

Students' Perceptions of the University as a Service (UaaS) Model

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Abstract

This paper investigates students' perception of the *University as a Service (UaaS)* concept and their receptivity to integrating AI-driven academic tracking tools in their educational journey. The main objective is to assess to what extent students are willing to adopt an educational model based on life-long learning and digital personalization, by identifying at the same time their acceptance limits in the process of automatic enrolment. The research uses a quantitative approach, based on an online survey distributed among university students. The collected data were analyzed with the help of statistical tools such as the Paired Samples T-Test, the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r), and the frequency distribution analysis, in order to test three hypotheses. Essentially, the analysis's goal is to investigate the correlation between employability, the desire for upskilling, and the degree of acceptance to have the progress monitored by AI tools. Results show a significant openness toward the UaaS model, with students perceiving the university as a lifelong career partner. Nevertheless, the hypothesis regarding the AI automatic class enrollment was statistically rejected ($r=0.099$), thus pointing out a clear distinction between the assistance offered by AI and the final control of decisions. The article contributes to the literature by exploring the UaaS concept in a context where the AI conversation has become the main concern. One of the main findings of our paper is that students have a tolerance threshold regarding how much of their decision control they hand over to AI tools. Finally, the research offers valuable insights for both universities and human resources departments. Educational institutions should pay closer attention to the design of their learning platforms, while business professionals need to close their strategic partnerships with universities.

Keywords

University as a Service; upskilling; reskilling; life-long learning; artificial intelligence in education

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Introduction

In the rapidly evolving labor market, the role of higher education institutions is challenged by the need to adapt to the ongoing digital transformations. The concept of University as a Service (UaaS) could be the strategic answer to this pressing need, by transitioning from a traditional, rigid perspective to one where students' needs must be met, just as in the business sector (Kruja et al., 2021). Moreover, recent research highlights that universities can no longer remain solely diploma providers but shift to life-long learning partners that yield flexible study programs, reskilling and upskilling, micro-credentials (Jamaludin et al., 2020; Niemi, 2021).

Moreover, the integration of AI and e-learning platforms has become a central pillar in the customization of the academic experience (Siminto et al., 2023; Yunina, 2023), while literature shows a gap between employers' expectations and the skills acquired in university by the students (Rotwell et al., 2025; Škrinjarić, 2023). This context leads us to the main research question of this study, represented by what the students' perceptions are toward the concept of UaaS, considering the correlation between the continuous upskilling needs and the openness towards AI-assisted academic monitoring. The adopted approach

consists of a quantitative analysis based on a 16-question survey administered to Romanian university students, in order to assess their perceptions towards the UaaS framework. We chose to test three hypotheses that explore the relationship between the students' expectations, upskilling needs and openness to AI tools.

Hence, this paper briefly summarizes the theoretical framework of the UaaS model and the AI's impact on educational processes, then it moves on to the description of the research methodology, followed by the presentation of the statistical analysis and the validation of the hypotheses, while in the end, we discuss the results and propose practical recommendations for fellow academics and universities.

2. Review of the scientific literature

The transition to the digital economy has put a lot of pressure on universities worldwide, forcing them to switch from offering static accumulation of knowledge to developing dynamic skills (Qolamani & Mohammed, 2023). In this context, they need to become agile by transforming digitalization from simple technical support to the foundation of a customized academic experience (Siminto et al., 2023; Mashilo & Shekgola, 2024; Wang'ang'a, 2024). Thus, technology is not seen as just a tool, but the means to adapt each student's route to the labor market's needs.

Lately, the concept of University as a Service (UaaS), a concept borrowed from the software industry, has become more and more popular in research related to how the paradigm shifts in higher education institutions. Essentially, UaaS implies that universities are no longer a temporary destination for people, but an ongoing provider of educational services (Siminto et al., 2023; Yunina, 2023). This model is based on modularity, accessibility and most importantly on the concept of knowledge subscription. Instead of proposing a rigid curriculum, the university becomes a dynamic hub that yields resources, mentorship, and certifications throughout the entire professional lifespan of an individual, by bridging the gap between the academic and the business environment.

Nevertheless, some studies draw attention to matters such as ethics, digital equity, confidentiality, commercial exploitation of data, or the danger of transforming education into just a service, with no real pedagogical impact in the absence of solid governance and a well-defined orientation towards educational goals (Chaudhry & Kazim, 2023; Williamson, 2023).

One of the central pillars of recent literature is the student as the end beneficiary of career-counselling services (OECD, 2023; Siminto et al., 2023; Yunina, 2023). Research shows that an institution's success is more and more measured by its capacity to facilitate students' insertion into the labor market (Gault et al., 2010; Qenani, 2014), however evidences show there is a gap between the universities' promises and the students' perceptions (Carter et al., 2024; Rotwell et al., 2025). Thus, this discrepancy between the professional development expectations and the actual received support transforms employability from a simple graduation outcome into a central factor that needs to be strategically dealt with by universities.

