



Research Article

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Students' Perspective on Freedom of Expression and Hate Speech in Albanian Universities

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Abstract

This article presents an analysis of the perspective of university students in Albania toward freedom of expression and hate speech within the academic environment. This study confidently investigates Albanian university students' attitudes and perceptions towards freedom of expression, its significance in academic institutions, and its relationship with principles of equality and non-discrimination. Based on survey data collected from 622 participants, the study examines student's attitudes toward the freedom of expression and hate speech. Study results strongly support previous research that highlights the significance of freedom of expression for young people in high educational institutions. The high level of participant agreement on the importance of freedom of expression in this study provides further evidence of the universal recognition of this fundamental right. The study contributes valuable insights to the discourse on freedom of expression and its implications for fostering inclusive and respectful academic environments in Albania.

Keywords: freedom of expression, hate speech, university students, academic environment, Albania

1. Introduction

Freedom of expression is one of the pillars of any democratic society¹. We cannot discuss democracy without mentioning freedom of expression, as one of the most debated freedoms in contemporary society. This freedom is sanctioned in several international acts. Thus, it is sanctioned by Article 19 of

¹ Freedom of expression. (2023). *The European Convention on Human Rights*. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/human-rights-convention/expression>

the Universal Declaration of Human Rights², Article 10 of the European Convention on Human Rights³, Article 11 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union⁴, etc.

In Albania, after the 90's, with the progress of society and the state towards democracy and European integration, there have been significant developments in the area of freedom of expression and hate speech. The Constitution of Albania, adopted in 1998, guarantees freedom of expression as a fundamental right in Article 22 that explicitly states that everyone has the right to freedom of expression⁵. Article 14 of the Constitution of Albania is unequivocal in its prohibition of discrimination that can directly relate to hate speech.⁶ The "Law No. 10221/2010 on Protection from Discrimination", amended, defines hate speech as denigration, hatred, and defamation, which are considered the most serious forms of its manifestation. However, it also encompasses and categorizes as hate speech any inconvenience, insult, stigmatization, or threat directed towards a person or group of people.⁷

Hate speech is also classified under Article 265 of the Albanian Criminal Code as an illegal offense. Any incitement of hatred, violence or discrimination against individuals or groups based on race, ethnicity, religion or sexual orientation is prohibited, as is the preparation, spread or storage of written material with such content, carried out by any means or form. Such actions are punishable by imprisonment from two to ten years.⁸

Albania has established several national institutions to promote and protect human rights, including freedom of expression. The People's Advocate (the Ombudsman)⁹ and the Commissioner for Protection from Discrimination¹⁰ play a significant role in monitoring and addressing violations of these rights, including instances of hate speech.

As part of its efforts to join the European Union (EU), Albania has been committed to aligning its legal framework with EU standards. Despite legal protections, challenges remain in ensuring the full respect for freedom of expression and combating hate speech in Albania. There are still concerns about the enforcement of existing laws, the independence of the judiciary, and the prevalence of hate speech, particularly online and in political discourse.¹¹

Based on democratic principles, universities are built and function as societies within societies.

² United Nations. (1948). *Universal Declaration of Human Rights*. United Nations. <https://www.un.org/en/about-us/universal-declaration-of-human-rights>

³ European Court of Human Rights. (1950). *European Convention on Human Rights*. https://www.echr.coe.int/documents/d/echr/Convention_ENG

⁴ European Union. (2000). *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union*. https://www.europarl.europa.eu/charter/pdf/text_en.pdf

⁵ CONSTITUTION OF THE REPUBLIC OF ALBANIA. (1998). Retrieved March 31, 2024, from https://www.gjk.gov.al/web/constitution_of_albania_1722.pdf

⁶ Ibid

⁷ QBZ - Qendra e Botimeve Zyrtare. (n.d.). *Qbz.gov.al*. Retrieved April 27, 2024, from <https://qbz.gov.al/eli/ligj/2010/02/04/10221>

⁸ QBZ - Qendra e Botimeve Zyrtare. (n.d.). *Qbz.gov.al*. <https://qbz.gov.al/preview/a2b117e6-69b2-4355-aa49-78967c31bf4d>

⁹ Avokati i popullit. (n.d.). *Www.avokatipopullit.gov.al*. Retrieved April 27, 2024, from <https://www.avokatipopullit.gov.al/sq/>

¹⁰ KMD - Komisioneri për Mbrojtjen nga Diskriminimi. (n.d.). Retrieved April 27, 2024, from <https://www.kmd.al/>

¹¹ Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions 2023 Communication on EU Enlargement policy. (n.d.). https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/system/files/2023-11/SWD_2023_690%20Albania%20report.pdf

Article 6 of the University of Tirana Statute¹², as the largest university in Albania, places freedom of thought and expression in the first place of the principles underlying the operation of this institution of higher education. Such a ranking is also an expression of its importance in the Albanian academic context. Bearing in mind the importance and impact of this freedom in creating and respecting intellectual diversity, in an era where the exchange of ideas and pluralism of opinions are the essence of the university environment, discussions on respecting, limiting or not limiting it are always present nowadays¹³. As all over in contemporary societies and within universities, freedom of expression faces new challenges, especially under the pressure of new technologies of information distribution. One of the most important challenges is the use of hate speech, which can threaten the fundamental values of a university environment where tolerance and respect for change prevail.¹⁴

This article aims to shed light on the perspective of how university students in Albania value freedom of expression as well as the use of hate speech within the university environment. The study is based on a structured questionnaire and includes the analysis of the answers of 622 participating students from 17 public and private universities.

The objectives of this study are:

1. To understand how Albanian students value the importance of the freedom of expression in universities.

This objective confidently investigates the perspectives of Albanian students on the crucial importance of free speech. The research aims to establish the high value that Albanian students place on this fundamental human right within the context of their universities.

2. To demonstrate through a comparative analysis of values, between freedom of expression, the principle of equality, and the principle of non-discrimination, what students value as more important.

The article compares and contrasts the importance that Albanian students attribute to various principles, such as freedom of expression, equality, and non-discrimination. Through empirical investigation and analysis, it asserts the identification of which principle holds greater significance in the minds of the students and how these values interact within the socio-cultural landscape of Albania.

3. To evaluate the attitude of students against hate speech.

An important objective of this article is to evaluate the attitude of university students in Albania towards hate speech within the context of their opinions on freedom of expression. By analyzing their responses toward hate speech, we aim to gain a deeper understanding of the challenges involved in upholding free speech values in higher education institutions characterized by diversity and ongoing social transformation.

4. To highlight students' attitudes towards the dividing line that should exist between freedom of expression and hate speech.

This objective examines Albanian students' attitudes towards the dividing line between freedom of expression and hate speech. The study aims to shed light on their attitudes, beliefs, and ethical considerations regarding the boundaries of permissible speech in society by exploring where students draw the line between these concepts.

The article will provide conclusions based on the findings. These conclusions will serve as

¹² Statute of the University of Tirana (2018). Retrieved March 31, 2024, from https://unitir.edu.al/wp-content/uploads/2019/08/Statuti_2018.pdf

¹³ Bychawska-Siniarska, D. (2017). PROTECTING THE RIGHT TO FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION UNDER THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS Exergue Citation. <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-freedom-of-expression-eng/1680732814>

¹⁴ Mattox, W. (n.d.). POLICY BRIEF. Retrieved March 31, 2024, from <https://www.jamesmadison.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/PolicyBrief-FreeSpeech-vo5.pdf>

actionable insights for policymakers, researchers, and students in Albania, enabling them to develop effective strategies and policies to address the challenges associated with freedom of expression and hate speech. This study aims to contribute to broader academic discourse and inform future research initiatives by generating an understanding of Albanian students' perspectives on these contentious issues.

2. Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Within Albanian academic literature, there is a notable gap regarding the perspectives of Albanian university students on freedom of expression and efforts to combat hate speech specifically within the university context. While existing academic literature covers studies on freedom of expression and hate speech in general contexts, there is a distinct lack of focused exploration within the specific context of Albanian higher education. Although scholars have investigated the broader themes of freedom of expression and hate speech, often in societal or non-academic backgrounds, there is a notable absence of dedicated examination within the specific framework of Albanian universities. Consequently, it is conceivable that fewer studies have been conducted with the specific objective of examining hate speech and freedom of expression in university settings in the Albanian academic literature.

Otherwise, in foreign academic literature, it has been noted by a large number of studies on freedom of expression and hate speech in the university context. A multifaceted and interdisciplinary investigation of hatred speech and freedom of expression in university settings is conducted in order to gain an understanding of the complexities of these issues within the academic environment. The investigation draws on a variety of theoretical, methodological, and empirical approaches.

The controversial nature of free expression on college campuses has made students hesitant to engage in politically touchy subjects. According to a survey of 791 university students in New Zealand conducted by the Heterodox Academy, most American students believed that free speech was not encouraged on campus, and a sizable portion of them were personally uncomfortable talking about such subjects.¹⁵

In the book, "Free Speech on Campus" Sigal R. Ben-Porath provides a thoughtful exploration of the complex issues surrounding free speech in academic settings. The author delves into topics such as hatred speech and freedom of expression, that are discussed in relation to the broader objectives of fostering inclusive and diverse university environments, defending academic freedom, and promoting open communication. Furthermore, the crucial matter of the delicate equilibrium between inclusivity and freedom of speech is addressed to analyze the conflicting ideals, such as the necessity to protect individuals from harm or discrimination, to promote diversity and inclusion, and to pursue the truth.¹⁶

In the study, "Thirty years of research into hate speech: topics of interest and their evolution", the authors Tontodimamma, Nissi, Sarra, and Fontane have reviewed scientific studies published between 1992 and 2019, that addressed the most common cases of hate speech.¹⁷ They have concluded that the period up until 2010 can be considered as the early stages of this field's scientific investigation. Only after this year, respectively 2011-2019 is characterized as a phase of rapid development of scientific research in this direction, especially in the United States

¹⁵ Halberstadt, J., Basu, A., Hughes, B., Hughes, R., Johnston, M., Kierstead, J., & Rozado, D. (2022). Perceived Freedom of Expression at New Zealand Universities. *Social Sciences*, 11(11), 502. <https://doi.org/10.3390/socsci1110502>

¹⁶ Bialystok, Lauren. (2020). *Free Speech on Campus* (Sigal Ben-Porath). *Philosophical Inquiry in Education*. 24. 412-415. [10.7202/1070696ar](https://doi.org/10.7202/1070696ar).

¹⁷ Tontodimamma, A., Nissi, E., Sarra, A., & Fontanella, L. (2020). *Thirty years of research into hate speech: topics of interest and their evolution*. *Scientometrics*, 126, 157-179. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11192-020-03737-6>

and United Kingdom.¹⁸

The Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act in England is a model of legislation that effectively safeguards freedom of expression in higher education institutions. The Act provides clear guidelines and responsibilities for universities, colleges, and students' unions, ensuring lawful freedom of speech while considering relevant legal frameworks. It proactively fosters open discourse and academic freedom, which could serve as a model for other countries and Albania, enhancing protections for free speech within their own higher education systems.¹⁹ In the following, the consulted literature is presented according to the objectives of this study.

2.1 Importance of the freedom of expression in universities

Freedom of expression in universities is a topic of significant importance. Several studies have explored this issue from different perspectives. Irawaty's research focuses on how higher degree students in Indonesia use social media to express their opinions, highlighting the role of social media in circumventing limitations imposed by government regulations²⁰. Medeiros highlights the ongoing debates and controversies surrounding freedom of expression on campuses, with different authors providing guidelines for how universities can navigate these conflicts²¹.

The importance of freedom of expression for Albanian youth, but not for the students in the university students, is highlighted in several studies but not in the university context. Regarding the studies in Albania, one study found that the level of free expression of opinion and active participation among university students is not satisfactory, indicating a need for collaboration and support to enhance active citizenship²². Another study emphasizes the development of communication technology and its impact on the freedom of expression, as well as the constant changes in legislation to protect human rights in this field²³. Additionally, the political participation and interest of Albanian youth are seen as crucial for establishing a strong democratic tradition in the country²⁴. These findings suggest that ensuring freedom of expression for the youth in Albania is essential for their active participation in society and the development of a democratic future.

The survey participants' responses regarding the importance of freedom of expression in the university setting were overwhelmingly positive. This serves as a powerful validation of its significance among young individuals in Albania. The results of the study strongly support previous research that highlights the significance of freedom of expression for young people in educational institutions. The high level of participant agreement in this study provides further evidence of the universal recognition of this fundamental right.

¹⁸ *Ibidem* p. 175

¹⁹ Higher Education (Freedom of Speech) Act 2023. (2023). Legislation.gov.uk. <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2023/16/enacted>

²⁰ Irawaty, & Martini. (2020). *The Freedom to Express Opinion Through Social Media: A Study of Higher Degree Students in Jakarta and Vicinity*. *KnE Social Sciences*. <https://doi.org/10.18502/kss.v4i14.7884>

²¹ Medeiros, B. (2018). *Regulating Freedom of Expression on Campus*. *American Quarterly*, 70(2), 315–325. <https://doi.org/10.1353/aq.2018.0020>

²² Lutaj, L. (2019). *Freedom of Expression and the Civil Participation of the Youth*. *European Journal of Education*, 2(3), 19–24. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejed.v2i3>

²³ Memini, V. (2022). *Freedom of expression and information within the right to communicate according to Albanian legislation*. *Intercultural Communication*, 7(1), 91–102. <https://doi.org/10.13166/ic/712022.4992>

²⁴ Erbaş, İ. (2014). *Political Interest and Participation of Youth in Albania: The Views of the Youth*. *Academic Journal of Interdisciplinary Studies*. <https://doi.org/10.5901/ajis.2014.v3n6p251>

2.2 Students' evaluation on which between the principle of equality, freedom of expression and the principle of non-discrimination is more important

The principle of equality and non-discrimination as well as freedom of expression are of a constitutional nature, though foreseen in the Albanian Constitution. According to the authors of Albanian constitutional law, Omari and Anastasi, freedom and equality are not two unique concepts.²⁵ Based on this definition, the students were asked in the questionnaire to give an evaluation of which of them, including the principle of non-discrimination, is seen as the most important. A perception of the students on the importance of each of these three constitutional norms enables the study to obtain results on their evaluation of hate speech. A study was conducted by a group of authors in 2002 to investigate how students' perceptions of the importance of constitutional principles such as equality and freedom affect their perception of hate speech. Priming the freedom of speech directed participants' attitudes and values toward advocating freedom of speech, whereas priming for equal protection directed attitudes and values toward the harm of hate speech.²⁶ Referring to the importance of the principle of equality in university, Oglethorpe argues that the establishment of an equitable environment in universities is derived from the 14th Amendment, which ensures equal opportunities for all.²⁷

