

## **Massivization of Higher Education: Evidence from Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia**

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There is a significant expansion of universities in the Western Balkans and an increasing number of students enrolled. In a region where economic growth is sluggish and youth unemployment is high, education is one of the key proxies to determine future development. This rapid expansion of universities has not been accompanied by the provision of resources to maintain ambitious standards, quality, and relevance. This study examines the factors leading to a deterioration of education quality, tackling teaching competencies, infrastructure, and professors' ethics. Using original data, this study investigates the HE quality from the perspective of two main stakeholders – professors and students – in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. The study points out to outdated teaching methods, lack of enrolment quotas and skill mismatch with the labour market. It all boils down to low institutional monitoring criteria and lack of admission quotas, creating space for unethical behaviour and massivization of HE.

*Keywords:* teaching quality, massivisation, skill mismatch, unethical behavior

### **Introduction**

Education has been a vital part of the revolution of Europe that has seen various countries on the continent and dominate the international scene (Subang, & Selangor, 2018). However, education has not had a remarkable impact in some European countries, especially Western Balkans, despite a massive engagement of the youth in higher education and the opening of additional universities. Even though the Western Balkans have largely relied on foreign donations and interventions from organizations such as the European Union to bolster the quality of higher education in universities and colleges, the quality of higher education administered in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia has eroded (Parameswaran & Glowacka, 2015). The success and failures of the quality of higher education have been largely attributed to the massivization of the education sector and teaching methods employed in tertiary institutions.

There is a considerable expansion of several universities in the Western Balkans (WB) and an increasing number of student enrolments. The rapid expansion of universities has not been accompanied by the provision of resources to maintain high education standards, quality, and relevance. Higher education (HE) institutions have relied much on a sufficient quantity of outputs without much interest in the adequacy

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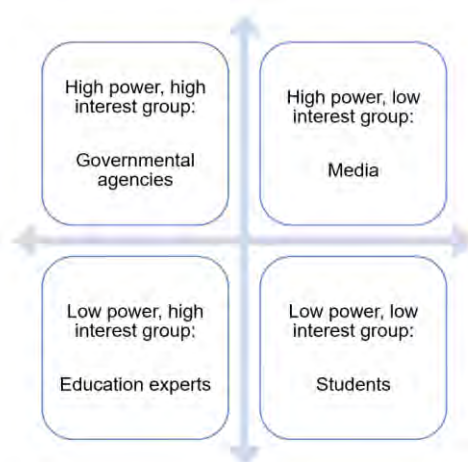
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of quality, even less so on research, which plunged the WB's labour market with large numbers of output that have caused disequilibrium in the labour market. Education policies, in the respective countries of the study, are usually disseminated via a top-bottom progression, starting from the Ministries of Education, Accreditation Agencies and other governmental agencies, often ignoring relevant stakeholders and particularly those engaged hands-on in the process, such as professors and students (Figure 1). This paper aims to get a closer look at higher education (HE) massivization in the context of the WB landscape by engaging in the dialogue of two main stakeholders of the HE sector – academic staff and students.

We define and argue the presence of mass education based on two main arguments. In the WB, a) almost every high school graduate has access to universities, regardless of their performance, as some of the private colleges do not apply entrance exams or, if applied, are usually formal, and b) the skill mismatch between demand and supply in the labour market leaves many graduated students from tertiary education redundant and unemployed. The argument for mass education in the HE is supported by stylized facts from our three sample countries.

Figure 1. Relevant Stakeholders in HE



Source: Authors (2022).

Figure 1 illustrates the relevant stakeholders involved in Higher Education (HE) in the Western Balkans. The diagram categorizes the stakeholders into three main groups:

1. **Governmental Bodies and Agencies:**
  - Ministries of Education
  - Accreditation Agencies
  - Other governmental agencies
2. **Educational Institutions:**
  - Universities
  - Colleges
  - Vocational Schools
3. **Non-Governmental and External Bodies:**

- International Organizations (e.g., European Union)
- Employers
- Students and Academic Staff

These stakeholders play crucial roles in shaping the HE landscapes in the Western Balkans by influencing policies, providing resources, and engaging in the educational process. This categorization helps to understand the complex network of entities that impact the quality and structure of higher education in the region, highlighting the importance of collaboration among these stakeholders to address the challenges of mass education and skill mismatches in the labour market.

During the early 2010's the share of enrolled students in tertiary education in our sample countries from WB was around 40 percent. During the last decade, in Albania and Kosovo, the share of enrolled students has reached around 70 and 73 percent, respectively, whereas in North Macedonia the numbers are more alarming, going up to 96 percent (Ministry of Education, Science and Technology, 2022; Agency of Statistics of Kosovo, 2022; INSTAT, 2022; State Statistical Office, 2022). Meanwhile, in a more developed regional country, such as Slovenia, this trend is in reverse (Subang & Selangor, 2022). The rapid transition process may have distorted the link between education and quality and between education and employment.

