

Factors of Non-Humanities Students' Tendency towards the Humanities

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Abstract

This paper examined personal, educational, social and economic factors of students of non-humanities disciplines' tendency to continue their higher education in the humanities. The mixed methodology (quantitative & qualitative) was employed in this research. Population consisted of all MA candidates in the humanities with an unrelated bachelor's degree. The sample involved 138 MA candidates who referred to University of Isfahan for the entrance examination. To enrich data, 18 higher education students with non-humanities bachelor's degree (medical sciences, science, and engineering) who were already studying the humanities in University of Isfahan were interviewed. Research tools included semi-structured interview and researcher-made questionnaire in terms of four educational, personal, social and economic factors. Questionnaire's reliability was estimated at 89% according to Cronbach's alpha and its validity was verified by professors. Results showed that "educational" and "personal" factors were relatively most influential in students' tendency to the humanities. Several recommendations are presented at the end to encourage students, especially the talented, to gravitate towards the humanities and to reconsider curriculums of the humanities in order to make them more interesting for elite candidates.

1. Introduction

According to Hernes (2005), the number of students in the world increased from 51 million in 1980 to more than 100 million in 2003. Different countries have made significant efforts in the last two decades to develop their higher education because of the positive relation it has with national development. Higher education is the most important element of developing human resources.

It has been observed over the last few years that non-humanities students' tendency to continue their higher education in the humanities has remarkably increased in Iranian universities and higher education institutes –both public and private. According to studies performed in advanced countries which differ from Iran in terms of their system for accepting students, the cause of this this tendency among engineering and science is their attention to philosophical debates and thinking about the universe and the philosophy of human existence (Ofran&Yanay, 2008).

Gardner (1999) believes in his theory of multiple intelligence that there exists in a group of people, some kind of intelligence referred to as existential intelligence. He thinks that people with high existential intelligence tend to humanities topics, philosophical-doctrinal subjects, understanding universe and thinking about the nature of and explanation for universe and take pleasure in the humanities. It can be therefore said that existential intelligence is one factor in encouraging and making students interested in humanities.

Moreover, Levenburg et al (2006) argued that more than 54% of students who had gravitated from disciplines in science, engineering and aerospace towards the humanities such as law, political sciences, social sciences, philosophy and logic stated that pure sciences such as mathematics, physics, and chemistry did not meet their needs and that being detail-oriented and focusing on one or more particular subjects regardless of social and cultural backgrounds did not solve their problems and satisfy their needs. Hence they tended to the humanities and interdisciplinary fields.

The humanities help us not only interpret topics we encounter as citizens critically and accurately, but also rationally and intellectually understand fundamental values which are presented in related policies and actions; they also help us understand and utilize others' experiences and approaches taken to grasp common human issues at different times and locations in different cultures. Indeed, the humanities deals with full background of human experiences; hence they might be added to during identification, evaluation, modification, and refinement of such experiences (Lattuca [2], 2001: 9).

Henry (2008) believes that the humanities are highly ranked in developed countries and famous faculties teach political sciences, international relations, law, etc.; their highly successful graduates who mainly work as political and State figures have made such disciplines even more interesting for elite students of engineering and medical sciences in a way that these students mentioned explanation and analysis of social and political phenomena the reason for shifting to the humanities because studying disciplines in the humanities will improve analytic abilities.

As Franklin and Rodrigus (2008) argue most job creations in the United States have been the result of

entrepreneurial, creative and innovative thinking of higher education graduates in the humanities who, by their knowledge of mathematics from their previous disciplines become successful and influential people in their societies. The same study showed that 69% of students who shifted from non-humanities disciplines to the humanities stated the challenging and upgrading concepts of the humanities as their reason. They mentioned in their answers that the humanities deal with a range of topics from preliminary issues of human communities such as environment pollution to the most complicated supernatural questions like who is my god?, Why do we die?, etc.; new concepts are born anytime out of such challenging and critical dialogues which may transform humans' way of thinking completely.

