. Consequently, it offers a strategic approach to better prepare future social workers to effectively advance sustainable development goals in their professional roles.

Keywords: Sustainable Development, Social Worker, Students’ Attitudes, Higher Education.

ATITUDES DOS ESTUDANTES DE SERVIÇO SOCIAL EM RELAÇÃO AOS PILARES DO DESENVOLVIMENTO SUSTENTÁVEL: O CASO DA UNIVERSIDADE DE SHKODRA, ALBÂNIA

RESUMO

Objetivo: O objetivo deste artigo é medir as atitudes em relação ao desenvolvimento sustentável entre os alunos matriculados no programa de bacharelado em Serviço Social e explorar a relação entre o curso de estudo dos alunos e suas atitudes em relação aos pilares do desenvolvimento sustentável.

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Resultados e Conclusão: O estudo conclui que as atitudes dos alunos em relação ao ambiente, à economia, à sociedade e aos componentes da educação são positivas, com particular ênfase nas suas atitudes em relação à sociedade e à educação. Em geral, os alunos manifestam o desejo de adquirir conhecimentos adicionais nesta área ao longo da sua formação universitária.

Implicaciones de pesquisa: O estudio destaca a necesidad de mejorar a educación en servicio social para fortalecer o compromiso dos alumnos con el desarrollo sustentable. Embora os alunos tenham uma compreensão básica de sustentabilidade, eles necessitam de uma educação mais aprofundada. A integração de tópicos especializados de sustentabilidade no currículo irá prepará-los melhor para funções profissionais. Esta abordagem garante que os futuros assistentes sociais possam efetivamente promover os objetivos de desenvolvimento sustentável.

Originalidade/Valor: A originalidade deste artigo reside na sua dupla análise quantitativa e qualitativa das atitudes dos estudantes de serviço social em relação ao desenvolvimento sustentável. Ele fornece informações valiosas sobre a necessidade de integrar a educação especializada em sustentabilidade nos programas de serviço social. Consequentemente, oferece uma abordagem estratégica para preparar melhor os futuros assistentes sociais para promover eficazmente os objectivos de desenvolvimento sustentável nas suas funções profissionais.


ACTITUDES DE LOS ESTUDIANTES DE TRABAJO SOCIAL HACIA LOS PILARES DEL DESARROLLO SOSTENIBLE: EL CASO DE LA UNIVERSIDAD DE SHKODRA, ALBANIA

RESUMEN

Propósito: El propósito de este artículo es medir las actitudes hacia el desarrollo sustentable entre los estudiantes matriculados en el programa de Licenciatura en Trabajo Social y explorar la relación entre la carrera de los estudiantes y sus actitudes hacia los pilares del desarrollo sustentable.

Método: Esta investigación es un estudio de métodos mixtos, que incorpora enfoques descriptivos tanto cuantitativos como cualitativos. Los participantes fueron reclutados mediante un método de muestreo intencional. La población de estudio estuvo compuesta por 104 estudiantes de la carrera de Licenciatura en Trabajo Social. Se utiliza la “Escala de Actitudes hacia el Desarrollo Sostenible” (ASDS) desarrollada por Biasutti & Frate (2017). También se incorporaron preguntas abiertas y cerradas. Los datos obtenidos fueron analizados mediante el Paquete Estadístico para Ciencias Sociales (SPSS). El análisis abarcó estadísticas tanto descriptivas como inferenciales. También se realizó un análisis temático.

Resultados y Conclusión: El estudio concluye que las actitudes de los estudiantes hacia los componentes medio ambiente, economía, sociedad y educación son positivas, con especial énfasis en sus actitudes hacia la sociedad y la educación. En general, los estudiantes manifiestan el deseo de adquirir conocimientos adicionales en este campo a lo largo de su formación universitaria.

Implicaciones de la investigación: El estudio destaca la necesidad de mejorar la educación en trabajo social para fortalecer el compromiso de los estudiantes con el desarrollo sostenible. Aunque los estudiantes tienen una comprensión básica de la sostenibilidad, requieren una educación más profunda. La integración de temas especializados de sostenibilidad en el plan de estudios los preparará mejor para roles profesionales. Este enfoque garantiza que los futuros trabajadores sociales puedan promover eficazmente los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible.

