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The level of student participation in decision-making processes in Kosovo Universities: a comparative study between the University of Prishtina and the University of Business and Technology

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Abstract

During the last decade in the education system of Kosovo, there has been an increase in demands for increased student representation in the decision-making processes of universities. During the last decade, efforts have been made for the concept of joint leadership to be implemented by Kosovar universities (public and private). This can be justified because students are the primary actors influenced by these decisions, and consequently, they should be held accountable for these decisions. To see how effective the work of these bodies has been, this paper aims to analyse research and elaborate at what level is the degree of actual participation of students in decision making? Particular focus will be on comparing this degree between public (UP) and private (UBT) universities. The research tool used is the descriptive questionnaire with qualitative access, which contains 11 closed-ended questions to collect this data. The target focus group of this study were UP and UBT students. The selection samples were second-year students, regardless of their field of study. The sampling method used is the probability sample, more precisely the random sample attended by 168 students (100 from UP and 68 from UBT). The findings showed that student participation is regulated according to legal provisions and relevant documents. However, these documents do not specify exactly in which areas of activity students have the right to be part of the decision-making process.

Keywords: student participation, private-public University, Kosovo, join leadership, decision-making process

Introduction

79. 264 is the figure which represents the number of students in Kosovo, of which 58 879 (80.0%) are students in public universities, while 14 725 (20.0%) are in private colleges. For such a large number of students, universities must have sufficient capacity and mechanisms to ensure quality governance within the University. The university management should establish these mechanisms to make decision-making processes more transparent, resulting in greater democratisation.

For a very long time in Kosovo, the model of decision-making within universities has been top-down, which means that students have not been sufficiently involved in decision-making processes in certain areas of university management. Over the last decade, universities have made efforts to implement the concept of shared leadership. Shared leadership refers to the division of tasks and achievement among the actors of an entity to develop the capacity for problem-solving. Shared leadership thus offers a concept of leadership practice as a team-level phenomenon, where many individuals adopt behaviours rather than just those in charge or those with formal leadership roles (Kocolowski, 2010).

Within the context of higher education, the term governance has been used to refer to how universities and other higher education institutions are organised and managed (Mulinge et al., 2017, p. 38). Based on the concept of Common Leadership, universities have established legal provisions and mechanisms (at least de jure) which guarantee students the right to participate in various areas and levels of decision-making.

Aggrawal (2004) adds that student representatives cannot participate in matters relating to the conduct of examinations, the evaluation of student performance, the appointment of professors and other "secret" issues of the University. Therefore, participation must be ensured in all other academic and administrative decisions these competent bodies take.

Student involvement requires understanding the nature of multi-level higher education governance, aspects of student self-government on campus, and various informal and formal ways of getting involved in university policies (Mafa, 2016). Involvement of students in university policies is done through university institutions. The pilot project of CD-ESR on the University as part of Citizenship has identified four sets of issues in which higher education institutions have a role to play, as an institution or through their members, i.e. academic community of researchers and students (Bergan, 2003):

- I. Institutional decision-making;*
- II. Institutional life in a broader sense, including the study process;*
- III. Higher education institutions as a multicultural society;*
- IV. Higher education institutions in their relations and interaction with the broader community.*

Problem formulation

In the last decade education system of Kosovo has seen a growth in demand for a more extensive student representation in the decision-making processes of universities. This can be justified because students are the primary actors influenced by these decisions, and consequently, they should be held accountable for these decisions. If other collegial actors share responsibility for decision-making with students, students are less likely to show incompatibility with the findings (Jeruto & Kiprop, 2011).

To achieve this, universities have created unique collegial bodies that aim to increase the role of students in the decision-making chain. To understand how effective these bodies work? This study aims to analyse and elaborate, in generalised and simplified points, the degree of actual participation of students in decision making. The particular focus will compare this degree between public and private universities. Our hypothesis predicts that student participation is higher in private universities. Since there is no significant number of studies in this aspect, this study aims to find the degree of proportion between the normative part and the actual fulfilment of these norms.