Findings of yet another study revealed that the most important causes of shifting to the humanities are the emotional consequences and advantages of this human social field which refer to reinforcement of important factors and variables such as higher self-esteem, positive thinking, self-confidence, enhancement of decision making capacities, overcoming irrational feelings, spirit of cooperation and participation, sense of belonging, sympathy and philanthropy among many others. Emotional advantages are of psychological and cultural aspects and usually affect the quality of other skills in enjoying a satisfactory personal and social life (khorsandi-Taskouh, 2008: 58).

Moreover, demand for higher education has escalated in the last two decades because of population growth rate and age composition, society's expectations to achieve higher education, and economic, social, and scientific changes in general (Qaroun, 2004).

Accordingly, the higher education system has two major missions: on the one hand, it must reasonably respond individuals' demands to enter university and study in various majors; on the other hand, it shows the youth new horizons and directs them in line with provision of the nation's future needs (Hoveida&Emadzadeh, 2004). Therefore, different national organizations especially the higher education plays an important role in promoting science in general and the humanities in particular. The humanities are of special status in developed countries and graduates of the humanities such as management, psychology, economy, and law are the leaders in the path of development and promotion.

The humanities are the disciplines whose contents teach the right way of thinking, acting, deciding, and changing; issues which are the intellectual and potential prerequisites to individuals, authorities, managers or all citizens' daily or bureaucratic activities. The role of universities in promoting such sciences, emphasis on the humanities in accepting students, funding of such disciplines in universities, change of approach and the negative attitude towards the humanities, efforts to change the approach and make the humanities accepted among students and parents, curriculum change and operationalization of the humanities in order to make science even more functional are the tasks which should be undertaken by the ministry of higher education and related organization to promote and enhance the humanities (Karnama, 2006).

Unfortunately however, in the last two centuries the humanities have been so degraded in developing countries that an illusion has formed among different layers of society that only gifted and elite people study in technical and empirical fields and those with less intelligence and capabilities tend to the humanities simply for passing time or ultimately personal use. Fortunately things have changed lately; on the one hand given the expansion of university and scientific centers, awareness of the educated part of society, and the need for the humanities emerged among university students, and on the other hand the status and importance of the humanities in today's complicated world, and the quantitative growth of science since the 17th century, there has been a tendency towards scientific quality orientation, scientific spirituality and spiritually oriented science in the world and Iran is no exception (Taghizadeh, 2007). In any way, as researchers have observed the shift of non-humanities students towards the humanities disciplines has increased for various reasons in Iran. This study is an effort to pave the way for extensive research in the future.

2. Research goals

- 1- Determining the effects of personal factors (interest, motivation, risk taking, need for success, creativity, etc.) on non-humanities students' tendency towards the humanities.
- 2- Determining the effects of educational factors (easiness, simpler tests) on non-humanities students' tendency towards the humanities.
- 3- Determining the effects of social (advancement, job promotion) factors on non-humanities students' tendency towards the humanities.
- 4- Determining the effects of economic factors (employment, less costs of study, etc.) on non-humanities students' tendency towards the humanities.
- 5- Determining differences respondents' answers about these factors in terms of demographic factors (gender, age, marital status)

3. Research questions

- 1- To what extent are personal factors influential on non-humanities students' tendency towards studying

- in the humanities disciplines?
- 2- To what extent are educational factors influential on non-humanities students' tendency towards studying in the humanities disciplines?
 - 3- To what extent are social factors influential on non-humanities students' tendency towards studying in the humanities disciplines?
 - 4- Are economic factors influential on non-humanities students' tendency towards studying in the humanities disciplines?
 - 5- How are students' opinions about these factors different in terms of demographic factors?