2.3 The attitude of students against hate speech

Several authors have exposed the hate speech between university students in recent years. In this sense the article "The Use and Exposure of Hate Speech among Students: A Discourse Analysis Study" a group of authors conducted a study on hate speech with a group of 79 students at the University of Sumer, Iraq. The objective of the study was to investigate whether students hear and observe hate speech, to identify what kinds of hate speech are most prominent, and to determine where hate speech is most common.²⁸ The results presented in the study show that 76% of the students have witnessed occurrences of hate speech. Among these, 57.4% have reported witnessing such instances only once, while 19.2% have stated that they have seen it multiple times.²⁹ Regarding the most common type of hate speech encountered by students, religious beliefs appear to be the primary target, with 46.5% of respondents indicating that they have witnessed instances of hate speech directed towards students' religious affiliations.³⁰ This can be explained in the context of social developments in Iraq, where the religious element is dominant in society. Another study, "Students Response to Hate Speech" through the use of indicators formulated in the form of statements, highlighted students' perceptions of hate speech. In the study, faced with cases that may constitute hate speech, students gave their perceptions showing a level of recognition of what constitutes hate speech.³¹

²⁵ Omari, L., & Anastasi, A. *E Drejta Kushtetuese*. p. 70. ABC Publishing.

²⁶ Cowan, G., Resendez, M., Marshall, E., & Quist, R. (2002). *Hate Speech and Constitutional Protection: Priming Values of Equality and Freedom*. *Journal of Social Issues*, 58(2), p. 247. <https://doi.org/10.1111/1540-4560.00259>

²⁷ Oglethorpe, D. (2018). *College Student Attitudes towards Free Speech and Expression*. *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. p. 33. <https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/5772>

²⁸ Idham, S. Y., Mugair, S. K., Baagbah, S. Y. S., Feng, H., Husseiny, F. A., & Saab, J. (2023). *The Use and Exposure of Hate Speech Among Students: A Discourse Analysis Study*. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, 13(12), 3087-3096. <https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.1312.05>

²⁹ *Ibidem*

³⁰ *Ibidem*

³¹ Bahari, Y., Fatmawati, & Seko, S. (2021). *Students Response to Hate Speech*. *Sociology Study*, 11(6). <https://doi.org/10.17265/2159-5526/2021.06.002>

2.4 *To highlight students' attitudes towards the dividing line that should exist between freedom of expression and hate speech.*

International and national instruments of human rights in democratic societies, apart from recognizing and protecting freedom of expression, at the same time impose restrictions on it. European Convention on Human Rights, in article 10 sanctions the meaning, content of freedom of expression as well as the cases when the state by law can restrict it.³²

In line with these regulations, although different studies find freedom of expression inherent in the functioning of democracy, it is also accepted that it is not unlimited. Different articles based on these instruments, but also on legal and judicial practice, have found that there should be a balance between freedom of expression and hate speech, to preserve democracy and its values, such as the principle of equality and non-discrimination. Current attempts to suppress various types of extreme speech, including hate speech, are analyzed by a group of authors in the study "Extreme Speech and Democracy Itself". Some of the cases found by the authors of different disciplines and from different countries, when free speech has to be limited, are racial hate speech, religion or sexual orientation, incitement to hatred against ethnic groups, etc.³³

However, studies in the direction of students' perceptions or attitudes towards these phenomena within the university environment need to be explored further. While insights from related studies contribute to our understanding of these phenomena in broader contexts, the unique dynamics and subtleties of students' perspectives within the Albanian university environment remain largely unexplored in academic literature.

3. Research Methods

The methodology used for this study was envisioned to gather comprehensive insights into students' perspectives on freedom of speech and the hate speech in Albanian universities. The methodology is summarized as follows:

Retrospective cross-sectional study: We conducted a survey with all-level University students in Albania during January 2024.³⁴

A Selection of Target Participant Group: After the purpose of the study was identified, the population was defined as students from both public and private universities in Albania. To ensure adequate representation of this population, study participants of varying ages, genders, and educational levels were selected using random sampling.

Development of the Questionnaire: To fulfill the study's objectives, we confidently designed a structured questionnaire that includes clear and concise questions to collect qualitative data on students' statements and opinions. The questionnaire was drafted with in the Albanian language avoiding language or phrasing that could influence participants' responses.

Pre-testing of the Questionnaire: A small sample of 20 participants underwent pre-testing of the questionnaire to ensure clarity and comprehension of the questions prior to the main study. The feedback from the pre-testing was confidently used to refine the questionnaire for the final study and was not included in the final study population.

Testing a questionnaire is a crucial process for evaluating the reliability and validity of the

³² European Court of Human Rights. (1950). *European Convention on Human Rights*. https://www.echr.coe.int/d/ocuments/d/echr/Convention_ENG

³³ McNamara, L. (2009). *Ivan Hare and James Weinstein (eds), Extreme Speech and Democracy. The Journal of Media Law*, 1(2), 295–303. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17577632.2009.11427346>

³⁴ "Perspektiva e studentëve mbi lirinë e shprehjes dhe marrjen e masave ndaj gjuhës së urrejtjes në universitete." (n.d.). Google Docs. Retrieved April 28, 2024, from <https://forms.gle/CxizVRWRA7hZS9aQ6>

questions and measures used in a study. This ensures the effectiveness of the questionnaire and provides accurate and dependable results. The draft questionnaire was pre-tested with a limited number of students to gather feedback on its clarity and appropriateness prior to distribution.

Internal Consistency: For the purpose of this study, the questionnaire was distributed to the students after confirmation and the necessary modifications. Cronbach's alpha is a statistical measure that confidently assesses the reliability and consistency of a Likert scale questionnaire in measuring a specific concept or characteristic. It decisively evaluates the degree to which scale questions have a consistent and similar relationship with each other, ensuring accurate measurement of the assessed concept. The resulting value of Cronbach's alpha ranges from 0 to 1. A high Cronbach's alpha value (close to 1) suggests that the questions are closely interrelated, while a lower alpha value (closer to 0) may indicate that the questions lack consistency and do not relate well to each other.

Table 1: Reliability test

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.586	13

Source: Author's calculations

Cronbach's alpha is a crucial tool for evaluating the quality and reliability of scaled questions. A value above 0.5 is generally considered acceptable in social sciences, but specific values may vary depending on the study's context and purpose. This demonstrates the high level of expertise and competence of the researchers involved. The Cronbach's alpha of 0.586 in this study indicates that the scale is reliable and consistently measures the intended construct, with minimal influence from random errors (Table 1).

Data Collection: The questionnaire was administered electronically to 17 randomly chosen universities and 622 participants using a secure platform, ensuring confidentiality and anonymity. Cluster sampling was employed, involving randomly selected universities and participants, to represent the broader population of university students in Albania.

Statistical Analysis of Data: We conducted statistical analysis, including simple descriptive analysis, correlation analysis, crosstabs etc. This analytical approach helped us extract meaningful insights from the gathered data.

