

Management at Higher Education Institutions (Focusing on University of Korca, Albania)

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ABSTRACT

"Higher education contributes to your life success. It makes you more competitive in the world of business and global economy. Higher education is the future of a healthy and powerful nation. It is essential for achieving high levels of economic growth".

To speak of higher education is not difficult, but is difficult to understand and apply it in the practice to higher education's institutions.

This paper has the aim to give an overview of the development of higher education in Albania, analyzing quality indicators. Analysis of higher education management is concentrated at the University of Korca, a university of southern region of Albania, with four faculties.

In order to analyse the problem; the study will evaluate quality indicators in this university vs. the labor market and budget of the university for some years. For this study were used 100 students from 12 departments with 1200 in total (85,4% response rate)

This paper determines the best way for success management of the university and recommendations for the future.

Introduction

This paper has reviewed the literature which is relevant to critical success factors of total quality management (TQM) and its implementation in various areas, especially in higher education institutions. As defined by British Standard Institution, TQM consists of a "management philosophy and company practices which aim to harness the human and material resources of an organization in the most effective way to achieve the objectives of the organization". Many researchers have reviewed applying of TQM in higher education institutions, but some of them are skeptical. So, Cashton (1994) has identified obstacles, which include insufficient trust between departments and low confidence levels of ability to manage the process: "Under these circumstances, it does not appear that, for the foreseeable future, British universities are in a position to adopt TQM philosophy."

There are three generic approaches to Total Quality Management (TQM) in higher education (Harris, 1994): - there is a customer focus where the idea of services to student are fostered through staff training and development, which promotes student's choice and autonomy;

- Approach has a staff focus and is concerned to value and enhance the contribution of all members of staff to the effectiveness of an institution's operation, to the setting of

policies and priorities; - approach focuses on service agreements stance and seeks to ensure conformity to specification at certain key measurable points of the educational processes. Evaluation of assignments by faculty within timeframe is an example.

Sangeeta (2004) considers education system as a transformation process comprising of inputs of students, teachers, administrative staff, physical facilities and process.

TQM in Higher Education

Hasson and Klefsjo (2003) define TQM as "management strategy that has interrelated components, namely core values, techniques and tools". Whereas according to Scrabec (2000), "TQM should be viewed as TQE (Total Quality Education). This model moves beyond customers to include society and business beyond student". However, Zairi and Youssef (1995) argue, "TQM must be viewed holistically by examining management factors such as institutional goal statements, long-range plans, and assessment techniques". Owen (2001) states that "Total and continuous quality improvement is seen as a journey not as destination and as such has no real beginning or ending".. TQM is a managerial tool to fix the problems relating to services as well as approaches in education industry and it can standardize the education industry.

Factors which have an impact in higher institutions can be:

- The pressure from budget reductions. In an era of economic crisis, HEIs are experiencing severe pressure from budget reduction, and they are obliged to establish new rigid systems of quality assurance, new rules and regulations and tight monitoring. So, academic leaders have been forced to develop more competitive ways to explore and embrace new roles in order to tap on institutional resources and core competences. Furthermore, the study of leadership in higher education faces many difficulties due to the dual control systems, since leaders have to excel in different contexts including administrative and academic departments and to deal with mixed expectations. Strong leaders are supposed to instigate change processes, set overarching objectives and formulate the necessary strategies to accomplish them. Nevertheless, empirical evidence supports that some strong leaders with clear and predefined objectives about the outcome of the evaluation process such as well-structured self-evaluation reports may have a negative impact, because they actually suffocate motivation and involvement from the academic staff.
- The lack of a participate culture. This problem stimulating discussions and analysis for current and future actions may conclude to disappointment and alienation among the staff or even resistance to change. Institutional culture may be defined as the collective personality of a HEI and reflected at the shared values, beliefs and behaviors of its members. Elements of culture such as autonomy from external control, adaptation, morale, conflict resolution, goal achievement, and formalization modify the degree to which faculty and administrators accept policy or changes associated with QA initiatives.

Literature review supports a positive effect of the aforementioned systems on organizations as a whole, empirical evidence reveals that resistance to accreditation by employees may be attributed to increased workload and bureaucracy, negative emotions of stress, insecurity and distrust, low level of commitment, autonomy restraint, lack of knowledge and experiences, and limited acceptance of the system.

It is very important to study all the best global conventions in order to create a model which is a combination of these conventions.