4. Methodology

In terms of its goals, this research is applied in type because the findings may be utilized in solving social issue. Given the nature of the topic and goal, the research methodology is descriptive-analytical. It is also a survey in type. Research population consisted of two groups: the first group was students who had a bachelor or master's degree in a non-humanities discipline and chose to continue their higher education in the humanities. The number of these students according to the Office of Higher Education, University of Isfahan was 32, 18 of whom were interviewed. The second group was all MA candidates with non-humanities degrees; since no precise number of the candidates was available and they could not be accessed easily, 138 candidates were randomly selected when they referred to the University of Isfahan for the MA entrance examinations.

Data collection tools were semi-structured interview and research-made questionnaire and the validity of questions were verified by professors in the field. The questionnaire included a total of 28 items for educational, personal, economic, and social factors. These items were also asked extensively and deeply in interviews and interviewees agreed to mentioning their views in this paper anonymously. Interviews were analyzed in terms of the four factors. Data were analyzed at two levels of descriptive statistics and inferential statistics. At the level of descriptive statistics, statistical indices of frequency, percentage, mean, and standard deviation were employed and at the level of inferential statistics, independent test, Hotelling, univariate test, and ANOVA were utilized.

5. Findings

Demographic findings: The sample included 138 individuals 72 (52.2%) of whom were female and 66 (47.8%) were male. Sixty seven (48.6%) of participants had a degree in science, 51 (37%) had a degree in engineering, and 20 (14.5%) of them had a degree in paramedical fields.

Among the respondents, 67.6% had chosen educational science-related disciplines, 10.9% psychology, 10.1% economy, 3.3% executive management, 2.9% counseling, 1.4% political sciences, and 3.8% had chosen public management for their higher education studies. In terms of marital status 54.4% of respondents were single and 45.5% of them were married. Having found the demographic information it was necessary to represent the findings in the form of questions.

The first question was that "to what extent are personal factors influential on non-humanities students' tendency towards studying in the humanities disciplines?" Results revealed that among personal factors, the items "interest in the humanities" (M=3.57) and "the humanities deal with all aspects of human behavior" (M=3.20) had the highest mean. Moreover, interviews showed that "interest in the humanities" had the highest influence on non-humanities students.

Table 1: comparison of mean scores for personal factors with a hypothetical mean 3

Personal factor	X	S	Se	t	P
	3.20	0.711	0.060	3.41	0.07

According to table (1) the observed equals 3.41 and $P \geq 0.05$, hence personal factors affected students' tendency towards the humanities more than average. Therefore it can be stated that there is a significant relationship between personal factors and the tendency of non-humanities students towards the humanities.

The second question was that "to what extent are educational factors influential on non-humanities students' tendency towards studying in the humanities disciplines?" Findings of the questionnaire indicated that the items "easy to understand concepts and theories of the humanities" (M3.66) and "solving society's problems with achievements in the humanities" (M=3.55) had the highest mean respectively. Results of interviews showed that "simplicity of contents in the humanities courses", "limited and definite sources for MA examination", and "attractive contents of the humanities" had the highest percentage among educational factors.

Table 2: comparison of mean scores for educational factors with a hypothetical mean 3

Educational factor	X	S	Se	t	P
	3.23	0.464	0.039	5.84	0.06

According to table (2) the observed t equals 5.84 and $P \geq 0.05$, hence educational factors affected students' tendency towards the humanities more than average. In other words there is a significant relationship between educational factors and the tendency of non-humanities students towards the humanities.

The third question was that "to what extent are social factors influential on non-humanities students' tendency towards studying in the humanities disciplines?" Results of the questionnaire showed that the items "job promotion" ($M=3.52$) and "social and political activities are more grounded in the humanities" ($M=3.47$) had the highest mean. Interviews revealed that the item "the humanities disciplines pave the way for people's participation in social and political activities" had the highest influence on students to shift to the humanities.

Table 3: comparison of mean scores for social factors with a hypothetical mean 3

Social factor	X	S	Se	t	P
	3.05	0.701	0.59	0.919	0.001

As table (3) represents, t equals 0.919 and $P \leq 0.05$ which means social factors influenced students' tendency less than average. In other words there is not a significant relationship between social factors and tendency towards the humanities.