The concepts of life-long learning and upskilling have become a professional necessity in order to keep relevance in the dynamic labor market. There is a wide concern about assessing students' perception of these concepts and how they should be managed inside a university (Narayanaswamy et al., 2024; OECD, 2023). People become more and more aware of the fact that knowledge obtained in university has a limited life span, so this understanding favors the UaaS model because students seem willing to find institutions that allow them to upskill periodically.

The integration of AI-driven academic tracking opens new horizons regarding the monitoring and optimization of the learning process (Kruchinin, 2019). Predictive algorithms can identify knowledge gaps and recommend personalized resources through e-learning platforms. Nevertheless, literature draws attention to the thin balance between automatization and the student's autonomy (Hardaker & Glenn, 2025; Yunina, 2023). Even though systems that run on a recommendation basis are usually well-received by users, accepting AI-monitoring is often conditioned by not losing decision-making control.

2. Research methodology

This section of the paper is focused on presenting the steps taken in order to answer the research question of this study and to test the three hypotheses. The subsequently analyzed results were obtained based on a 16-question survey, distributed to randomly selected bachelor and master degree students through the Google Forms platform. For content validity purposes, the 16-question survey was structured into three major parts, each corresponding to the investigated hypotheses, and it concluded with a section dedicated

to socio-demographic questions (such as year of study, field of specialization, and labor market experience), for the purpose of building the respondents' profile. The first section examined students' expectations regarding the employment support provided by the university, utilizing a 5-point Likert scale (from strongly disagree – 1 to strongly agree – 5). The second part of the questionnaire measured the respondents' commitment to lifelong learning and upskilling, asking students about their current learning habits and their future intentions regarding career development. The third section focused on technology acceptance, assessing the participants' comfort levels and boundaries regarding AI-driven monitoring and automated academic processes.

In total, 90 answers were obtained and further statistically analyzed. This sample is representative of the economic science field, with the majority of participants being active in Management (61.1%), Finance (21.1%) and Accounting (13.1%). Additionally, the analysis shows a solid concentration for the bachelor students, especially for second year students (61.1%) and first year students (28.9%) – as they are also the ones who are in the life stage where they lay the foundation for their career options and who are also more open to adopting new educational tech tools. Only 8.9% of the sample is represented by third-year students.

Furthermore, an essential aspect regarding the respondents' profile is their current connection to the labor market, as approximately 72% of them have already engaged in some form of professional activity, which transforms their perceptions from mere opinions into pragmatic expectations. Figure no. 1 shows the distribution of respondents based on their level of experience.

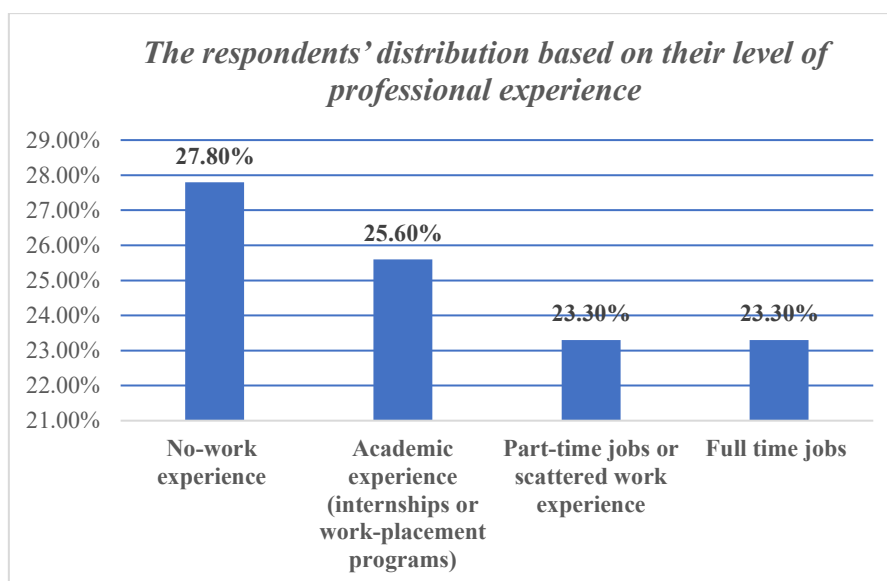


Figure no. 1. The respondents' distribution based on their level of professional experience

Despite the relatively small size of the sample (N=90), specific statistical tests were used to ensure the accuracy of the findings. First of all, to evaluate the reliability of the Likert-scale items, Cronbach's alpha coefficient was calculated as a measure of internal consistency. Secondly, Paired-Samples T-Test were used to compare students' expectations from the university and their perceived current university offerings. Subsequently, Pearson's correlation coefficient (r) was chosen to explore the strength and direction of the linear relationships between the variables. Last but not least, prior to conducting these parametric tests, it was verified if data followed a normal distribution using the Shapiro-Wilk test, to ensure the assumptions of the applied statistical tools were fully met.

3. Results and discussions

This section of the paper provides an interpretation of the results, aiming to address the research question and evaluate the validity of the hypotheses.