Study objectives

General Objectives of the study

The general objective of this study is to examine the degree of student involvement in decision-making, at the level of University Bodies in public and private universities, more precisely in the University of Pristina and UBT.

Particular objectives of the study

Explicitly, this study aims to:

- 1. Identify areas of decision issues in which students are allowed to be involved in UP and UBT*
- 2. Examine the degree of student involvement in decision-making at UP and UBT*
- 3. To ascertain the extent to which students see participation in decision-making as necessary in their universities*

Importance of the study

Participation in university decision-making makes students feel appropriate and see themselves as an essential part of the university system (Mafa, 2016). Therefore, this study is assumed to make the following contributions:

- 1. The study can raise awareness among students and university officials about the importance of participatory decision-making so that universities can harness students' potential for problem-solving.*
- 2. The study will follow up on recommendations that can help students make decisions.*
- 3. The study may provide some input for further research.*

Definition and concepts

Decision-making bodies are the persons or bodies in charge of the accountability to make and review decisions related to the relevant institution (Law Insider, n.d.).

Decision-making - is an ongoing process that culminates in a single decision or a series of decisions (choices) that stimulate movements or actions (Gemechu, 2014)

University Management - is the initiative of university administrators to effectively and adequately address the concerns, questions, proposals, complaints and students feedback, academic and non-academic staff (What is University Management | IGI Global, n.d.)

Materials and methods

This study uses a comparative research model of the causal generalisations type. The reasoning behind the chosen model lies in the fact that the study will not only focus on the differences and similarities between student participation in the two universities mentioned above but will continue to use the empirical data collected to examine the cause of these differences (Esser & Vliegthart, 2017). The research tool used is the descriptive questionnaire with qualitative access, which contains 11 closed-ended questions to collect this data. The target population of this study were students of UP and UBT. The champions were sophomores, regardless of their field of study. The sampling method used is the probability sample, more precisely the random sample attended by 168 students (100 from UP and 68 from UBT). This sampling is used because through this sampling, every respondent has an equal choice and thus eliminates bias in sample selection (Mathews & Ross, 2010). The questionnaire on the equipment is included "group chats" of students on social media. The questionnaire was used on this platform via the link because the questionnaire was created in Google Forms. Their participation has been voluntary and anonymous. The questionnaire was also distributed to the group "Prishtina Network" on Facebook. In addition to this method of data collection, this study also used the method of document analysis. Documents such as the university statute and the student organisation statute have been consulted to analyse the legal aspect of student participation in decision-making.

Data presentation and analysis

This section will present the data collected through the questionnaire and documents, and at the same time, this data will be analysed. The presentation of these data follows the sequence of study objectives. The data collected by UP and UBT will be presented in parallel, making comparisons. This section will include discussions such as the intensity of students' interest in decision-making, how much this interest is represented in practice and areas of decision-making they are involved in.

Areas of decision making where students can participate

According to article 156, paragraph 1, of the Statute of UP, citation: "Students have the right to establish student organisations to which all students can be part of ". These organisations should represent students' interests in the highest bodies of the organisational structure of UP: Steering Council and Senate (University Governance - the University of Prishtina, n.d.). Typically all these bodies should have statutes, but unfortunately, they were not found on the UP website or other official addresses. According to Article 157 of the UP Statute, students' interests will be represented within the University through the Student Parliament at the university level and the Student Council at the Academic Unit level.

On the other hand, the right to express their opinions and participate in their representatives' elections is guaranteed to UBT students by Article 55. (c) (e) of the UBT Statute. Students elect their representatives who will represent the student interests in the respective Faculty Council (Article 41, UBT statute). Also, as a body representing students' interests at UBT is the Student Organization. Articles 8 and 14 of the Statute of this organisation define its rights and responsibilities, which among other things states "the presentation and representation of the rights and interests of students before the bodies of BPrAL College "UBT-e" LLC, Prishtina, as well as other relevant state institutions", "presentation of opinions and standpoint, as well as their proposals" (i.e. members of the organisation) and" initiation of the procedure which they think is of interest for the improvement of the student standard ".

