

Class Size, teaching quality and students' level of satisfaction with their academic performance

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Abstract

The main goal of this study is to verify if a greater number of students within a University's departments is an influential factor on the quality of instructors' teaching and evaluating. This goal will be realized through answering two research questions of this study. Through the first question, it will be identified if there is a difference between the level of students' evaluations of their professors' delivery and forms of teaching, and assessments between students within small, medium or large departments; meanwhile, the second question will verify if there is a difference between the academic performance of students from different departments. To identify the scope of this study, the quantitative research method has been used. The research was conducted with the 1006 students who are currently pursuing their BA degree at Hasan Prishtina University, within different sized departments. The results of the study reveal that there are differences between the student evaluations on the quality of instruction and evaluation. Students from smaller and medium groups within the department, declare to be more satisfied with their personal academic achievements and give higher evaluations of their instructors, considering the latter cooperative and supportive throughout the education process than did students of larger groups within the department. Furthermore, students of departments with a greater number of students have shown to have more difficulties on passing their exams compared to other students coming from departments with smaller sized classes.

Keywords: Kosovo public higher education, class size, students evaluations, teaching and evaluation quality, academic performance

1. Introduction

One area of greater focus in the field of psychology and pedagogy is the study of how and why people think and act in different ways, and how they learn and come to absorb new knowledge in specific academic environment and systems¹.

The main goal of this study is to verify if a greater number of students within a University department is an influential factor on the quality of instructors' teaching and evaluating. This shall be accomplished by identifying and answering two following research questions: The first research question will be if there is a difference between the level of students' evaluations of their professors' quality and forms of teaching, and assessments between students within different class size departments. Meanwhile, the second will verify if there is a difference on students' academic performance between students within different departments.

2. Literature Review

Among others, compiling the group of influential factors on the academic performance of students are academic factors, including teaching methods, evaluations offered by instructors² and the environment in which learning happens³. Furthermore, it has been noted that students' grades also interact with the number of students within a class⁴.

The best student academic performance has been noticed to interconnect with the level of instruction accepted from the instructor and the latter's skillset in passing his knowledge onto his students. For an instructor to be considered adept, research of the field of education, stress that, aside from their educational background in specific fields, instructors must also be analyzed based on their abilities in the education field⁵.

Other studies have concluded that poor student performance is attributed to poor teaching⁶. To positively affect student academic performance, instructor must show ability and knowledge in developing pedagogic approaches in relation to their students' needs⁷. They must surpass the traditional pedagogic approach, by providing opportunities for their students to equip themselves with extensive knowledge on their field of study and to acquire skills in utilizing this knowledge in practice. Additionally, since evaluating methods along with teaching methods, are valued to be among the most significant factors on student performance, it is considered that in order to justly evaluate what a student has learned, a correct evaluation method is that which valued a student's combined skills⁸. The fair form of evaluation will set student expectations and provide them with the opportunity to evaluate themselves and perform better.

According to other views, it is also emphasized that students' evaluations are considered to be the most important part in education, for the main goal of this process is measuring student achievement, thus, it is suggested that instructors' forms of evaluation must be compiled in a way that fulfills and motivates students and not the contrary⁹. Constructive and immediate comments from instructors influence the rise of motivation and awareness in students on matters that need improvement in regards to the strengthening of their academic¹⁰.

The environment, in which learning takes place, is also identified as a significant factors in the academic achievements of students. However, the role of the environment refers to the physical atmosphere or class organization and general infrastructure, including here lighting, seating types of space availability and number of students. In contrast, the psychological and social dimension of the environment in which learning occurs, has to do with the participation in lectures and level of participation in discussions and curricular activities. Therefore, being considered as factors of significance and influence in the students' academic study, completed studies have attributed a greater role to psychosocial factors, including the class environment, which is characterized from the type of collaboration among students to the nature of collaboration among students and instructors¹¹ Institutions which have a more compatible environment for students, have proven to affect students positively and motivate their learning. Since students, as mentioned, have unique values, they experience situations in different ways¹².

For many years, due to the influence of many political, financial or socio-cultural factors in Kosovo, only one part of the population has achieved to complete studies of the higher level. However today, the necessity for higher education is truly undeniable. Market needs, youth ambitions, and compatibility with work needs, continuously influence the youth especially, to graduate from studies of all three cycles.