For scientific rigor and the validation of the "University as a Service (UaaS)" framework, the collected data were subjected to inferential statistical analysis. It is important to mention that in the data collection phase, the tool designed to assess the variables regarding the students' current perception on the university's help provided for their future careers, encountered a design limitation; it provided respondents with a binary and polarized choice (with "Strongly agree" coded as 5 and "Strongly disagree" coded as 1), omitting the intermediate levels of the Likert scale. Although this aspect forces a categorical decision from the respondent

and alters the natural dispersion of the distribution, parametric statistical tests retain their utility for identifying macroscopic gaps. The results of the comparative analysis were interpreted in light of this methodological specificity.

The first hypothesis explores whether there is a statistically significant difference between the students' expectations that the university runs as an employability hub and their perception of the actual institution's efforts in this regard.

In order to test the first hypothesis, paired samples T-Test was used, by comparing the mean scores of ideal expectations with the perceived current reality. Following the analysis of the data, $p = 9,63 \times 10^{-7}$ ($p < 0,001$) was returned. Since this value is strictly lower than the standard significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, hypothesis H1 is statistically confirmed.

In light of the first hypothesis' confirmation, we understand that the students experience a gap between their expectations and the reality within the university. They wish for the university to effectively prepare them for their future careers, however they consider the institution's efforts to be insufficient. This finding confirms why the universities' adoption of the UaaS framework is essential to turn them into a true facilitator of professional success, rather than just a provider of diplomas.

The second hypothesis states that over 60% of students are highly open to a recurrent educational model (continuous learning / upskilling) offered by the university.

The verification of this hypothesis was performed through the analysis of the frequency distribution. We isolated the proportion of students who opted for higher scores – 4 and 5 on the Likert scale –, concerning their interest in returning to university after graduation. The results showed that 82.22% of respondents validated this direction. Since the results are higher than the hypothesis threshold of 60%, we consider that hypothesis H2 is statistically confirmed.

This outcome proves that the students no longer see graduation as an end to their relationship with the university, as they are willing to return to acquire new skills. Hence, the UaaS framework is validated, positioning the university as a lifelong career partner, not just a three-year stage.

The third hypothesis investigates whether there is a positive and statistically significant correlation between the students' level of acceptance regarding AI-driven academic tracking and the inclination toward automatic enrolment in external e-learning platforms.

In order to measure the intensity and direction of this association, we applied the Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r). The model returned a value of $r = 0.099$. This figure indicates an extremely weak linear association, the equivalent of a lack of correlation, therefore, we consider that hypothesis 3 is statistically rejected.

This result indicated the fact that the students are reluctant to hand over control to AI tools. While they accept them as useful and value their recommendations, they defend their right to decide for themselves which classes to enroll in. Hence, when designing UaaS platforms, AI should be integrated only as recommendation systems, leaving the final decision in the end users' hands.

Additionally, for the purpose of a better understanding of the validation process of our proposed model, Table no. 1 summarizes the results of the inferential analysis.

Table no. 1. Summary of the inferential analysis results

Hypothesis	Statistical tool used	Obtained value	Reference threshold	Statistical decision
Hypothesis 1	Paired Samples T-Test	$p < 0.001$	$\alpha = 0.05$	Confirmed
Hypothesis 2	Frequency distribution analysis	82.22%	60%	Confirmed
Hypothesis 3	Pearson Correlation Coefficient (r)	$r = 0.099$	Significant correlation ($r > 0.3$)	Rejected

Conclusions

The present research evidences that the University as a Service (UaaS) concept has evolved from a merely theoretical framework into a worldwide necessity felt by students. Our results show that students are inclined to perceive the university as a life-long strategic partner in their professional careers. The validation

of hypotheses 1 and 2 indicates the need for universities to transform themselves into digital, agile, and personalized ecosystems that bridge the gap between knowledge yield and the labor market requirements.

In this light, our first recommendation for universities would be to prioritize the conception of modular study programs, that use AI-driven recommendations without removing the student's autonomy. Additionally, they should struggle to constantly improve their curricula and keep their relevance.

Secondly, concerning the recommendations for human resources departments and other business professionals, we advise towards openness to co-creating educational content. A UaaS partnership allows companies to identify talented people from the earliest stages of their careers and thus create a smooth transition that would eventually reduce onboarding costs and diminish the knowledge gap.

Regarding the limitations of this present research, despite its relevant results, a number of aspects can be improved for the future. First of all, even though the sample used is representative of the present study, increasing the number of participants, the geographical area, or the spectrum of study fields, would offer even more relevant results. Moreover, since the questions measured the students' perceptions, we have to acknowledge the level of subjectivity involved. Last but not least, we can identify a limitation regarding the statistical methods used, since only linear correlations were applied, thus exploring qualitative variables through interviews, could offer us a better understanding of the AI reticence.

In the end, concerning possible future research directions, they should focus on exploring the ethical and psychological factors that influence students' trust in educational AI-algorithms. Moreover, a comparative study between generations would offer valuable insights in order to determine whether the professional maturity shifts perception regarding automatic class enrollment. Lastly, a financial assessment of the UaaS adoption by universities could yield strong arguments for whether this process is feasible now or remains a possibility.

Generative Artificial Intelligence (GenAI) usage statement:

Grammarly was responsibly used for language improvement. After this process, the authors reviewed and edited the content as needed and take full responsibility for the content of the present article.

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