Determination of Sample Size: The sample size was determined using the Slovin's formula. The variables in this formula are: n = minimum number of sample size, N = the total number of sample population of the study, e = margin of error in the calculation.

$$n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$$

According to the National Institute of Statistics in Albania³⁵ data for 2022-2023, the total number of students was 121352. Data for 2023-2024 will be published in May 2024.

Slovin's formula was used to calculate the sample size 399 for a Confidence Interval of 95 % and a margin of error of 5%. We decided to extend the sample to 622 participants in order to have a higher representation of students from public and private universities, to increase the reliability of the results obtained from the questionnaire as well.

Ethical considerations: The study adhered to ethical guidelines. The questionnaire data were ethically used only for the scientific paper, ensuring the responsible and confidential use of data for scientific purposes only. The legal framework such as Law no. 9887, dated 10.03.2008, "On the

³⁵ Institute of Statistics (INSTAT). Retrieved March 31, 2024, from <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/11613/press-release-statistika-te-regjistrimeve-2022-23.pdf>

Protection of Personal Data”, as amended, Law no. 9288, dated 07.10.2004, For the Ratification of the Convention “On the Protection of Individuals in Connection with the Automatic Processing of Personal Data”, as amended, were observed to safeguard participant’s privacy rights.

4. Results and Discussions

Freedom of expression is a fundamental human right that is crucial to democratic societies.³⁶ It empowers individuals to express their thoughts, beliefs, and ideas without fear of censorship or retaliation. In the context of universities, freedom of expression is indispensable for fostering intellectual inquiry, critical thinking, and the exchange of diverse perspectives.

This section presents the results of the research questions. It also presents the analysis and interpretation of the data obtained from the students’ responses to the questionnaire. A comprehensive examination of the data made it possible to delve into the interpretations that shed light on the issue of hate speech and freedom of expression in the university context.

The interpretation of the results as part of the discussions of this study is based on the demographic criteria of the participating students, including age and gender. In addition, the interpretation of the results of the study is supported by other criteria, such as the level of study. This approach has been taken in order to investigate the causes and how they may affect the concrete attitudes of the students.

A very important result of our study is that 99% of survey participants believe that freedom of expression is either very important or important in the university (Fig 1). This result showcases the significance of this topic in the academic community.

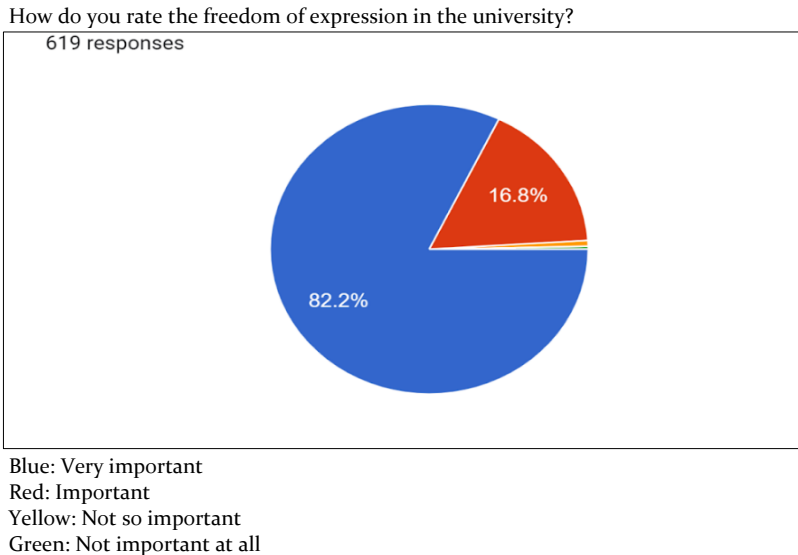


Figure 1: Evaluation of the Freedom of Expression in University

³⁶ Freedom of expression. (n.d.). The European Convention on Human Rights. <https://www.coe.int/en/web/humanrightsconvention/expression#:~:text=Freedom%20of%20expression%20is%20one>

As its first objective, this study confidently evaluates the significance of freedom of expression within universities. It asserts that attitudes towards this fundamental right vary across different dimensions, such as level of education, age, and gender. Understanding the nuances of freedom of expression within the university is essential for creating inclusive and intellectually vibrant academic environments. Exploring the perspectives of students at different stages of their academic journey and across various demographic groups provides valuable insights into those factors that shape attitudes towards free speech. This information informs efforts to promote a culture of open dialogue and respectful discourse within higher education institutions. The findings of this study will be authoritative and will contribute significantly to the Albanian existing literature on this topic.

The study's objectives are used to formulate research questions. For the first objective we wanted to get answers for these research questions:

- Which is the value of freedom of expression among students of different academic levels?
- What do students think about restricting freedom of expression based on age and gender?

According to what was mentioned above, 99% of respondents in our survey think that academic freedom of expression is either extremely important or important and only 1% of students rate it as slightly important and not at all important (see Fig. 1). This result demonstrates the importance of this topic to the academic community.

The data analysis unequivocally demonstrates that Albanian university students highly value freedom of expression, regardless of their level of education. A significant majority of 82.4% of the participants rated freedom of expression as 'very important'. It is worth noting that there was a variation in the distribution across educational levels, with 46.1% of these participants pursuing Bachelor's studies. This finding underscores the strong recognition of the significance of free speech among undergraduate students. Moreover, the data reveals that a significant proportion of participants (16.4%) were enrolled in Integrated Programs, while an almost equal percentage (16.9%) were pursuing Master's Studies (See Table 2). These findings underscore the critical role of freedom of expression across diverse academic paths. Notably, even those engaged in Ph.D. studies (0.8%) and other educational pursuits (2.1%) expressed a strong appreciation for freedom of expression. Participants who rated freedom of expression as 'important' were distributed across educational levels, with a notable percentage of participants from Bachelor studies (10.4%), Integrated Programs (2.1%), and Master Studies (3.4%) affirming the importance of free speech. Participants who rated freedom of expression as 'important' were distributed across educational levels, with a notable percentage of participants from Bachelor studies (10.4%), Integrated Programs (2.1%), and Master Studies (3.4%) affirming the importance of free speech. This suggests that the value of free speech is recognized across different levels of education. Freedom of expression plays a critical role in academia, as recognized by many. Albanian university students hold it in high esteem, regardless of their educational level (See Table 2).

The data clearly shows that the majority of participants in both categories, 'very important' and 'important', are pursuing Bachelor's degrees. This highlights the significant emphasis that undergraduate students place on freedom of expression in the university. This is likely due to their stage of academic and personal development, where they are actively engaging with new ideas and perspectives. Participants in Integrated Study Programmes and Master Studies also value freedom of expression, albeit to a slightly lesser extent than those in Bachelor's studies. This suggests a potential change in priorities as students advance to higher levels of education, where they may place greater emphasis on other aspects of academic or professional growth. The inclusion of participants from Ph.D. studies and other programs in the survey sample highlights the diversity of educational backgrounds represented. Although constituting a smaller percentage of the total, their perspectives on freedom of expression are still significant and warrant attention.

The significance of freedom of expression in the university context is universally recognized, regardless of the level of education. However, the emphasis on this issue varies across different educational levels, indicating that its importance may shift as students' progress through their academic careers. By understanding these nuances, we can better inform efforts to promote and

protect freedom of expression within universities. The data emphasizes the significance of education level in shaping attitudes towards freedom of expression among university students. Targeted strategies are necessary to promote a culture of free speech that resonates with students at all stages of their academic journey (See Table 2).