No matter how a university originates, a historical product or a newly-founded one, it is certain that it will coincide with one of the four conventions that have characterized global education. These conventions are known as the Napoleonic system, the Humboldtian system, the American system and the Newman system.

Brennan and Shah recognize four types of assessment based on quality:

- The academic type
- The managing type
- The pedagogical type
- The employment type

The first one is based on the traditional academic values, while the second type is associated with a focusing in the institutional assessment, concerning the procedures and the structures and the supposition that quality comes from a good management. In the third type the focus lies in the teaching ability and practice. In the fourth type the focus lies in the characteristics of the graduated output and in the standards. In the second and third type the values of the quality are not varied in all the institution. While in the first type they vary, in the fourth they can be both varied and no varied.

General View in the Albanian Higher Education

The first educational institutes of the higher education were opened after the Second World War. In 1957 it was created the first university, which was followed by the creation of other universities based on the Russian higher education system. Thus the higher education in Albania was for a long time a closed system.

However, with the passing of the years, the situation has changed and the higher education has felt the necessity to adapt to the latest economic and social development in Albania.

If we take a glimpse to the development of the higher education in Albania during these years of transition we will notice some aspects of its evolution among which we can mention:

The change and modification of the manner of student acceptance in universities, the change of the programs and curricula according to the framework of Bologna, the increase in the number of universities, the opening of new studying departments, the increase of the academic staff and its continuous qualification in western countries, the tendency to develop the non-public higher education alongside the public one.

The generally positive evolution of the higher education in our country was accompanied with a series of difficulties:

1. The abandonment from the auditorium of a considerable number of qualified staff (because of immigration or employment in government administration or private sector)
2. Partial and confusing autonomy especially in the financial area
3. Quantitative expansion and extension of the universities detrimental to the quality
4. Difficulties and lack of capacities in the auditorium, modern equipment and in the everyday and massive means
5. Decrease of the discipline of scientific research
6. Difficulties in offering and hiring as assistants, the best students because of the low wages.

A tendency in the higher education has been the 'massiveness'. The highest number was of the students involved in the full time system with 69%, 19% in the part time system and 11% in the correspondence system.

Ensuring quality in the Albanian Higher Education

Ensuring quality in the system of higher education is of a great concern in all the European countries, not only in Albania. The quality in the system of higher education in a country, its assessment and monitoring is a decisive factor concerning the status of the systems of higher education.

There are various meanings of the term quality which often reflect the stakeholder's interest in the higher education, thus quality of the higher education is a multi-dimensional concept. It has to do with: students' admission, employment and qualification of lecturers, the facilities and equipment, the services with third parties and administration.

Financial autonomy – The higher education, in particular, is one of the fields that affects aids and precedes the process of the preparation of the conditions for integration following the western countries' tendency in higher education.

Institutional autonomy has three dimensions and even if one of its dimensions is not gratified it leads necessarily to the non-gratification of academic freedom which is in fact the

foundation of a university.

1. Financial autonomy is a dimension of what is called institutional autonomy. Financial autonomy means that the university must have the legal capacity to distribute internally and independently the funds given by the government and to use or self-administrate the nongovernmental income.
2. Structural autonomy means that the university itself determines the way it is organized. It determines its internal structure, i.e. faculties, departments, sections and its administration bodies.
3. Administrative autonomy means that the administration and management of universities must be their own responsibility as an institution. It is obvious that this administration must coincide with the national standards and ethics.

We need to find new ways in favor of the increase of the financial autonomy, aiming:

1. Elimination of the inefficient and superfluous parts
2. Insertion of new elements that respond better to the new financial delineation
3. Distinct designation of the rights and duties of all the cogs of the structure

The main achievements in Higher Education in Albania:

- Our system of higher education has grown around 3 times in 8 years and has achieved, in proportion with the population, the dimensions typical of developed countries. The number of the students getting an education in public and private universities has tripled compared with 2005. The academic staff has grown 2.5 times more compared with 2005.
- The State Exam entirely digitalized (computer based) was implemented not only for the first time but also according to international standards, in the field of health and education, aiming the increase of the level of preparation of the new specialists in the higher education institutions.
- It was created the National Database of students and lecturers and also, since 2 years ago, it is possible to have the national number of matriculation for every student by the National Exam Agency aiming the supervision and transparency of the system of higher education.
- It has been developed further and also it has improved the system for quality ascertainment and accreditation including international expertise in the Accreditation Council and in the Public Agency for the Accreditation of Higher Education, as part of the process of attaining full membership of this institute in the European network of accreditation agencies (ENQA).
- During the period 2005-2014 there have been financed 26 projects for building and 120 projects for reconstructing the campus, auditorium, libraries, dormitories, didactic facilities and other objects in the system of public higher education for building or reconstructing the campus, libraries and there have been equipped 102 science laboratories.
- The Pan-Albanian Cooperation in Education and Science
- It was created, in cooperation with the Education Ministry of the Republic of Kosovo, the joint abecedaries which is used today in the schools of Albania and Kosovo. The Joint Commissions of the two Ministries of Education in Albania and Kosovo are finalizing the unified Plans and Programs in the obligatory education.
- There have been implemented for the first time the programs (in 2005-2013) Brain Gain and the Excellence Fund to grow the human resources in the higher education. The Program of the Excellence Fund, started in 2007 and supported by a yearly financing of the Albanian government of 100million Lek, has aided 177 people who have applied for the scholarship for their university studies in some of the most prestigious universities in the world. With a total financing of \$ 1.5 million the Brain Gain Program has aided 141 beneficiaries.

The Access of the "Product" of the University Of Korça in the Market

The identification, analysis and assessment of performance indicators of the public universities, which aim the increase of the "product" access in the market, are a very important process. This process takes under consideration some grouped indicators, including not only indicators of the analysis of the Teaching Performance, but also indicators of the Financial Performance of the universities; indicators of the Research Performance approaching

the European standards also indicators of the Internationalization of Universities, including here the participation in international publications and presentations.

Teaching Performance

The University "Fan S. Noli" offers the following programs in the full time and part time system:

- 24 full time Bachelor studying programs
- 13 part time Bachelor studying programs
- 15 full time Professional Master's Degree studying programs (Professional Master in Teaching Biology-Chemistry", "Professional Master in Nursing", (opened for the first time);
- 2 part time Professional Master's Degree
- 5 Scientific Master studying programs
- 1 Postgraduate studying program

The aforementioned data reflect the progressive growth of the university's capacities as a higher education institute which fulfills adequately the need for university qualification in the three cycles of study and in the two systems of study in the southeastern part of Albania. These data constitute a challenge in relation to the adaptation of the studying programs to the changes that the economic and social development of the region suggests, the use of European standards of teaching and especially lifelong learning and the conservation of a fairer student/lecturer ratio in the institution. Generally all the studying programs reflect a growing interest when compared with the year 2012-2013 when the total number of students reached 6357. During the academic year 2013-2014 6970 students were part of the University of Korçë.

The performance of the academic staff

The performance in teaching is closely related to the performance of the academic staff, where the main issues remain the lecturer/student ratio and the lecturer/guest lecturer ratio. In the University this performance is represented as following: 1/43 - 1/53

Financial Aspects and their impact in the performance of universities

The challenges for the quality increase and for the internationalization of higher education, together with the development of a qualitative scientific research activity have intensified the need for the growth and the diversification of the financing of the higher education. The review of the financing patterns of the higher education is in fact a European tendency and part of the modernization process of the system. A priority of the educational policies is therefore the optimization of the financial resources invested in a national level aiming the quality increase. The universities have to plan and make careful budgets within their budgeting limits. An element of the financial perspective is the government fund allocated to universities. In the University of Korçë this fund is increased by 5-9% every year.

The Performance of the Internationalization of the Universities

This indicator includes the participation in international presentations and publications of the academic staff, demonstrating estimating data in this respect. The participation in national and international conferences of staff has been very high in four faculties of this university. The University "Fan S. Noli" publishes regularly its Bulletin in two series. The bulletin of this year has just been published and there can be found the publications of 105 authors, respectively 30 authors belonging to the social science and 75 to the exact science.

Moreover, a growing indicator is the number of articles published by the academic staff of the university in the country and abroad, their number in 2014 was 130 articles compared with 87 articles in 2012.

