A Conceptual University Balanced Scorecard: Quality Assurance in Higher Education in Kosovo

Flamur Abazaj, *International Business College Mitrovica*

Albana Berisha, *International Business College Mitrovica*

Abstract

Balanced Scorecards (BSC) for higher education is not a tool that is used on a common basis by HEIs. Kosovo due to its small, yet complex higher education system provides a great opportunity for the implementation of a pilot BSC study, that would enable further studies later for more specific purposes. The paper suggests a model that can be implemented based on the Kosovar context for a general performance measurement using the BSC tool. BSCs have proven to be of great benefit when used in a purpose driven manner, and therefore this can be applied to the Kosovo higher education market due to the general lack of national measurements done. The paper also provides a methodology and methods for the proposed model and its data collection and analysis needs. The paper further suggests more themes and focuses that future studies could implement using the BSC.

Introduction

Quality Assurance is a prominent field in higher education management, which has been heavily promoted over the last few decades on a global scale. The concept of using balanced scorecards (BSC) initially started with the intent of providing corporate management with a performance measuring tool, used mainly for strategic planning. Gallopeni and Llapi (2017) stated that Kosovo higher education institutions (HEIs) lack a well-developed and understood system of internal quality assurance at when it comes to measuring student satisfaction. While there certainly are individual differences between institutions, the internal quality assurance systems of HEIs plays an impact on the overall quality of a higher education market, especially affecting the outcomes of student satisfaction and their implementation to further academic programmes and student affairs.

With the technological development that the world has undergone in the 20th and 21st century, the value of information and measurements are well understood. However, the aspect where discussion and uncertainty still have an affect is about what specifically should be measured and how those outcomes should used (Ruben, 1999). While in business traditionally finance indicators have played a key role in determining performance and outcomes, higher education is a different story. For this paper, while taking into consideration the Kosovar context, will focus on three main perspectives of the higher education market, and define the main key performance indicators (KPIs) to model a potential BSC that can be applied and used for a national level performance measurement and assessment.

Proposed Methodology

This section contains a model of the possible methodology to be used for the creation of a BSC for higher education within the Kosovar context. This BSC focuses on a variety of aspects of higher education that will enable the collection of data, and systematic analysis of those based on type, purpose, and impact. The selection criteria for the type of data collected is very significant for the impact of the BSC.

The following table displays the main perspectives that the proposed methodology and BSC would focus on:

Table 1. Perspectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

Perspective	Key Performance Indicators
Student Satisfaction and Success	Overall student satisfaction (Quantitative and Qualitative)
	% of Student Graduating vs Enrollment (Drop-out rate)
	# of students continuing further education
	# of students being employed up to one year post-graduation
Staff Satisfaction and Administration of Learning and Teaching Process	Overall Staff Satisfaction (Quantitative and Qualitative)
	Employee Termination Rate
	Professional Development Opportunities (Admin)
	Professional Development Opportunities (Academic)
	Organizational Satisfaction (Communication and Chain of Command Command)
	Financial Motivation
Quality Assurance (QA) Performance	Review Results (Accreditation)
	Review Results (External QA Evaluation)
	Review Results (Internal)
	Review of Regulations and Policies (Internal and External Stimulation)
	Number of administrative and academic issues facilitated (Complaints and Appeals)

The above displayed table exemplifies that education is performance measurements in higher education is a complex endeavor. Since quality in essence is a somewhat subjective area to measure, but the best proposed methodology for such the creation of a BSC is via mixed methods. Quantitative methods, via empirical analysis would enable the creation of some main indicators, while qualitative data collection and analysis would enable a more detailed review of the empirical results. Traditionally qualitative measures and results tend to be more overlooked when it comes to quality in higher education performance, however, they present key information especially in their relation to student satisfaction, motivation, and stimulation for life-long learning (Ruben, 1999).

One of the reasons that this BSC within its perspective scopes does not branch out too wide, is to avoid feedback burnout. Fieger (2012) argued that categorizing and grouping surveys questions to make them more manageable, but also less intimidating for the participants provides higher validity to the data which in return positively impacts the statistical analysis as well. Due to that

the scope of the BSC has been narrowed down to three perspectives, with each perspective being measured for more four to six different types of KPIs.