Table 2:

			Which study cycle are you following?					Total
			Bachelor	Program i integruar	Master	Doktoraturë	Tjetër	
How do you rate freedom of expression at the university?	Very Important	Count	283	101	104	5	13	506
		% of Total	46.1%	16.4%	16.9%	0.8%	2.1%	82.4%
	Important	Count	64	13	21	0	4	102
		% of Total	10.4%	2.1%	3.4%	0.0%	0.7%	16.6%
	Not so Important	Count	2	2	0	0	0	4
		% of Total	0.3%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.7%
	Not Important at all	Count	1	0	0	0	1	2
		% of Total	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.3%
Total	Count	350	116	125	5	18	614	
	% of Total	57.0%	18.9%	20.4%	0.8%	2.9%	100.0%	

Secondly based on the first objective data analysis aimed to evaluate the attitude of the students regarding the restriction of freedom of expression with reference to age group.

Among the 18-24 age group, comprising the majority of participants in the study at 82.5%, a significant proportion (40.8%) believe that freedom of expression should be unlimited. Additionally, 29.3% advocate for limitations on freedom of expression only in special cases, while 12.5% support restrictions with conditions (See Table 3).

Table 3:

			Freedom of expression in the university should be:			Total
			Unlimited	Limited by conditions	Limited to special cases	
Personal Information: Age:	18-24 years old	Count	252	77	181	510
		% of Total	40.8%	12.5%	29.3%	82.5%
	25-34 years old	Count	40	12	29	81
		% of Total	6.5%	1.9%	4.7%	13.1%
	35-44 years old	Count	12	3	4	19
		% of Total	1.9%	0.5%	0.6%	3.1%
	over 45 years old	Count	5	3	0	8
		% of Total	0.8%	0.5%	0.0%	1.3%
	Total	Count	309	95	214	618
		% of Total	50.0%	15.4%	34.6%	100.0%

Participants aged 25-34, which forms a smaller but still substantial portion of the sample at 13.1%, a smaller percentage (6.5%) believe that freedom of expression should be unlimited. Similarly, fewer participants in this age group advocate for limitations, with 4.7% supporting restrictions only in

special cases and 1.9% supporting restrictions with conditions.

In older age groups, the percentages advocating for unlimited freedom of expression decrease further. Among participants aged 35-44 (3.1% of the sample), only 1.9% believe that freedom of expression should be unlimited. Similarly, among participants over 45 years (1.3% of the sample), the percentage supporting unlimited freedom of expression is even lower at 0.8%. (See Table 3).

The data suggests a trend where younger participants, particularly those aged 18-24, are more likely to advocate for unlimited freedom of expression compared to older age groups. This could be attributed to factors such as generational differences, exposure to diverse perspectives through digital media, and a greater emphasis on individual rights and liberties among younger demographics (See Table 3).

The findings have clear implications for policymakers, researchers, and civil society organizations. It is crucial to understand the attitudes of different age groups towards the restriction of freedom of expression. This understanding can inform the development of targeted interventions and policies that resonate with diverse demographic groups.

To finalize the first objective another data analysis aimed to evaluate the attitude of the students regarding the restriction of freedom of expression with reference to gender.

It was found that among the male participants, who made up 31% of the sample, a significant proportion (15.5%) believed that freedom of expression should be unlimited.

Furthermore, 9.9% of males advocated for limitations on freedom of expression only in special cases, while 5.6% supported restrictions with conditions. The data shows that among the participants, the majority of whom are female (68.9%), a higher percentage (34.6%) believe in unlimited freedom of expression compared to males. These findings demonstrate a clear trend in the opinions of the participants, highlighting the importance of considering gender when discussing freedom of expression. Additionally, a larger proportion of females (24.9%) advocate for limitations on freedom of expression only in special cases, while 9.4% support restrictions with conditions (See Table 4).

Table 4:

		Freedom of expression in the university should be:			Total	
		Unlimited	Limited by conditions	Limited to special cases		
Sex	Male	Count	94	34	60	188
		% of Total	15.5%	5.6%	9.9%	31.0%
	Female	Count	210	57	151	418
		% of Total	34.6%	9.4%	24.9%	68.9%
	Other	Count	1	0	0	1
		% of Total	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%
Total	Count	305	91	211	607	
	% of Total	50.2%	15.0%	34.8%	100.0%	

Albania has experienced a substantial rise in female enrolment in higher education, similar to many other countries. This is due to various factors, birth rates, migration, changes in societal attitudes towards women's education, and greater access to educational opportunities for females. As the majority of students in Albania are female³⁷, it is reasonable to expect a higher representation of females in any study conducted within a university setting. The study reflects this demographic reality, with 68.8% of the participants being female.

The gender disparity in the study's participant pool may have an impact on the observed

³⁷ Institute of Statistics (INSTAT). Retrieved March 31, 2024, from <https://www.instat.gov.al/media/11613/press-release-statistika-te-regjistrimeve-2022-23.pdf>

differences in attitudes towards freedom of expression between males and females. With females being the majority in the sample, a diversity of perspectives shaped by their experiences, backgrounds, and societal roles is likely to be present (See Table 4).

The percentage of females advocating for limitations on freedom of expression, particularly in special cases, may be influenced by a variety of factors related to their lived experiences. It is important to note that this statement is not a subjective evaluation, but rather an observation based on possible factors that influence opinions on freedom of expression. Women in Albanian society may have faced discrimination or marginalization, leading them to be more sensitive to the potential harm caused by hatred speech. It is important to acknowledge that individuals may prioritize different values based on their gender, with females potentially placing greater emphasis on inclusivity, empathy, and social cohesion. It is crucial to acknowledge that attitudes towards freedom of expression are not solely determined by gender, but can also be influenced by other identities such as socio-economic status etc. Understanding the gender dynamics in attitudes towards freedom of expression is crucial to inform policies for fostering a culture of free speech and democratic engagement.

In summary, the data clearly indicates that gender differences exist in attitudes towards the restriction of freedom of expression, with females generally more supportive of limitations compared to males. To fully understand the complex factors shaping these attitudes and to develop inclusive strategies for promoting free speech and civic engagement³⁸, a more comprehensive analysis and consideration of intersectional perspectives is required (See Table 4).

4.1 *Analysis of values, what students value as more important between freedom of expression, principle of equality and principle of non-discrimination.*

Regarding the second objective of the study as a comparative analysis on the students' perspective of values, the data analysis was initially focused on the context of age and gender of the participants.

We formulated the research question: In the context of age and gender, what between the freedom of expression, principle of equality and principle of non-discrimination do students value most?

The data highlight the participants' prioritization by age as: equality as most important, then freedom of expression, and protection from discrimination. The results show that participants place different emphasis on principles of equality and non-discrimination and freedom of expression. It is noteworthy that across all age groups, a significant proportion of participants (40.8%) attach great importance to the principle of equality. This statistic shows participants' strong commitment to fairness and social justice. A significant proportion of participants (36.3%) value freedom of expression. This emphasizes the importance they attach to open dialogue and the exchange of ideas within society. To a lesser extent, protection against discrimination is also recognized as important, with 22.9% of participants prioritizing this principle. This result reflects individuals' concerns about the need to ensure equal treatment and equality for all members of society (See Table 5).