In these documents, there is a sort of ambiguity or uncertainty regarding which areas students have the right to participate in decision-making. This is because such a thing is not directly revealed in the statutes mentioned above. In this absence, students outside student organisations are unclear in which cases they should exercise their right to express an opinion or give ideas.

Level of student participation in decision making

As mentioned above, student representatives are members of the governing bodies of universities. According

A keni qenë ndonjëherë pjesë e organeve vendimmarrese në universitetin tuaj?

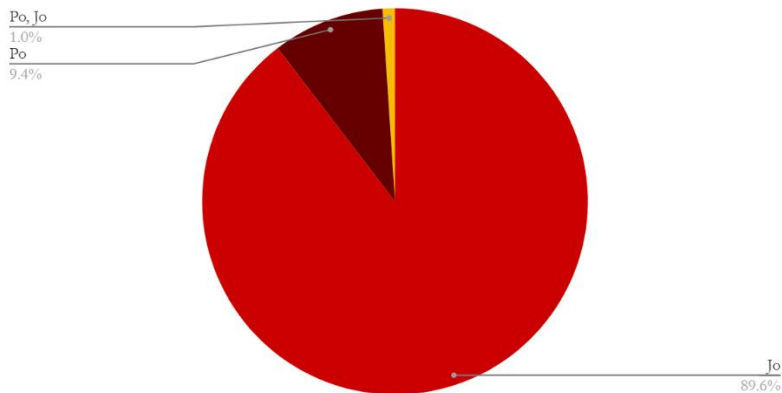


Figure 1 Level of participation of UP students in university bodies

whom are students (Article 43, UP Statute). The reason students are included in the Senate is that the competencies of this body are more related to student issues (Article 47, UP Statute). However, when the students were asked how many were members of these bodies, 10 out of 100 participating students stated that they participated in these bodies. In contrast, the rest indicated that they did not participate.

At UBT, students also have the right to participate in university bodies. For example, according to Article 26 of the Statute of UBT, in the Academic Council, among other members, there must be one member from the

to Article 18 of the UP statute, "The President of the Student Parliament may participate in the meetings of the Steering Council, without the right to vote, when dealing with issues related to students." Thus, the Chairman of the student parliament is not a member of the Steering Council, but in a way, they assume the observer role.

Hence, Senate has 43 voting members, 7 of

A keni qenë ndonjëherë pjesë e organeve vendimmarrese në universitetin tuaj? *

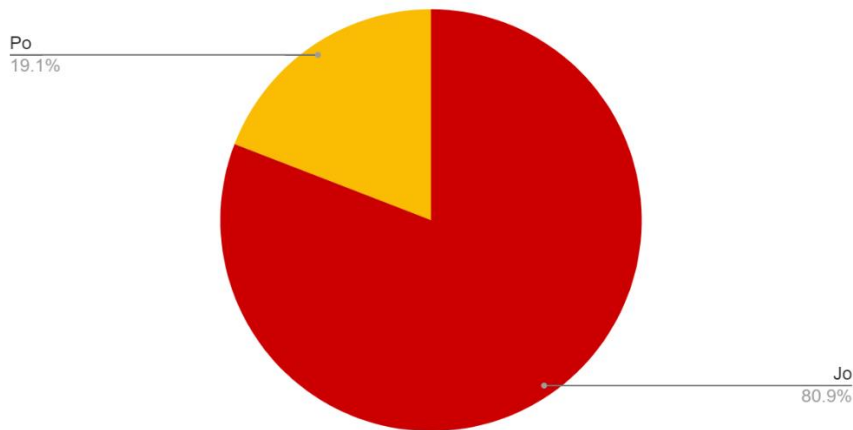


Figure 2 Level of participation of UBT students in university bodies

participated in the questionnaire were asked; did they join as members of these organisations, 15 of 68 answered "yes".

In addition, students were asked how many student rallies they have attended in the last two years. Their answers are as follows:

Në sa tubime studentore keni marrë pjesë gjatë 2 viteve të fundit?