Originalidad/Valor: La originalidad de este artículo radica en su análisis dual cuantitativo y cualitativo de las actitudes de los estudiantes de trabajo social hacia el desarrollo sostenible. Proporciona información valiosa sobre la necesidad de integrar la educación especializada en sostenibilidad dentro de los programas de trabajo social. En
consecuencia, ofrece un enfoque estratégico para preparar mejor a los futuros trabajadores sociales para promover eficazmente los objetivos de desarrollo sostenible en sus funciones profesionales.

**Palabras clave:** Desarrollo Sostenible, Trabajador Social, Actitudes de los Estudiantes, Educación Superior.

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1 INTRODUCTION

In 1987, the Brundtland Report defined sustainable development as development that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Brundtland, 1987). As Krstić (2018) affirms ‘‘the concept of sustainable development includes integral economic, technological, social and cultural development harmonized with the need for the protection and improvement of environment that enables current and future generations to meet needs and improve the quality of life’’.

The significance and applicability of sustainable development are grounded in the escalating focus on the three core pillars of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), which encompass the domains of economy, society, and environment (UNESCO, 2005). The global community at the United Nations on September 25, 2015 agreed to the 2030 Global Agenda entitled ”Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development”. The theme of ”no one will be left behind” is most critical so as to ensure that inclusive development is within the reach of all people groups and communities (Jayasooria, 2016).

Simplified, the Global Agenda for Social Work & Social Development Framework for 2020-2030 emphasizes the collaborative effort of social work and social development professions, alongside partners, to promote inclusive social transformation over the next decade. This involves celebrating people's strengths, fostering their active participation, particularly those marginalized, and co-designing thriving communities and societies for both people and the environment (IASSW, ICSW, IFSW, 2020).

Peeters (2012) asserts that sustainable development deserves attention within the social work profession and they should not remain passive; rather, it can actively participate in transformative processes by embracing an Eco social approach rooted in social-ecological systems thinking. Sustainable development (SD) has garnered significant attention across various domains, including academia, governance, planning, and development interventions.
(Mensah & Ricart Casadevall, 2019). Universities are expected to step up to this challenge by producing graduates equipped with the necessary attitudes to serve as responsible change agents and global citizens (Abu-Alruz et al., 2018).

Based on these foundational principles, the social work profession is crucial for contributing to sustainable development processes. In this context, taking into consideration the agenda of social work, the theoretical preparation of the social worker in higher education is very important, to make him capable of the labor market. The paper aims to measure the attitudes toward to the sustainable development of the students of the Bachelor study program in Social Work at the “Luigj Gurakuqi” University of Shkodër and to identify the relationship between students’ course of study, and their attitudes toward to the pillars of sustainable development. This study is significant in the fields of education and sustainable development. By examining the attitudes of Bachelor's students in Social Work towards sustainable development, it highlights the role of future social workers in promoting sustainability. The research recommends enhancing social work education to better equip professionals to address sustainable development challenges. Assessing student perceptions allows institutions to tailor programs, ensuring graduates are prepared to navigate the social, economic, and environmental issues they will encounter, and to promote long-term sustainability and resilience within communities.

2 REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The foundational principles of what would later be termed sustainable development were established during the 1972 United Nations Conference on the Human Environment, commonly referred to as the Stockholm Conference (Kulik, 2024). Sustainable development was first introduced in the United Nationsí Brundtland Commission in 1987 known as “Our Common Future” (Abu-Alruz et al., 2018). Sustainability was defined as “meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (the United Nations Brundtland Commission) or as ”enduring into the long-term future; it refers to systems and processes that are able to operate and persist on their own over long periods of time” (Robertson, 2021). Commentators often distinguish between different aspects of sustainability, including social, economic and environmental, while recognizing that these are inherently interconnected (Bowles et al., 2018).

In 2015, the United Nations adopted 17 goals that offered an integrated approach to economic and social development, especially driven by the recognition that environmental
issues and many health and social challenges know no borders. These Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), also known as the Global Goals, provide a framework for action to meet the needs of vulnerable individuals and communities worldwide (Rice et al., 2022). While various definitions exist for sustainable development (SD), the one put forth by the Brundtland Commission Report is frequently cited. According to this report, sustainable development entails development that fulfills the requirements of the present generation without jeopardizing the capacity of future generations to fulfill their own needs (Schaefer & Crane, 2005).