³⁸ Lutaj, L. (2019). *Freedom of Expression and the Civil Participation of the Youth*. *European Journal of Education*, 2(3), 19-24. <https://doi.org/10.26417/ejed.v2i3>

Table 5:

			Which do you rate as the most important:			Total	
			Freedom of expression	Protection from discrimination	The principle of equality		
Personal Information Age:	18-24	Count	182	114	211	507	
		% of Total	29.6%	18.5%	34.3%	82.4%	
	25-34	Count	28	21	32	81	
		% of Total	4.6%	3.4%	5.2%	13.2%	
	35-44	Count	10	6	3	19	
		% of Total	1.6%	1.0%	0.5%	3.1%	
	Over 45	Count	3	0	5	8	
		% of Total	0.5%	0.0%	0.8%	1.3%	
	Total		Count	223	141	251	615
			% of Total	36.3%	22.9%	40.8%	100.0%

Participants aged 18-24 prioritize the principle of equality at a significant percentage of 34.3% of the total, followed by freedom of expression (29.6%) and protection from discrimination (18.5%). Such a result shows that younger participants value equality first, which may be a reflection of their idealism and dedication to social justice issues. Participants between the ages of 25-34, however, prioritize these concepts somewhat lower, giving to equality only a 5.2% priority, freedom of expression a 4.6% priority, and protection from discrimination a 3.4% priority. This change in priorities could be a sign that people in this age range have different obligations like family responsibilities or career advancement. Individuals between the ages of 35-44 exhibit a marginal rise in their preference for freedom of expression (1.6%), indicating an increasing understanding of the value of free speech and intellectual liberty as people get older. The values of equality (ranked at 0.8%) and freedom of expression (ranked at 0.5%) are still valued by participants over 45, despite their smaller share of the total. This suggests that all these three values are important to people to all ages (See Table 5).

From the above results, we first assess that based on age, participants aged 18-24, 25-34 and those over 45 evaluate the principle of equality as the most important. While participant's aged 35-44 value freedom of expression as the most important.

Secondly, a comparison between the principles of equality and non-discrimination and freedom of expression is also important for evaluating the perceptions of students on freedom of expression in relation to hate speech. The results on the principle of equality (40.8%) and that of non-discrimination (22.9%) together are 63.7%. Such a result shows a greater support for both principles in relation to freedom of expression (36.3%).

In the question where the participants were asked only about the importance of freedom of expression, without comparing it with other principles, 99% of the participants rated it as very important and important. Meanwhile, when the participants were asked which they value as more important between freedom of expression and the principle of equality and non-discrimination, they answered 63.7 for both principles and 36.3 for freedom of expression.

The principle of equality and non-discrimination are important barriers to hate speech. The fact that these principles together have been evaluated by the students as more important in relation to freedom of expression, show that even though the majority of them value freedom of expression as very important and important, it does not exceed the importance they give to the principle of equality and that of non-discrimination, as two important barriers to overcoming freedom of expression and the use of hate speech.

4.2 Below we will see the data analysis focused on the context of gender. What do the participants value the most important, between freedom of expression, the principle of equality and the principle of non-discrimination?

Among 68.7% of female participants, the highest proportion (30.1%) consider the principle of equality to be the most important. This suggests a strong commitment to fairness and social justice among women in the study. Following closely behind, 24.3% of female participants prioritize freedom of expression. This indicates the significance of open discourse and the exchange of ideas in society for women (See Table 6).

		Which do you rate as the most important:			Total	
		Freedom of expression	Protection from discrimination	The principle of equality		
Sex	Male	Count	72	50	66	188
		% of Total	11.9%	8.3%	10.9%	31.1%
	Female	Count	147	86	182	415
		% of Total	24.3%	14.2%	30.1%	68.7%
	Other	Count	0	0	1	1
		% of Total	0.0%	0.0%	0.2%	0.2%
Total		Count	219	136	249	604
		% of Total	36.3%	22.5%	41.2%	100.0%

While a smaller percentage of female participants (14.2%) prioritize protection from discrimination, this still reflects significant concern about ensuring equal treatment and rights for all individuals, particularly among marginalized groups.

Among 31.1% of male participants, the highest proportion (11.9%) value the right to freedom of expression the most. This suggests that men also recognize the importance of open discourse and intellectual freedom.

Similarly, 10.9% of male participants prioritize the principle of equality, indicating a commitment to fairness and social justice among some men in the study. Interestingly, a smaller percentage of male participants (8.3%) prioritize protection from discrimination. This may suggest a lower level of concern or awareness about discrimination among some male participants (See Table 6).

The data demonstrates pronounced disparities between the male and female participants' priorities for the principles. Male participants place a comparatively greater emphasis on freedom of expression, while female participants prioritize equality more strongly. Experiences with discrimination and perceptions of power dynamics may have an impact on these differences. Women who have been exposed to discrimination on the basis of their gender or other characteristics might place a higher value on equality. Men, on the other hand, might value freedom of speech more than other women in order to stand up for their rights and authority. In summary, the data emphasizes the complexity of the interactions between gender, cultural norms, and experiences in forming attitudes toward social justice and human rights. It also shows the diversity of perspectives and priorities among male and female participants regarding key principles.

4.3 Evaluation of the attitude of students against hate speech

Objective 3 is focused on the evaluation of the attitude of the students toward hate speech. The research question "What attitude do students of different academic levels have toward hate speech?" seeks to understand how students across various stages of their academic journey perceive hate speech. The data provided offers insights into students' attitudes towards hate speech at the university level and how these attitudes may vary based on their academic level of study (See Table 7).

Table 7:

			Hate speech in university environments must				Total
			Strictly prohibited	To be controlled and monitored	To be punished	I do not know	
Which study cycle are you following?	Bachelor	Count	185	104	47	13	349
		% of Total	30.1%	16.9%	7.7%	2.1%	56.8%
	Integrated program	Count	53	39	22	3	117
		% of Total	8.6%	6.4%	3.6%	0.5%	19.1%
	Master	Count	72	34	17	2	125
		% of Total	11.7%	5.5%	2.8%	0.3%	20.4%
	Ph.D.	Count	3	2	0	0	5
		% of Total	0.5%	0.3%	0.0%	0.0%	0.8%
	Other	Count	8	7	3	0	18
		% of Total	1.3%	1.1%	0.5%	0.0%	2.9%
Total		Count	321	186	89	18	614
		% of Total	52.3%	30.3%	14.5%	2.9%	100.0%

The majority of students (82.6%), regardless of the academic level, express a clear stance on hate speech at university, with the majority (52.3%) believing that it should be strictly prohibited. Additionally, 30.3% of students believe that hate speech should be controlled and monitored, while 14.5% advocate for punishment for hate speech. A small percentage (2.9%) responded that they do not know. Among the 52.3% of students who believe that hate speech should be strictly prohibited, the majority (30.1%) are pursuing a bachelor's degree, followed by 8.6% in an integrated program, 11.7% in a master's degree, and 0.5% in a doctoral program, with 1.3% in other study cycles (See Table 7).

Among the 30.3% of students who believe that hate speech should be controlled and monitored, the distribution by academic level includes 16.9% in bachelor's degree programs, 6.4% in integrated programs, 5.5% in master's degree programs, 0.3% in doctoral programs, and 1.1% in other courses of study. Among the 14.5% of students who believe that hate speech should be punished, 7.7% are pursuing bachelor's degrees, 3.6% are in integrated programs, 2.8% are in doctoral programs, and 0.5% are in other courses of study (See Table 7).