Student Satisfaction and Success

The main aspect that usually is regarded when carrying out student feedback evaluations is their overall satisfaction. With the overall trend of the commodification of higher education, students are on a. increasing basis regarded as customers/clients where the education provided is a product. Whether this approach is beneficial or not is a debate, however, to does present the interesting idea that satisfaction ratings could be carried out in a similar fashion. The BSC initially was introduced to the higher education markets as a measure once the commodification of the market was enabled, by the decreasing state support for HEIs due to the dissatisfaction of stakeholder with the financial performance of public enterprises (Lawrence & Sharma, 2002). This brings about the idea of performance measure of students in the idea of a unit cost, as well as the efficiency of spent resources. With this kept in mind, the overall student satisfaction can be measured in the following way:

- Step 1: Quantitative and Qualitative Data Collection – Students are asked to rate their overall satisfaction with their studies and the services provided by the HEI using a Likert scale (for example, 1-7, 1-5, or 1-3). Apart from that, students are given the opportunity to provide verbal-written feedback
- Step 2: Quantitative Analysis – The empirical data collected from students is analyzed and made displayable.
- Step 3: Qualitative Analysis – The result of the quantitative analysis is reviewed and compared to the verbal feedback provided by students.
- Step 4: Qualitative Analysis – Focus Groups and Interviews are organized to provide deeper and more detailed feedback on the results of the previous data collection and analysis, as well as allow to change the scope of the research based on a needs assessment basis.

Three other main KPIs that need to be would be analyzed under the proposed model are the student drop-out rate (students graduating versus students enrolling), number of students continuing further education post-graduation, and the student employment rate post-graduation

(one year). These data would need to be collected by the databases and internal records of the HEIs as now in Kosovo there are no national tools or instruments that regularly keep track of these parameters.

Staff Satisfaction and Administration of Learning and Teaching Processes

For this perspective there are a total of six KPIs that will be reviewed. Following the logic of the above displayed section, KPIs will be grouped together based on likeness for easier to execute data collection and analysis. Based on this the KPIs will be grouped as follows:

Table 2. Grouping of KPIs for the staff perspective

Group 1	Overall Staff Satisfaction (Quantitative and Qualitative)	
Group 2	Employee Termination Rate	Financial Motivation
Group 3	Professional Development Opportunities (Admin and Academic Staff)	
Group 4	Organizational Satisfaction (Communication and Chain of Command)	

Group 1

Overall Staff Satisfaction would be measured in a similar manner to the Student Satisfaction KPI. It would be initiated by collecting rough and generalized quantitative and qualitative, and then once that data is analyzed, focus groups and interviews may be analyzed based on those results and then intended research outcomes.

Group 2

Employee Termination Rate is measured as it will provide insight into the ability of an HEI to adjust their operations to the needs of their staff. Termination may occur for many reasons based on the staff's individual and collective experience; however, a common reason is financial stimulation., which is why the measure on financial motivation has been group together. Both data sets will be collected main focusing on quantitative data for a more objective reasoning, however, along with the number of staff that have terminated their contracts, reasons for termination will also be collected where possible.

Group 3

Professional Development Opportunities are a great stimulation for staff within higher education institutions. Programmes, such as, the Erasmus+ Mobility programme have become widespread in Kosovo HEIs and have enabled a more fluid movement of staff to exchange practices with many European HEIs. Studies have shown that engagement and the quality of work of staff can be increased by providing appropriate professional and academic development opportunities (Brancato, 2003). This KPI would measure the number of such opportunities for academic and admin staff within HEIs in Kosovo, as well as the percentage of beneficiaries.

Group 4

Within the Kosovo context, measurement of the organizational satisfaction is quite relevant. As the Kosovar culture heavily depends on interpersonal communication, factors such as the chain of command and the communication strategy (especially from a top-down perspective) within their workplace have a significant impact on the experience and satisfaction. Participants of the data collection here would quantitatively and qualitatively provide data for the measurement of their experience and rating.