According to Klarin (2018), sustainable development stems from the Triple Bottom Line concept, emphasizing a balance among environmental sustainability, social sustainability, and economic sustainability. Environmental sustainability maintains the quality of the environment crucial for economic activities and people's quality of life. Social sustainability ensures human rights, equality, and cultural identity. Economic sustainability preserves natural, social, and human capital essential for income and living standards. Rice, Fisher & Moore (2022) highlighted that that the SDGs' emphasis on economic and social progress aligns with social work principles. Despite education challenges, the SDGs provide a framework for addressing global social, economic, and health issues. In this regard, the social work profession emerges as a vital partner for the UN SDGs and their aspirations, as it plays a crucial role in conveying and articulating communities' concerns and priorities in alignment with policy objectives (IFSW, 2021). Professionals and social work associations agree on the vital role of social workers in sustainable development. They share a consensus on the main commitment areas: a) environmental crises, b) social crises, c) sustainable development goals, and d) the social work profession (IFSW, IASSW, UNRISD, HETS, HESSO, 2017).

The 2030 SDG Agenda includes five key areas, known as the five pillars: people, planet, prosperity, peace, and partnerships. These pillars are central to both the theory and practice of social work. Jayasooria (2016) suggests that social workers can align their roles with the SDG 2030 agenda to promote holistic development, prioritizing human rights and environmental concerns in their practice of human services and social justice. Also, Kirti (2021) emphasize that the social work values are consistent with the 2030 Agenda: Human dignity, inclusivity, respect, diversity, equality and non-discrimination, empowerment, reliance, resilience, and self-help are common themes in Agenda 2030. Social workers identify with these values for execution.

Lombard (2015) emphasized the importance of infusing sustainable development into social work education and emphasized the incorporation of students' lived experiences into teaching and learning. Essential to preparing students for a practice aligned with broader social
justice goals is the utilization of approaches such as human rights, reflective practice, and critical pedagogy in social work instruction. The positive impact and significance of education in advancing sustainable development, fostering social progress, and enhancing human well-being have been extensively documented.

Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) should be integrated into all levels of formal education curricula, including early childhood care and education, primary and secondary education, technical and vocational education and training (TVET), and higher education (UNESCO, 2017). ESD refers to educational programs and experiences that are designed to allow people to acquire the knowledge, skills and values that are necessary to shape a sustainable future (Biasutti, Frate, 2017). Throughout the 10-year span of the Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) Strategy, member states have pledged to integrate sustainable development principles into education and learning (UNECE, 2016). At all education levels, curriculum changes should prioritize incorporating content and learning practices relevant to Education for Sustainable Development (ESD). Progress is evident, especially in higher education, where sustainability is increasingly integrated into curricula, teaching methods, research efforts, operational practices, and community engagement (Buckler & Creech, 2014).

According to UNESCO “Education for sustainable development (ESD) is an appropriate educational program to educate people from an early age to reduce human dependence on natural and social environments. The ESD educates people to participate, be active, and have knowledge of nature, equality, and social justice, thereby ESD can enhance consciousness and form human behavior.” (UNESCO, 2021). Ofei-Manu and Didham (2018) highlight education as a crucial instrument for sustainable development, serving as a framework to reconcile perceived conflicts between economic, social, and environmental progress, ultimately aiming for universal well-being. While education stands as a distinct SDG, its role as a cross-cutting tool for implementation demands further exploration to advance progress across various sustainable development goals.

Naranjo (2024) concluded that aligning curricular planning in social work education with the SDGs is crucial to prepare students with the skills and competencies required for working effectively with target communities. Also, Mazza (2021), based on a literature review, emphasized the critical role of education in attaining sustainable development, a perspective echoed in both European and United Nations strategies. The positive impact of education on bolstering sustainable development endeavors is evident.
3 METHODOLOGY

3.1 THE PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

The paper aims to measure the attitudes towards sustainable development among students enrolled in the Bachelor's program in Social Work at the "Luigj Gurakuqi" University of Shkodër, and to explore the relationship between students' course of study, and their attitudes towards the pillars of sustainable development.