The data reveals that students have a strong opinion against hate speech, with a significant majority supporting measures that either outright forbid hate speech or regulate it closely. The distribution by academic level provides insights into how attitudes towards hate speech may vary across different stages of academic study. Graduate students and master's degree holders, for instance, might have a more subtle perspective that takes monitoring and punishment into account, whereas bachelor's degree holders might be more likely to support severe prohibition. A preference for preventative measures or educational interventions over punitive measures may be indicated by the comparatively lower percentages of students who support punishment for hate speech. The results highlight the significance of tackling hate speech in academic environments. Understanding the potential disparities in attitudes towards hate speech according to academic environments can facilitate the development of focused interventions and educational programs that foster inclusivity, diversity, and dignity for every member of the academic community. Further research may delve deeper into the fundamental causes of students' sentiments regarding hate speech to address this problem.

4.4 Students' attitudes towards the balance and the dividing line that should exist between freedom of expression and hate speech

The research question "Based on the balance that should exist between freedom of expression and hate speech, what is the dividing line between them according to the students' assessment?" delves into the understanding of where the boundary lies between freedom of expression and hate speech according to students' perceptions?

By analyzing the data, it can be explored the correlation of the data between the question “Do you believe that there should be a balance between freedom of expression and the prevention of hate speech at the university?” and the question What do you think should be the dividing line between the freedom of expression and hate speech. (Fig 2)

A significant majority of participants (79.1%) believe that there should be a counter balance between freedom of expression and preventing hatred speech in universities. That indicates a recognition among the respondents of the importance of both protecting free speech and preventing harmful expressions that incite hatred or discrimination (See Table 8).

Table 8:

		What do you think should be the dividing line between freedom of expression and hate speech?				Total	
		Security and threat protection	Protection of dignity from insults, defamation, mocking words, etc.	Tolerant and inclusive environment at the university	Other (specify)		
Do you think there should be a balance between freedom of expression and preventing hate speech in the university?	Yes, a balance is needed	Count	101	245	122	483	
		% of Total	16.5%	40.1%	20.0%	2.5%	79.1%
	No, freedom of expression is more important	Count	7	17	6	5	35
		% of Total	1.1%	2.8%	1.0%	0.8%	5.7%
	Depending on the situation	Count	16	43	26	8	93
		% of Total	2.6%	7.0%	4.3%	1.3%	15.2%
Total		Count	124	305	154	28	611
		% of Total	20.3%	49.9%	25.2%	4.6%	100.0%

Regarding the dividing line perspectives, from those that think that there should be a balance, the largest proportion of participants (40.1%) believe that the dividing line between freedom of expression and hate speech should be drawn to protect dignity from insults, defamation, mocking words, etc. This suggests a focus on safeguarding individuals' dignity and preventing harmful speech that undermines their integrity.

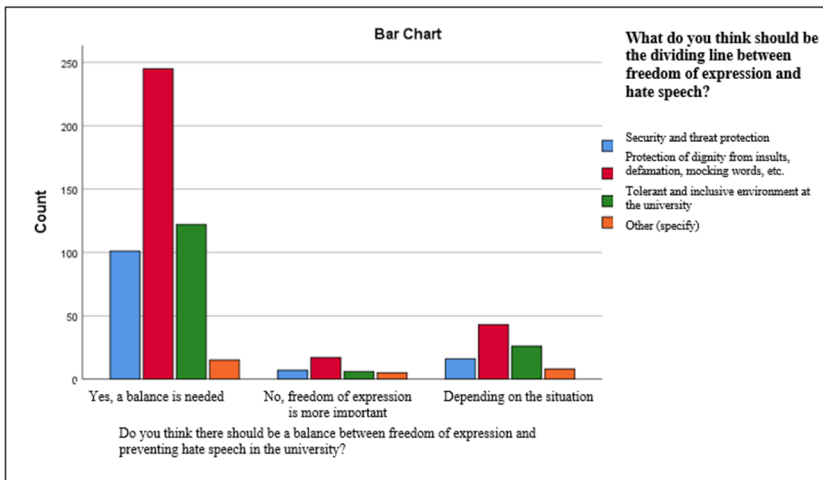


Figure 2: Correlation between the question “Do you believe that there should be a balance between freedom of expression and the prevention of hate speech at the university?” and the question: What do you think should be the dividing line between the freedom of expression and hate speech?

Another significant portion of respondents (20%) assess the tolerant and inclusive environment at the university as the appropriate dividing line between freedom of expression and hate speech.

This highlights the importance of fostering an academic environment where diverse perspectives can be shared without fear of discrimination or prejudice. A smaller percentage of participants (15.2%) believe that the counter balance between freedom of expression and preventing hatred speech should depend on situations. Within this group: 7% believe that the dividing line should prioritize protecting dignity from insults, defamation, mocking words, etc. 4.3% advocate for a tolerant and inclusive environment at the university as the dividing line and 2.6% suggest that security and protection from threats should determine the dividing line. A minority of respondents (5.7%) are contrary. (See Table 8).

This perspective may reflect a strong commitment to the freedom of expression, even at the expense of potential harm caused by hate speech.

The data highlight the diverse perspectives among participants regarding the balance between freedom of expression and preventing hate speech. Efforts to address hate speech should consider the various factors and considerations identified by respondents, including protecting dignity, fostering tolerance, ensuring security, and upholding the principle of free speech.

In summary, the survey data provide valuable insights into students' attitudes towards the balance between freedom of expression and preventing hate speech, as well as their perceptions of the dividing line between the two. These insights can inform strategies and initiatives aimed at promoting a culture of respectful discourse and diversity within universities.

Another research question connected with the 4th objective of the study is: "Based on the context of the age of the participants, which is the dividing line between freedom of expression and hate speech according to the students' assessment?"

The data that has been cross-checked across age groups offers important insights into how participants' perceptions of where to draw the line between hate speech and freedom of speech may differ. Protection of dignity from insults, slander, and mocking words is the main line that separates hate speech from freedom of expression, according to a sizable portion of participants (49.9%) across all age groups (See Table 9).

Table 9:

			What do you think should be the dividing line between freedom of expression and hate speech?				Total
			Security and threat protection	Protection of dignity from insults, defamation, mocking words, etc.	Tolerant and inclusive environment at the university	Other (specify)	
Personal Information: Age	18-24	Count	99	264	117	25	505
		% of Total	16.2%	43.1%	19.1%	4.1%	82.4%
	25-34	Count	18	29	30	4	81
		% of Total	2.9%	4.7%	4.9%	0.7%	13.2%
	35-44	Count	5	10	4	0	19
		% of Total	0.8%	1.6%	0.7%	0.0%	3.1%
	Over 45	Count	2	3	3	0	8
		% of Total	0.3%	0.5%	0.5%	0.0%	1.3%
Total		Count	124	306	154	29	613
		% of Total	20.2%	49.9%	25.1%	4.7%	100.0%

This suggests that respondents as a whole understand how critical it is to protect people's integrity and dignity in the educational setting. 43.1% of individuals in the 18-24 age range believe that the main factor separating people is the preservation of dignity. This shows younger participants should place a higher priority on preventing speech that is disparaging and demeaning to others, as it can damage someone's reputation and sense of self-worth. Also, a significant percentage (19.1%) of participants in this age range think that the university's inclusive and tolerant atmosphere acts as the

boundary. This demonstrates how younger participants are becoming more conscious of the significance of creating dignified, welcoming environments where a range of viewpoints are appreciated. Participants in this age group who see security and protection from threats as the main point of differentiation are less likely (16.2%) and this is likely due to worries about the safety and well-being of individuals within the university community (See Table 9).