Quality Assurance Performance

While the job of quality assurance (QA) departments with HEI overlaps quite a bit with the data that for the BSC is required above, there still are some unique aspects to QA for the increasing of quality with their respective HEI. Accreditation and external QA evaluations are processes that all HEIs now undergo, and as part of those many recommendations on how to increase the quality of education and services are provided by relevant experts of the fields.

As per the logic implemented in the previous section, some KPIs will be combined for efficiency purposes. Those will be as follows:

Table 3. Grouping of KPIs for the Quality Assurance Perspective

Group 1 - Review of Results	Accreditation	External	Internal

Group 2	Review of Regulations and Policies	Number of issues facilitated

Group 1

The measurement for the Group 1 of the KPI can be quite complex. Since data collection and analysis would heavily rely on qualitative analysis of larger reports, the use of a qualitative analysis software such as NVivo is highly recommended. However, for the purpose of accreditation during the analysis of Self-Evaluation Report (SER) and Expert Assessment Reports (EAR) a heavy focus should be set on analyzing the suggestions and recommendations that have been provided as well as possible conditions, as those provide indicators for potential improvements where weaknesses have been identified. As most evaluation frameworks of accreditation agencies include a specific section on the evaluation of the internal quality assurance systems of HEIs this makes it very relevant for the purpose of developing a BSC based on QA.

The same holds true for external quality assurance evaluations. Many institutions apart from their accreditation-based evaluations that are legally mandatory in Kosovo for all HEIs in defined periods, also do independent external quality assurance evaluations, which also includes the gaining of ISO certification. An example of this would be the ISO 9001 standard for libraries that some HEIs have gained over the last few decades (Mola, 2007).

Essential to the HEI, legally, administratively, and academically is its internal quality assurance system. The internal QA system was and is heavily promoted in Europe through ENQA and its ESGs (European Standards and Guidelines for Quality Assurance in Higher Education) (ENQA, 2015). Those set a basic set of standards needed to fulfil and guide HEI in their creation and implementation of internal QA structures. Some of the most basic functions included in internal QA systems are evaluation/feedback of stakeholders, and the systemic review and updating of policies.

Group 2

This group mostly focuses on the idea of measuring the flexibility of QA systems to adjust themselves on a need basis. As policy and regulation updates can be both stimulated internal and externally, there are many factors that may influence these.

Discussion and recommendations

As the Kosovo Accreditation Agency (KAA) was established in 2009, and before that no mandatory external evaluations had taken place for HEIs, Kosovo HEIs are still somewhat inexperience in the continuity of QA practices internally (Gallopeni & Gjylbehare, 2017). However, as Kosovo at a national level is trying to harmonize its educational practices and policies with the European Standards this will be mandatory. Now the KAA carries out all its evaluations with the use of International Experts, where during the academic year 202-2021 more than ten institutional evaluations and over 230 programme evaluations have taken place (Kosovo Accreditation Agency, 2021).

The implementation of performance measure by using BSC can lead as a step towards the right direction for a more national benchmarking basis. It would enable to the public and especially prospective students to understand the performance of the HEIs in Kosovo, as well as provide ratings to stimulate competition and the exchange of best practices.

An important aspect that has not been discussed above is the flow of data collection. The below graphic displays in what order the data should be collected:
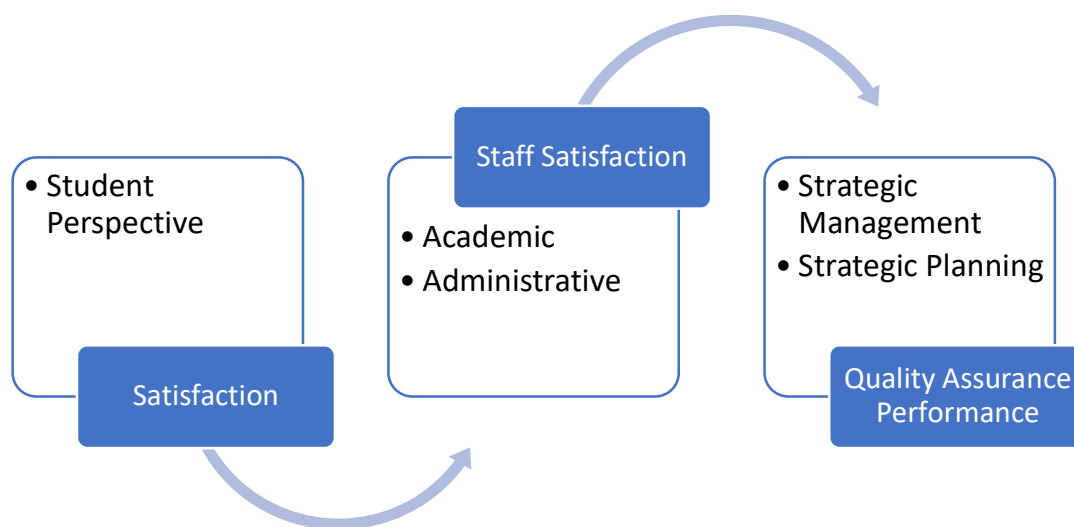