The following research questions were addressed:

1. What is the level of attitude towards the pillars of SD among social work students?
2. What is the relationship between students’ course of study and their attitudes towards the pillars of SD?
3. What is the relationship between students’ level of knowledge about SD and their attitudes towards the pillars of SD?

3.2 THE METHOD USED

It is generally deemed more appropriate to employ a mixed methodology, aligning with the study's objectives and the research questions posed. This approach encompasses both quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques. Mixed methods research involves integrating elements from qualitative and quantitative research approaches, such as diverse viewpoints, data collection methods, and analysis techniques. This integration aims to facilitate a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter and to corroborate findings (Johnson et al., 2007). The survey method was used. It is used ’’Attitudes toward Sustainable Development Scale’’ (ASDS) developed by Biasutti & Frate (2017). The ASDS composed of 20 items was distributed on four dimensions as follows: environment (5 items), economy (5 items), society (5 items), and education (5 items). These items were rated on a Likert-type scale ranged as follows: 1 ’’Strongly Disagree’’, 2 ’’Disagree’’, 3 ‘’Neutral’’, 4 ‘’Agree’’, and 5 ‘’Strongly Agree’’ (Abu-Alruz J., et al., 2018).

Open and closed questions were incorporated to gather insights into students’ knowledge levels regarding sustainable development, the sources from which they acquired this knowledge, and to solicit their suggestions for future endeavors. The piloting phase was carried out by professionals in the field of psychology. The internal consistency was assessed by calculating Cronbach's α, demonstrating good stability with a value of 0.93. The Albanian
version of the ASDS questionnaire after his administration with the sample size is Cronbach’s alpha = 0.88.

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

The study population comprises students enrolled in the bachelor’s program in social work. Out of the study participants, 2 students (1.9%) are male, and 104 (98.1%) are female. Among the participants, 36 students (34%) are in their first academic year, 36 students (34%) are in their second academic year, and 34 students (32%) are in their third academic year. Students’ ages range from 18 years old (13 students or 12.3% of participants) to 29 years old (1 student or 0.9%). Two students (1.9%) did not disclose their age. The average age of the study participants is 20.4 years. The representation levels of students in the study (Table 1) are as follows: in the first year, 46 students are enrolled, with 36 participating in the study, resulting in a representation level of 78.2%. The second year consists of 50 students, with 36 participating in the study, equating to a representation level of 72%. In the third year, there are 39 enrolled students, with 34 participating in the study, resulting in a representation level of 87.1%. Overall, the representation level for students in the bachelor's study program in social work is 78.5%.

Table 1

General data about the level of representation of students.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Course of study</th>
<th>Enrolled</th>
<th>Participants in the study</th>
<th>The level of representation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>First year</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>78.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Second year</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>72%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Third year</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>87.1%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>135</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>78.5%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The questionnaires were distributed in May 2023 to all students present in the classrooms, adhering to the principle of anonymity. Students were given the freedom to complete the questionnaire voluntarily. In total, 115 students completed the questionnaire, but 9 were deemed invalid due to incomplete responses to most items. Additionally, 5 students declined to participate in the survey.
3.4 DATA ANALYSIS

The questionnaires were administered in June 2023, and the data obtained were analyzed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS), version 20.0. The analysis encompassed both descriptive and inferential statistics. Descriptive statistics, including relative and absolute frequencies, mean, median, mode, and standard deviation, were employed to gauge the level of attitude towards the pillars of SD among social work students. Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was utilized to explore the relationship between students' course of study and their attitudes towards the components of SD. Additionally, correlation analysis was conducted to assess the relationship between students' age and their attitudes towards the SD components. The dependent variable is the *students’ perception* and the independent variables is the *students’ course of study*.

The alpha coefficient of reliability was calculated for each component of the sustainable development, as follows: environment ($\alpha=0.72$), economy ($\alpha=0.76$), society ($\alpha=0.87$), education ($\alpha=0.80$). The qualitative data collected from the open-ended questions were entered into a Microsoft Excel program, and thematic analysis was conducted. The responses were transcribed, coded, and categorized based on similarities to determine the main themes. A narrative description is presented in the results and their discussion section.