Students' opportunity to choose, between different fields of study and public or private universities are now considered sufficient. However, regardless of the existence of a considerable number of public institutions of higher education locally, the university with the greatest number of students in the Bachelor program continues to be "Hasan Prishtina" University, formerly known as University of Prishtina. Also, regardless of the fact that the rise of the number of young people continuing from secondary education to university studies may be considered a positive element in the Kosovar society, the functioning of the higher education system in Kosovo is evaluated to be faced with great challenges, that are documented in different evaluation reports from field experts.

According to the research conducted on the educational background of instructors in Kosovo¹³, it is said that, though significant steps have been made towards the improvement of education in Kosovo, the competency of instructors remains very low. Furthermore, it can be said that, in the higher education system, University of Prishtina has challenges in combining the learning process with the discipline and knowledge, administration functioning and general community.

Similar shortages have been identified even from the actual institutions of education. Throughout the past few years, the Ministry of Education and Technology in Kosovo has carefully identified the challenges that education in Kosovo has and continues to cope with. Among others, one identified struggle deals with the quality of teaching. Thus, based on new methodologies, it is considered that there remain working unqualified instructors and a low level of achievement in all aspects of education continues to exist¹⁴.

Furthermore, data shows that the academic personnel at University of Prishtina has participated in different trainings on teaching methods even after the reforming process of the education system in Kosovo began. Nevertheless, reluctant to change, this system continues to utilize the old, or traditional, style of teaching¹⁵. Also, a considerable part of the teaching staff in the University of Prishtina are considered to be resistant towards changes

that should be taking place in order to reform the education system just as traditional teaching methods should be replaced with new ones. They prove to be uncooperative with students through the plan/program design or selection of evaluation methods¹⁶. Similar assessments have been specified in other reports, conducted a year after, which the improvement of academic and staff professionalism remains one of the greatest difficulties that University of Prishtina continues to face¹⁷.

Aside from the factors mentioned above, which document the challenges of higher education in Kosovo, the great number of students and the lack of necessary academic staff, is presumed to be another influential factor. Though for a short period of time, the number of students registered in “Hasan Prishtina” University was reported to mark a decrease, according to data from the Statistical Office of Kosovo, this registration rhythm quickly changed. According to this data, the number of students registered for the first time in the University of Prishtina, is reported to have risen significantly in the 2008-2012¹⁸ period.

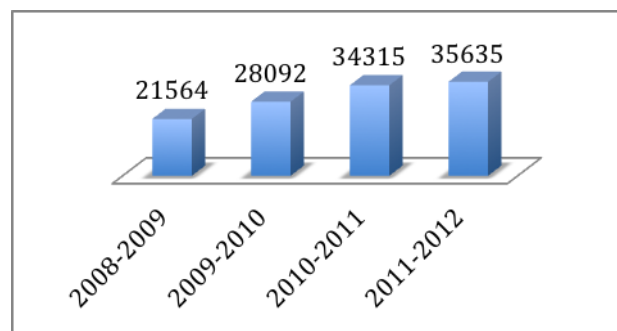


Fig. 1: Student Registration 2008-2012 (ASK, 2013)

Furthermore, though there is no published data regarding the number of first-time registered students in the University in the 2013-2014 period, media reports and data from the “Hasan Prishtina” University administration, report the number of first-time registered students in 2013-2014 is significantly higher compared to all prior academic years. This number of registrations, besides surpassing the university’s capacity, has simultaneously incited local debate regarding the negligence of student acceptance criteria.

According to the Statistical Office in Kosovo, the number of instructors reported for the 2010/2011 academic year in the University of Prishtina is 1023. Based on the same data, similar to the information given on the number of students, another discrepancy in number of teachers from different departments is prevalent. However, according to these statistics, a greater number of instructors within larger numbers of students is not reported.