The fourth question was that "are economic factors influential on non-humanities students' tendency towards studying in the humanities disciplines?" Findings showed that the highest mean was for the items "less costs of studying the humanities in comparison with other disciplines" ($M=3.01$) and "acceptance of more students to the humanities in recent years" ($M=2.97$). Interviews verified such findings too.

Table 4: comparison of mean scores for economic factors with a hypothetical mean 3

Economic factors	X	S	Se	t	P
	2.77	0.698	0.059	-3.83	0.02

Table (4) indicates that equals -3.83 and $P \leq 0.05$; this means economic factors influenced students' tendency less than average. In other words there is not a significant relationship between economic factors and tendency towards the humanities.

A comparison of these four factors shows that "economic factors" had the least influence on shifting towards the humanities. Information obtained from interviews led the researchers to the same conclusion. However some of interviewees referred to "appropriate labor market" among economic factors for some of the humanities disciplines such as management and economy.

The fifth question was that "how are students' opinions about these factors different in terms of demographic factors?"

Table 5: comparison of mean scores for personal, educational, social and economic factors in terms of gender

gender factors	Male		Female		T	P
	\bar{X}	S				
Economic	2.81	0.674	2.72	0.722	0.764	0.457
Educational	3.27	0.482	3.19	0.447	1.07	0.286
Social	3.32	0.615	2.80	0.684	0.746	0.000
Personal	3.11	0.582	3.28	0.807	-1.41	0.160

Table (5) shows that for social factors t is significant at $P \leq 0.01$ which indicates that there are differences between opinions of male and female respondents in a way that male students considered social factors more influential. However no difference was observed in terms of other demographic factors such as marital status, and previous degrees.

6. Discussion

As mentioned earlier there was a significant relationship between personal factors such as interest in the humanities disciplines and holistic view of the humanities, and tendency towards the humanities. Findings of Nasr et al (2002) and Abdi and Danaei (2002) who referred to interest, scientific potency, and predisposition as the most influential factors are in agreement with the present study. In general, interest in a discipline is one of the most important and influential factor in selecting a field of study for higher educations, if accompanied by enough knowledge and awareness of the field, leads to more successful future.

As to the effectiveness of educational factors, it was mentioned earlier that these factors have significant relationship with tendency towards the humanities. This is in line with findings of Mullet and Note (1999); they found that many people choose their field of study in university according to its value. Some tend to engineering and medicine while others choose disciplines with intellectual values such as philosophy, psychology, and educational sciences. Their findings are in agreement with the present study because in comparison with other disciplines the humanities disciplines have more interesting and flexible contents. Contents of the humanities courses are simpler. Moreover, university capacities to accept students are higher for the humanities in Iran. MA examination sources are limited and available and are mostly in Persian language. In addition, it is possible to continue studies to PhD level in the humanities.

No significant relationship was found between social factors and student's shifting to the humanities. In fact the humanities do not enjoy a suitable status in Iran or generally in developing countries and prestige or high social class is more tied with engineering and medical sciences while the status of the humanities is still unclear. The analysis of demographic information showed differences between responses of male and female participants in terms of social influences on tendency towards the humanities. In fact, social status and prestige are more important for men than women.

There was not a significant relationship between economic factors and tendency towards the humanities. Indeed, in comparison to engineering and medical sciences the humanities are not considered high income disciplines and there is no doubt that those who choose the humanities do not have economic goals.

Given the findings of this study and people's interest in studying the humanities, it is suggested that up-to-date active data bases should be expanded and standard study rooms and libraries for the humanities be developed both quantitatively and qualitatively. The status of the humanities scientists should be defined in the supportive program of Iran's National Elites Foundation, and academic associations should become active in systematic and free presentation of theories and views in the humanities. Moreover, the budget for the humanities should be increased and reasonable tariffs be set for research in the humanities.

7. References

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