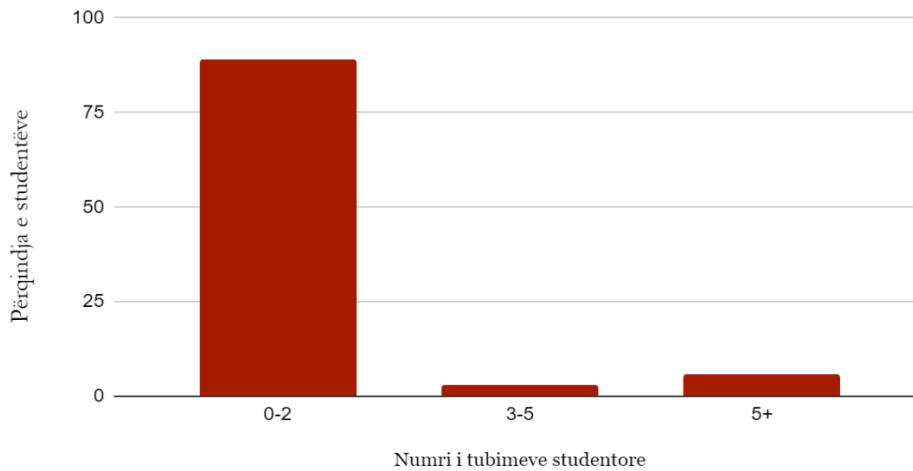
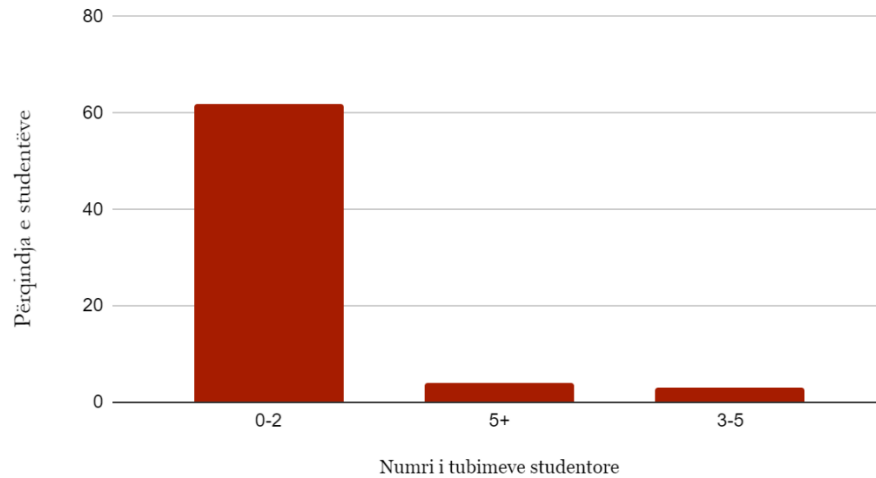


Figure 3 Participation of UP students in student gatherings

ranks of students from each faculty. Also, according to Article 26, a representative of the students can attend the meetings of the Steering Council if the Chairman of the Council deems it necessary or if it is a request of the student organisation.

However, when UBT students who

Në sa tubime studentore keni marrë pjesë gjatë 2 viteve të fundit?



From what we see in the graphs above, UBT students participate more in the decision-making bodies of the University, whilst, in the student gatherings, UP students participate more.

How important it is for students to participate in decision-making at their universities

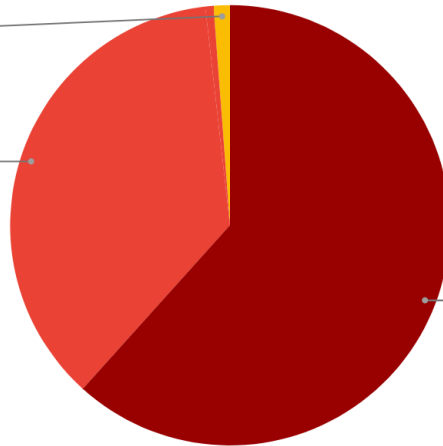
To be a participant in decision making, students must first consider this process as necessary. Participation in university governance makes the student body have a sense of belonging and mostly see themselves as

Pjesëmarrja e studentëve në vendimmarrje do t'u mundësojë atyre të zbatojnë në mënyrë më efektive disa nga vendimet e universitetit.