III. Methodology

For the study, the quantitative research method has been used. The measuring instrument has been designed in the form of a questionnaire conducted with 1006 students who are currently pursuing their Bachelor degree at Hasan Prishtina University. Students were selected from the 12 departments of the University. The research sample was determined for 1006 students, or 10% of students of the departments selected. The data collected from the questionnaire were processed through the statistical package SPSS. Interaction between the tested variables is presented through interactive analysis (cross-tabulation analysis), while the results for the standard deviation (SD) of the tested variables are tested and released through Pearson’s chi-squared test (χ^2).

Participant students in the study were from department of average numbers of students, ishin from the faculty of Philosophy (N= 109, or 10.8%), the faculty of Education, (N=142 or 14.1%), and the faculty of Mechanical Engineering (N= 109, 10.8%). Among faculties with larger number of students were, the faculty of Law, with the following participation (N= 300, students or 29.8%), and the faculty of Economy (N= 229, or 22.8%). Meanwhile, from faculties with smaller numbers of students, participant student were from the faculty of Construction and Architecture, (N=48, or 4.8 %), the faculty of Medicine (N= 49, 4.9 %) and the faculty of Sport Sciences (N=20 , apo 2.0%). Student participation in the research was voluntary, and completion of the questionnaire was anonymous. Data collections were gathered in various forms, by visiting the respective faculties, by contacting students directly after their lectures, exams, stay in the library, at their student center, cafeteria or student gatherings.

IV. Results

According to the results of this study, students have different views in the teaching quality in the university. However, from the complete number of students participating in the study, the largest numbers of students from departments with large classes have admitted to not favor their instructors greatly. In this case, of all participant students, (51.10%) students from the faculty of law, have declared they do not agree and (31.10 %) of students from the same faculty have declared they strongly disagree with the idea that their professors clarify students responsibilities towards a successful completion of the course. Similar results have been noticed from students of another faculty as well, that also holds a greater number of students, the faculty of Economy (fig. 2).

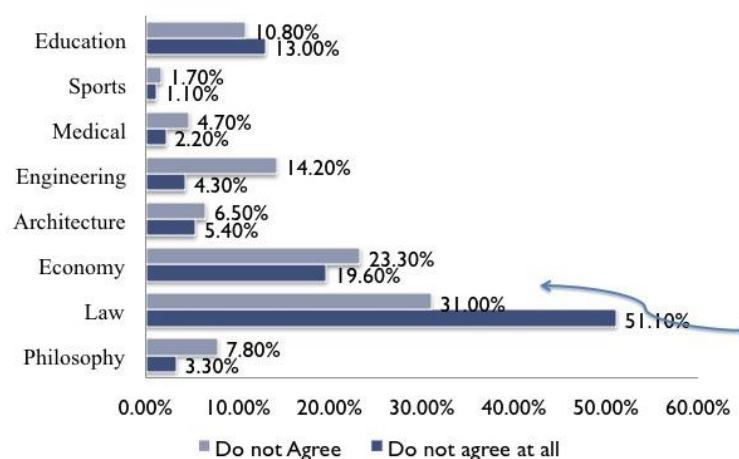


Figure 2. Teaching quality based on student evaluations
Large, Average & Small Sized Departments

According to the results of this study, the views of students from departments with greater student bodies are also similar with the way they value correctness in their professor in regards to evaluations and the announcement of results within the prearranged deadline.

From all participating students in the study, the greatest number of students (42.40%), have declared that they strongly disagree that their professors grade their assignments' within the scheduled timeline. This group of students comes from the faculty of law, that is one of the faculties with the largest student bodies (fig. 3).

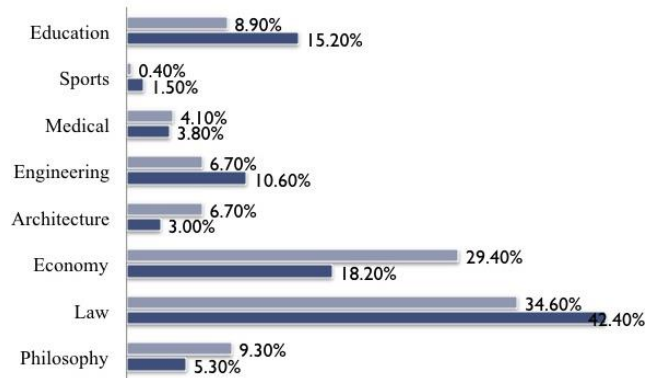


Figure 3. Instructors grade our assignments' within the scheduled timeline

Aiming to identify the views of participating students in regards to their instructors' correctness, the participants were also asked if they believed their instructors evaluated their assignments and exams fairly. Similar to the results mentioned before, in this case too, it becomes clear that the greater number of students, who do not believe in the fair evaluation of their work, come from the faculty of Law and Economy (fig. 3).