Results of the study

For this study were used 100 students from 12 departments with 1200 in total (85,4% response rate)

Considering of questionnaires, the correlation analysis (Pearson correlation) brought to light some interesting relationships:

- Teachers' crucial component of successful guidance and analytical feedback to students ($r = 0.749$, $P < 0.001$).
- The level of difficulty of the course, is positively related to the workload and the credits (ECTS) assigned to it ($r = 0.595$, $P < 0.001$).
- The usefulness of the exercise workshops is strongly related to the assessment of their overall quality ($r = 0.795$, $P < 0.001$).
- Regarding faculty, the students are quite satisfied from academic staff towards their duties such as: - their attendance to the courses;- the time spent for collaboration with the students;-the prompt correction of their project work.
- The correlation analysis verified that the more the academic staff organize their teaching materials, the better they succeed in stimulating the interest of the students for the course ($r = 0.795$, $P < 0.001$) and the better they can analyze and present the concepts of the course in a simple way, with interesting examples ($r = 0.749$, $P < 0.001$).
- The students are found to be moderately satisfied from the suitability of the classrooms and from the teaching equipment.
- The use of the Institute's library services is considered low (average 1.57 times per month per student), while the existence of the Career Office is more important.
- The degree of the awareness of the internet and network services of the Institute is high (85.4 %).
- The suitability and quality of the curriculum is strongly related to the sufficiency and the quality of the studies ($r = 0.649$, $P < 0.001$), the effectiveness of the faculty ($r = 0.609$, $P < 0.001$), but also the better link with the requirements of the labour-market ($r = 0.749$, $P < 0.001$).
- The sufficiency and the quality of the knowledge acquired in turn ($r = 0.749$, $P < 0.001$) as well as educators' relation with students ($r = 0.609$, $P < 0.001$) determine to a large degree the perceived quality of the course.
- A proper work placement for the compulsory industrial training required in all programs of study contributes positively to the higher quality of dissertation thesis ($r = 0.516$, $P < 0.001$).
- Some of important students' suggestions on the upgrade and improvement of support services are the following:
 - The incitement of the students to use the books of the library more as well as the enrichment of the library collection
 - The renovation and upgrade of infrastructure (classrooms, laboratory equipment).
 - The more effective promotion of the role of the Career Office.
 - Incitement of the students to exploit ICT facilities (e.g. web-page)

So, it is very important: offering feedback to the lecturers in order to improve teaching; assigning the capacities of the staff for promotion; helping students to select a course; and providing information for educational research.

Conclusions

Higher education is a sector which has the priority in all the economies and especially in Albania since it brings a series of benefits which it sorely needs. These benefits can be included in 4 categories:

- Private economic benefits
- Private social benefits
- Public economic benefits
- Public social benefits

However, the laws related to the higher education are still in the level of centralization even if we talk about financial autonomy.

The diversification of the funds resources (students' fee) is proving to be the best option for the institutions of higher education, in order to fulfill the demand of academic quality. To achieve the desired result the commitment of 6 main actors of the higher education is essential: government, higher education institutions/provider, including the academic staff,

students groups, and accreditation agencies, agencies for the academic and professional acknowledgment.

Unless the financial autonomy is guaranteed, the higher education will not obtain the utmost of the management of income in relation to the quality or other functions. This path leads necessarily to the increase of the quality of the final product "the validity of the diploma". This study highlights some conclusions expressed in these directions:

Higher education in Albania has undergone distinct changes in the recent years. The attempts made for the massiveness of school gave the opportunity to many students to be part of the university's auditoriums but also led to various problems. The challenge that the universities face today is the increase of the quality.

Universities today must attempt to increase the cooperation with the businesses, by developing studying programs that makes students skillful in concordance with the demands of the job market, also by promoting the undergraduates in this market. Thus, universities will become research centers in which the business enunciates the problems or the situations that it deals with and the solutions can be found through the concrete work done by the students working in location or by studying cases in class

The improvement of the quality of the system will increase the possibility to prepare qualified specialists in the fields required by our economy.

The unification of the formats of the regulations of the studying programs and syllabuses of certain subjects in every program. The continuous variations in the regulations of the studying programs, which reflect the need for adaptation with the social and economic changes of the country and the national and international developments which promote the professional ethics of the graduates, will continue to be an object of controversy in the constituent units of the faculties.

The attempts for the diversification of the university supply require the curriculum reform to be a priority and a strategic aim in the higher education reforms.

The challenge of the higher education is now the improvement of the quality, the diversification of supply and the increase of the system's flexibility in accordance with the demands of the job market.

The mechanics of the university's financing need to be reviewed basing them in distinct and measurable directives for the academic performance of the university.

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