Only 13.1% of participants who are between the ages of 25 and 34 say that the main factor separating them is the preservation of their dignity. As people get older and learn more about hate speech and freedom of expression, this suggests that priorities may change. This age group's respondents see the university's inclusive and tolerant atmosphere as the main point of differentiation (4.9%). This shows that senior participants are becoming increasingly aware of how critical it is to foster settings that value diversity and courteous discourse. In a similar vein, a smaller percentage (4.7%) place more importance on maintaining one's dignity, while a minority (2.9%) see security and protection from threats as the key barriers, indicating a nuanced understanding of the variables influencing the line that separates hate speech from freedom of expression (See Table 10).

Table 10:

		Do you think there should be a balance between freedom of expression and preventing hate speech in the university?			Total
		Yes, a balance is needed	No, freedom of expression is more important	Depending on the situation	
Sex	Male	Count	137	11	39
		% of Total	22.6%	1.8%	6.4%
	Female	Count	344	23	52
		% of Total	56.7%	3.8%	8.6%
	Other	Count	0	1	0
		% of Total	0.0%	0.2%	0.0%
Total		Count	481	35	91
		% of Total	79.2%	5.8%	15.0%

The significance of taking age-related variations in opinions about where to draw the line between hate speech and freedom of expression is highlighted by these results. To address the changing perspectives of participants as they move through different age groups, customized interventions and educational programs might be required. In general, the analysis of the data offers significant insights into the complex perspectives of participants from various age groups about where hate speech and freedom of expression differ. These insights can inform strategies for promoting respectful discourse, fostering diversity, and creating inclusive environments within university settings.

"Based on the context of the age of the participants, should there exist an equilibrium between freedom of expression and hatred speech according to students' assessment?"

The final research question examines how participants perceive the need to balance freedom of expression and the prevention of hate speech at the university, particularly focusing on gender differences. The data reveals a strong consensus among participants, irrespective of gender, about the significance of maintaining an equilibrium between freedom of expression and preventing hatred speech at university. An overwhelming majority (79.2%) emphasize that such equilibrium is crucial to foster a respectful and inclusive academic environment. This highlights a shared understanding of the complexities associated with navigating the tension between these principles (See Table 10).

A smaller percentage of participants (15%) believe that the balance between freedom of expression and preventing hate speech should be situation-dependent. This perspective suggests a recognition of contextual factors that may influence the appropriateness of certain expressions within the academic setting. It highlights the necessity for different approaches to addressing hate speech. A minority of participants (5.8%) argue against the idea of balancing freedom of expression and preventing hatred speech. (See Annex, Table 10).

Interestingly, while the majority of both genders endorse the need for a balance, a significantly

higher proportion of female participants (56.7%) express this belief compared to male participants (22.6%). This is related to a major number of female participants in the survey.

Among the total 69% of female participants, a significant majority (56%) believe in the equilibrium that should exist between the two above categories. This perspective reflects a nuanced understanding of the complexities involved in fostering inclusive and respectful academic environments while upholding the principles of free speech on campus (See Annex, Table 10).

In summary, the data analysis provides valuable insights into participants' perspectives between freedom of expression and hate speech at the university, with attention to gender differences. These insights can inform efforts to create inclusive and respectful academic environments that uphold the principles of free speech while mitigating the harmful effects of hate speech.

5. Conclusions and Recommendations

In conclusion, 99% of the students that participated in this survey value freedom of expression as very important or important.

The data clearly indicates that gender differences exist in attitudes towards the restriction of freedom of expression, with females generally more supportive of limitations compared to males. Recognizing generational differences in attitudes towards freedom of expression emphasizes the significance of involving young people in discussions about their rights and responsibilities in the digital age. Empowering Albanian youth to critically evaluate the implications of unrestricted expression fosters a culture of informed and responsible citizenship.

The data unequivocally demonstrates that Albanian students strongly oppose hate speech, with an overall majority in favor of measures to either strictly prohibit or control and monitor hate speech. This highlights the student's community's collective rejection of hate speech and underscores our unwavering commitment for a respectful and inclusive academic environment. The distribution of attitudes towards hate speech among different academic levels provides valuable insights into how perspectives may evolve as students' progress in their academic studies and gain deeper insights into societal issues. Further research is necessary to explore the root causes of students' attitudes towards hate speech and to evaluate the efficacy of interventions in tackling this issue.

Notwithstanding the majority of the students (99%) value freedom of expression as very important or important, it does not exceed the importance they give to the principle of equality and that of non-discrimination. This attitude shows the importance it has for the expression and pluralism of opinions. On the other hand, this does not mean that this wide scope of freedom of expression would justify the transition to hate speech. Most of the students (52.3%) believe that hate speech in universities should either be strictly prohibited or controlled and monitored (30.3%). Banning hate speech is an indicator of students' attitude towards it. Another indicator of this attitude is the support found among students for the fact that there should be a balance between freedom of expression and hate speech. Students are clear when 79.1% of them believe that there should be an equilibrium between freedom of expression and preventing hatred speech at universities. Data analysis shows that the need to balance freedom of expression with the prevention of hate speech is widely recognized among university students in Albania. The majority of participants take a clear stance on this issue, emphasizing the importance of addressing hate speech while upholding freedom of expression.

This study emphasized the crucial significance that freedom of expression has in higher education institutions. It is quite evident that the majority of students recognize the value of this fundamental right as a cornerstone of academic and intellectual development.

In light of the findings of this study, the authors propose the specific recommendations for the regulation of hate speech in university settings.

Firstly, the adoption of a more specific legal framework, within the legislation of higher education and universities statutes, is of greater importance in order to provide legal protection directly related to the issue of free speech on university campuses for students and academics. The

significance attached by students to the right to freedom of expression within the university environment serves as an indicator of the necessity to implement measures to protect against hate speech, whilst ensuring that the right to freedom of expression is not infringed.

Secondly, the issue of hate speech is relatively under-researched in the Albanian academic environment. It would therefore be beneficial to develop training courses for students and academics. These courses should be based on the most effective experiences of countries that have a consolidated legal framework and jurisprudence of the national courts. The presentation of concrete examples serves to illustrate the manner in which the Albanian academic environment can be approached to facilitate an understanding of the balance that should exist between freedom of expression and the prevention of hatred speech at universities. This understanding also results in the creation of a welcoming and inclusive university environment.

Thirdly, Albanian universities must ensure that administrative offices, ethics committees, other responsible academic structures and student councils play a proactive role. They must emphasize the importance of balancing the right to freedom of expression with other fundamental rights, such as the right to dignity and non-discrimination. Training, access to resources, guidelines, support mechanisms, legal guidance, mediation services and counseling support for academic structures can effectively increase their capacities and address issues related to freedom of expression.

The facilitation of dialogue, the provision of resources and training support, are essential steps in fostering a culture that values diverse perspectives while upholding academic principles in Albanian universities. Ultimately, by investing in the capacity building of key stakeholders and promoting a culture of open discourse, Albania can ensure that higher education institutions serve as promoters of freedom of expression, critical thinking, and academic excellence.

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