Nuk pajtohem
1.2%

Pajtohem
36.5%

Pajtohem plotësisht
61.7%



part of the decision-making process in the university system (Mafa, 2016). Participation in decision-making also results in more effective management and decision-making of universities (Huddleston, 2007). To see how well these theories correspond to our

Figure 4 Students' attitudes towards the importance of their participation in decision-making at UP and UBT

reality in universities, students were asked about their standpoints in this regard.

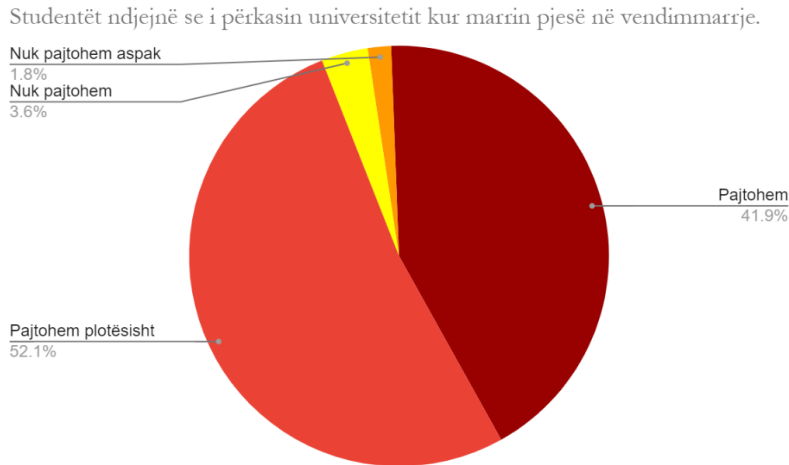


Figure 5 Students' attitudes towards the importance of their participation in decision-making at UP and UBT

From the graphs shown, we can see that most students agree that their participation in decision-making has a positive impact, both in terms of personal and the University's functioning. Nevertheless, just because you

Studentët nuk shqetësohen shumë për pjesëmarrjen në vendimmarrje në universitete.

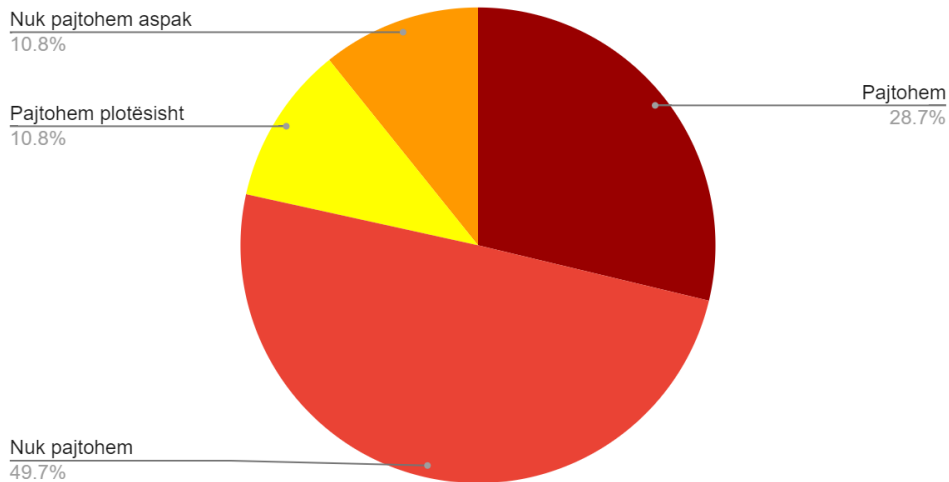


Figure 6 Students' attitudes towards the importance of their participation in decision-making at UP and UBT

see something as necessary does not necessarily put it into practice. This was also the case when we asked students if they (did not) worry about participating

in university decision-making.

Studentët marrin pjesë në vendimmarrje sa herë që universiteti ka ndonjë problem që lidhet me studentët.