4 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 QUANTITATIVE RESULTS

4.1.1 General data related students’ attitude towards to the components of Sustainable Development

As mentioned above, each component has 5 items, and the items were rated on a Likert-type scale ranged from 1 ("Strongly Disagree") to 5 ("Strongly Agree"). As observed from Table 2, students' attitudes towards the environment, economy, society, and education components are generally positive, with particularly favorable attitudes noted towards the society and education components.
As we can see from the table 3, students’ attitudes toward SD components is positive for all the items.

**Table 3**

*Data related to the items of the SD components.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Mode</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment component</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1. When people interfere with the environment, they often produce disastrous consequences</td>
<td>3.34</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Environmental protection and people’s quality of life are directly linked</td>
<td>4.04</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Biodiversity should be protected at the expense of industrial agricultural production</td>
<td>3.65</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.96</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Building development is less important than environmental protection</td>
<td>3.25</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.29</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. Environmental protection is more important than industrial growth</td>
<td>3.54</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.13</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy component</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Government economic policies should increase sustainable production even if it means spending more money</td>
<td>3.66</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.91</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. People should sacrifice more to reduce economic differences between populations</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1.03</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. Government economic policies should increase fair trade</td>
<td>4.07</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.92</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. Government economic policies should act if a country is wasting its natural resources</td>
<td>4.17</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Reducing poverty and hunger in the world is more important than increasing the economic well-being of the industrialized countries</td>
<td>3.78</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1.02</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society component</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Each country can do a lot to keep the peace in the world</td>
<td>4.5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.81</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. The society should further promote equal opportunities for males and females</td>
<td>4.29</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0.87</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. The contact between cultures is stimulating and enriching</td>
<td>3.87</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0.77</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.1.2 The relationship between students’ course of study and their attitudes toward to the SD components

There is no statistically significant relationship between students’ attitudes towards the Environment component (Sig=0.35), Economy component (Sig=0.12), Society component (Sig=0.60), and Education component (Sig=0.14), and their course of study. However, although a slight difference is observed in the results obtained, students in the first academic year exhibit a more positive attitude towards the Environment and Economy components, and students in the third academic year have more positive attitude toward Society and Education components (Table 4 and figures 1, 2, 3, and 4).
Table 4

Data related to the relationship between students’ course of study and their attitudes toward the SD components.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Environment</th>
<th>Course of study</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Environment</td>
<td>First year</td>
<td>18.16</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.48466</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second year</td>
<td>18.05</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.63975</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>23.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third year</td>
<td>17.00</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>4.72261</td>
<td>7.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>18.26</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>3.69507</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economy</td>
<td>First year</td>
<td>20.16</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.87298</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second year</td>
<td>18.61</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.81098</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>24.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third year</td>
<td>18.79</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.67448</td>
<td>13.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>19.19</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>3.51709</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>First year</td>
<td>21.00</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>4.07080</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Second year</td>
<td>21.02</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.99987</td>
<td>15.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Third year</td>
<td>21.73</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.16524</td>
<td>12.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Total</td>
<td>21.24</td>
<td>106</td>
<td>3.43320</td>
<td>5.00</td>
<td>25.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>First year</td>
<td>20.19</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.56147</td>
<td>14.00</td>
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</tr>
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<td>106</td>
<td>3.01087</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Figure 1

Distribution of environment component data by the students’ course of study
Figure 2

*Distribution of economy component data by the students’ course of study*

![Box plot for economy component data by course of study](image)

Figure 3

*Distribution of society component data by the students’ course of study*

![Box plot for society component data by course of study](image)
Figure 4

Distribution of education component data by the students’ course of study

4.2 QUALITATIVE RESULTS

In general, students place value on the theme of sustainable development and express keen interest in obtaining comprehensive information about this topic. Some of the students’ opinions on the SD topic include the following:

“I think that sustainable development topic is important for everyone.” (S56)
“Communication for sustainable development should begin in adolescence, as it is the most delicate age, where the individual takes responsibility and decides for the future.” (S96)
“We should be informed as much as possible about these topics.” (S100)