Graphic 1. Flow of data collection

As BSC for higher education quality assurance in higher education were adopted from models of BSCs from business and the corporate world, a client first approach would be most preferred. Student feedback within QA systems in considered instrumental to performance evaluation. If student data is collected first, it would enable the adjust the scope for the measurement of the staff and QA systems (Harvey & Green, 1993). This also fits quite well with the systematic approach

that most QA departments in HEI implement. That would be the so called PDCA cycle (Shewhart, 1939). The PDCA cycle refers to Plan-Do-Check-Act, and as that suggests a multi-step-based planning for the review and updates to institutional regulations and policies. It is also a tool in learning and management used to motivate employees to become more proactive leading to improvement in various processes (Evans & Lindsay, 2008). These factors of implementing the PDCA cycle in higher education settings has shown to stimulate incremental growth (Kędzierska-Bujak, 2021).
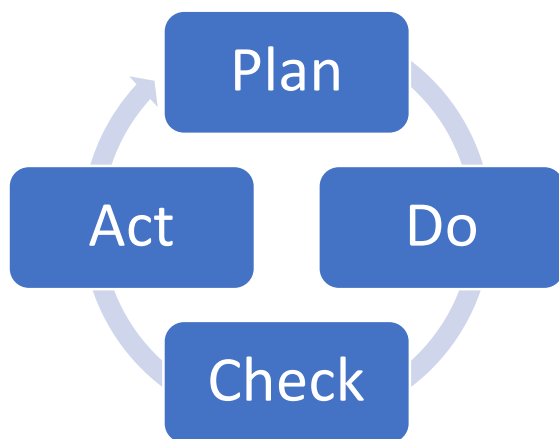
Graphic 2. PDCA Cycle

This brings about the idea of the BSC being more than a plain performance measure. As for all their purposes, HEIs are obliged to draft and implement long-term strategic plans. The BSC provides a perfect chance for data driven strategic planning to take place at Kosovo HEIs. Data collected on the national level, as well as the individual HEI level would enable a more empirically driven decision-making for both the academic and commercial aspects of the ever-commodifying higher education market (Lawrence & Sharma, 2002; Alani & Khan, 2018). Zangoueinezhad and Moshabaki (2011) also suggested that using knowledge-based parameters in a BSC can provide insights that otherwise are diffuclt to measure due to the intangabile nature of the products and services of the higher education markets.

The above mentioned proposal for the methodology for the paper has been drafted taking into consideration of the local context. While the scope of the proposed data collection for the set perspectives is quite general, it has been made keeping in mind the need for a pilot study for the Kosovo HE market. Benchmarking between HEIs in Kosovo in a formal setting is very rare, and also national data is scarce and not collected for performance based measurements.

A BSC driven pilot measurement in Kosovo also provides the opportunity for later measurements in more specific areas. Above mentioned were the libraries and strategic planning purposes, however, the measurements may also focus on other more specific aspects of higher education, such as student involvement in higher education and decision making, feedback cycle measurements for QA systems, student assessment methodology, and many more to follow on. Hence, it is important to understand that BSC are not a direct improvement tool. They enable data driven decision making when done correctly, and are tools to display data collection results.

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