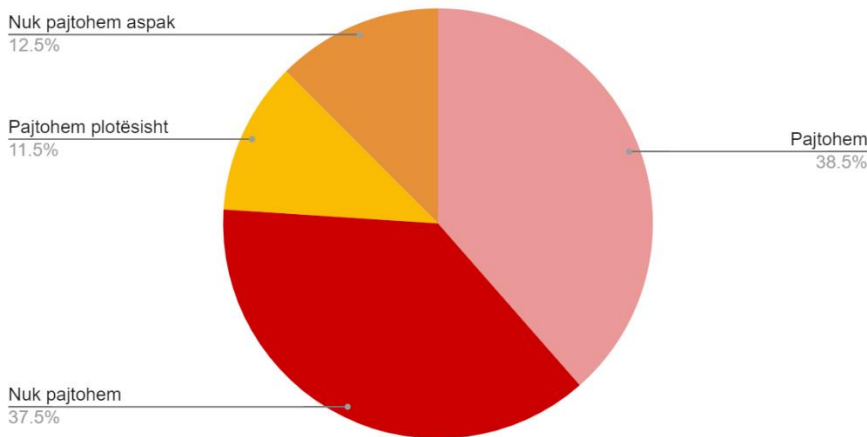


Figure 7 Students' attitudes towards the level of their participation in decision-making at UP

decision-making as something important, we need to know how much importance is given to this issue by the university management. This is also why students have expressed their opinion, where we have a sort of equality in numbers between those who think that students participate in decision-making and those who

Studentët marrin pjesë në vendimmarrje sa herë që universiteti ka ndonjë problem që lidhet me studentët.

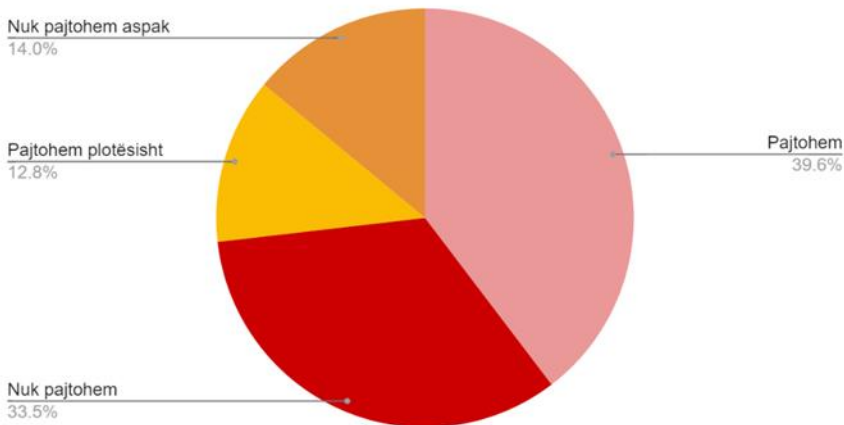


Figure 8 Students' attitudes towards the level of their participation in decision-making at UBT

into decisions, UBT students were more satisfied, but again by a small margin:

Although the majority again expressed that students are interested in decision-making, about 21.6% think it is the opposite. Therefore, according to the last-mentioned, students have other priorities. Seeing that most students consider participation in

oppose this. As a result of comparing the two graphs, we notice that UP students are more satisfied with their involvement in decision making than UBT students. However, this difference is slight, about 3%. However, on the other hand, when we asked students if their University incorporates their ideas

Universiteti juaj përfshin idetë / mendimet e studentëve në vendimet që ata marrin.