The students affirm that they have received knowledge about sustainable development from high school and from studying at the university, but they affirm that they have received more knowledge at the university. Some students expressed their view on this issue:

“It is very important for us to be informed. This study program is very valuable for me because I have gained a lot of knowledge about sustainable development.” (S12)
“As much as I have received as a student, the knowledge about SD is very effective for my development.” (S33)

Students also desire to acquire additional knowledge in this field throughout their university education. For instance:

“We must have more knowledge about sustainable development.” (S67)
“We need to have more knowledge about this topic and give more importance to this topic.” (S81)

They suggest that, in addition to acquiring general knowledge about sustainable development and its components, they should also receive more in-depth understanding about the methods, strategies, and approaches necessary to promote sustainable development. For example:

“I think that sustainable development should be related to long-term strategies, but what we know is very little of what we need to know about this topic.” (S86)
“The University provides us with SD knowledge, but it is not enough.” (S88)
My suggestion is that the students need to be equipped with more knowledge about sustainable development, so that the students become more aware about this topic.” (S104)

4.3 DISCUSSION

Similar studies have been conducted regarding students’ attitudes towards the concept and key pillars of sustainable development. The findings of the study conducted among students enrolled in the Bachelor’s degree program in social work at the University of Shkodra align with the results of similar studies conducted in various countries around the world. Drayson et al. (2014) found that over two-thirds of respondents consistently advocate for sustainable development (SD) integration into all university courses. Additionally, students express a preference for reframing existing curriculum content rather than adding new courses. Furthermore, there's a strong consensus among first-year respondents that universities should be responsible for developing sustainability skills as part of their coursework. In the study carried out in Serbia, the authors concluded that "In general, students recognized the main determinants of sustainable development and supported an integral approach to sustainability, i.e., the need to include knowledge, values, and skills for sustainable development in higher education programs" (Nikolic et al., 2020). Jamal Abu-Alruz et al. (2018) conducted a similar study with undergraduate students from the Faculty of Educational Sciences at a public university in Jordan. Their findings revealed that while three pillars of sustainable development (economy, society, and education) received positive attitudes from university students, the fourth pillar, environmental sustainability, garnered negative attitudes from them.

The research by Balakrishnan, Tochinai, & Kanemitsu (2020) in Malaysia reveals that Education for Sustainable Development (ESD) in higher education institutions fosters positive
perceptions and attitudes towards sustainable development among undergraduates. However, the economic and social dimensions received relatively low mean scores, suggesting a need for educators to provide students with greater exposure to these topics in the classroom. According to Afroz and Ilham (2020), the overall awareness level of students of University of Malaya in Malaysia toward SDGs is ‘high, shown by a significant number of students who possess high knowledge with a positive attitude’. The main findings from the study of Šućur-Janjetović, Lepir and Šćepović (2023), including the social work students from Bosnia and Herzegovina and Australia, indicate that most of students in both countries are unfamiliar with the SDGs.

5 CONCLUSION

All students participating in the study demonstrate knowledge of sustainable development; thus, there are no students in the bachelor’s program in social work who lack knowledge in this field. Students’ attitudes towards the environment, economy, society, and education components are generally positive, particularly towards society and education. Students in the first academic year exhibit a more positive attitude towards the environment and economy components; however, there is no statistically significant relationship between students’ attitudes towards these SD components and their course of study. Similarly, students in the third academic year show a more positive attitude towards the society and education components; nonetheless, there is no statistically significant relationship between students’ attitudes towards these SD components and their course of study. Students generally assert that they have acquired knowledge about sustainable development both during their high school education and through their university studies; however, they emphasize that they have gained a deeper understanding of the subject at the university level. Furthermore, students express a desire for further education in this field throughout their university education. They propose that, in addition to acquiring general knowledge about sustainable development and its components, they should also receive deeper insight into the methods, approaches, and strategies necessary to promote sustainable development.

6 RECOMMENDATIONS

Considering the conclusions reached, it is imperative to heed several recommendations. Students in the bachelor’s study program in social work should receive additional information regarding sustainable development and the role that social workers play in advancing it. This
information can be integrated into existing courses or, alternatively, a dedicated course could be introduced into the educational curriculum, specifically emphasizing the role of social workers in promoting sustainable development.

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