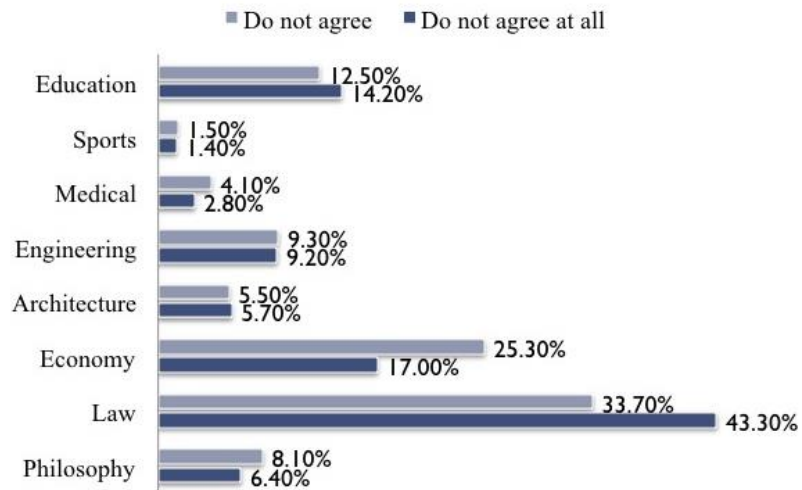


Figure 3. Instructors always grade our assignments fairly

Study results also reveal differences in relation to the student academic performance based on the faculty in which they study. From the general number of participating students in the study, the number of students who most commonly repeated the same exam (more than four times) due to continuous failure, were the ones from larger student bodies, again the faculty

of economy (N=32, or 10.7 %). Nevertheless, common repetitions of the same exam were also noticed in other faculties, in which, the number of students is not as large (table 1).

Table. 1. Number of repetitions of the same test by the students, according to department

	1	2	3	4+
	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)	N (%)
Philosophy	38 (34.9)	34(31.2)	24(22.0)	13(11.9)
Education	42(29.6)	53(37.3)	31(21.8)	16(11.3)
Engineering	14(12.8)	41(37.6)	36(33.0)	18(16.5)
Medical	6(10.2)	13(26.5)	21(42.9)	9(18.4)
Architecture	16(12.8)	41(37.6)	36(33.0)	18(16.5)
Sport Sciences	0(.0)	8(40.0)	9(45.0)	3(15.0)
Economy	78(26.3)	112(37.3)	77(25.7)	32(10.7)
Law	79(26.3)	34(31.2)	24(22.0)	13(11.9)

V. Conclusion

The results of the study reveal that there are clear differences between the student evaluations on the quality of instruction and evaluation. As the study proves: students from larger departments are less satisfied with their professors teaching methods and assessments; and students from larger departments present poorer academic performance compared to other group size students. It is undeniable that Kosovo higher education professors should take into consideration building further the cooperation with their students, and gaining trust regarding the fairness of their evaluation methods. The results of this study bring attention to the matter that the course leader should inform students in advance on the full course requirements and the evaluation methods, which will be used to measure students' performances. Such an approach would provide students with greater and better-planned preparation time while simultaneously allowing a more trustworthy relationship between student and instructor to develop. Additionally, if academic standards are rigorous, curriculum and assessments are aligned to those standards, and teachers possess the skills to teach at the level the standards demand, student performance will improve. Therefore, policy makers and university leaders should take into serious consideration the professional and academic backgrounds of their working instructors and should better organize the student numbers according to class sizes. As the study reveals in many forms, instructors' abilities to deliver, teach and evaluate fairly along with class size, are all influential factors in the higher education system in Kosovo. As such, they should be given meticulous care and attention if aiming to truly reform a traditional teaching system into a modern and more compatible one.

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