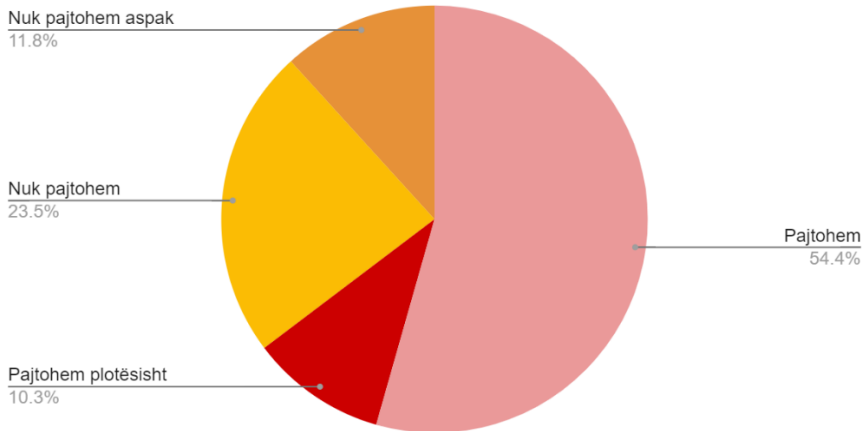


Figure 9 Students' attitudes towards the level of their participation in decision-making at UBT

Universiteti juaj përfshin idetë / mendimet e studentëve në vendimet që ata marrin.

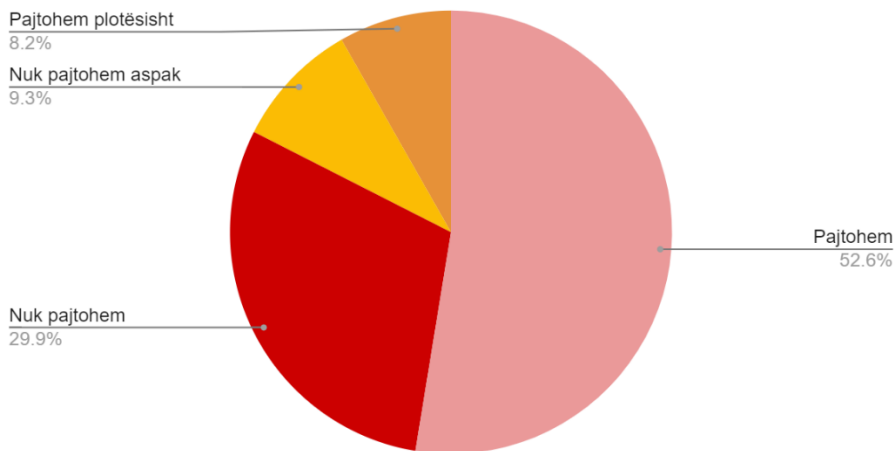


Figure 10 Students' attitudes towards the level of their participation in decision-making at UP

Discussion and recommendations

This part of the study addresses the research questions and important topics from the analysed data. The findings showed that student participation is regulated following legal provisions and relevant documents. However, these documents do not specify exactly in which areas of activity students have the right to be part of the decision-making process. Nonetheless, the UBT documents had more precise details regarding the obligations of the university student institutions. Nevertheless, later evidence shows that, although the students were granted the right to express their opinions, they were not satisfied with the practical side of implementing these regulations and statutes. This also reflected their interest in participating in decision-making processes.

Furthermore, even though students were aware of the positive aspects of these processes, they also did not see involvement in them as very important. This indicates that students themselves are responsible for their low decision-making participation. Hence, student representatives are responsible for being critical and creative in understanding and communicating student problems. However, these representatives must also support other students in votes and give ideas on various issues. Even if they do not participate, about 50% thought that the respective universities valued and took their opinions into account. A higher degree of satisfaction is observed in UBT, which can result from the fact that UBT students participated more in the decision-making bodies of the University.

Based on what has been said above, here are some recommendations:

- I. Opening opportunities for participation for a more significant number of students and making activities more participatory and inclusive***
- II. Expanding student participation beyond issues affecting only students***
- III. Giving more autonomy to student representative bodies;***
- IV. Integrating the work of student representative bodies into the broader advisory and decision-making bodies of the University;***

Research Limitations

This research has two main limitations, which can be improved in the following studies:

- 1) Lack of preliminary research in our country - has made it more difficult and perhaps inappropriate to establish theoretical frameworks in UP and UBT.***
- 2) An insufficient number of participants in the questionnaire - since the survey was conducted online, the interest of students to participate was small. The small number of respondents generalised the results obtained from the empirical data more problematic.***

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