According to OECD (2018) rankings, the quality of education in the WB is “disappointingly low”, despite massive education going on. One of the related reasons concerning the second argument is the relatively high unemployment rate prevailing in the WB. The unemployment rate in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia is 12 percent, 25 percent, and 16 percent, respectively. The unemployment rate among youth (ages 15-24) is even higher: 20.9 percent, 50 percent, and 35 percent, respectively. A high level of youth unemployment rate may have surged the WB governments to liberalise the education sector by licensing many additional public and private universities, to maintain the social peace, if not to also help stop emigration. Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, respectively have 40, 32 and 19 actively operating universities. These are three small European countries with a population ranging from 1.8 to 2.9 million. For comparison, the HE system in small, developed countries of Europe like Luxemburg and Malta consists of only 5 universities each, whereas Switzerland with three times as much population as the WB sample countries, has only 12 active universities. If we additionally consider migration as one of the other structural issues these countries constantly face, the figures implying mass education become of higher concern. For example, only from 2015-2019 Kosovo lost almost 10 percent of its population as a consequence of migration. Therefore, what Karanovic and Karanovic (2015) refer to mass education in the WB as ‘a bubble in the making’, we say that by now these trends may be well out of proportion. Even though the skills mismatch issue has regained some attention of institutions and media, the massivization of HE is not yet part of the public discourse.

Additionally, the cost of investing in a university diploma in WB outweighs the economic benefits. In Kosovo, those with high school degrees (not university degrees) have the highest employment share in the private sector. In Albania, the share of jobseekers with a university education is around 7 percent of total job seekers, however, this share has been increasing by 1 percentage point each year in the last

four years. The unemployment among youth is not only because of the low economic absorption capacity to accommodate newcomers in the labour market, but also because of the skills mismatch in the labour market (Bartlett & Vavrus, 2014; WIIW, 2020). The presence of skills mismatch implies that universities in the WB either provide low-quality education, or are out of touch with the market and industry needs. Thus, delivering outdated curricula, or a massive number of enrolled students incentivised by the profit motive leaves universities uninterested in addressing structural issues in the education system – or all three of them. The latter is even truer given the lack of university enrolment quotas set by the Government, even in cases when, for example, more economists and law graduates are already redundant. The institutions should admit students who can be successful in the institution's academic program, including specifically recruited populations. The number of students should derive from the market needs, the physical infrastructure of HE institutions, and the number of academic personnel available.

In presence of mass education, neither the economy benefits from a “qualified” and educated workforce nor the university graduates capitalize on their education degrees, creating a deadweight loss effect. If anything, they both are on the losing side. One might argue that these countries need to shift the attention towards vocational schools and universities, as a way to address the matter of skills mismatch. However, since the highest unemployment rate pertains to graduates from vocational schools, begs the question if vocational schools in the WB are a victim of mass education and low education quality, if not lower than academic schools and universities.

### **Literature Review**

Hiebert (2013) asserts that the Western Balkans countries have witnessed a tremendous increase in population in the last four decades. The continuous increase in population has created the need and the avenue to expand the high education sector to accommodate the growing number of students transitioning from high school to universities and colleges (Owlia & Aspinwall, 2016). The high proliferation of students has made it possible for most students who pass their high school exams to enrol in their preferred courses to become successful individuals in society (Jacoby & Howard, 2015). USAID, UNDP, SDG, and OECD ranked Kosovo bottom third among 72 countries that participated in the PISA test (Saqipi, 2019). The reason behind the deficient performance is linked to outdated practices, the traditional education system, and limited financial and professional capacities. At the same time, it faces delays in the implementation of reforms, preparation of curriculum and their implementation, and a lack of textbooks suitable for teaching and learning (Sokoli, Sirca, & Koren, 2021). Hence, regardless of their success in high school and entrance exams, students are enrolled in university programs. Enrolment of students with a considerable gap in learning from high schools into universities and colleges has affected the quality of education offered in HE institutions.

The standing paradox of massivisation is that it has led to the degradation of higher education quality through the proliferation of tertiary institutions. In most

Western Balkans countries, the number of public institutions has remained fairly constant in the last two decades of the 20th century and the first decade of the 21st century (Galloway, 2015). On the other hand, the population of students has increased exponentially. Hence, public universities have not been able to offer adequate vacancies. Consequently, private investors have managed resources to leverage the ballooning student population (Jacoby & Howard, 2015) by opening an exponential number of higher education institutions.

Through the ministries of education, the governments have played a key role in the “mushrooming” of private universities through authentication and registration of private universities (Lagrosen, Seyyed-Hashemi, & Leitner, 2014)]. Despite the tremendous strides made by Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia in the increased access to education, the growth has posed some serious challenges to the quality of higher education (Owlia & Aspinwall, 2016), as in the following.

Notably, private institutions in Western Balkans have actively engaged in the monetization of education. In most countries, private universities, colleges, and vocational training institutes are more numerous than public universities (Jucker & Mathar, 2014). The doctrine of education discourages the commercialization of education; private universities have actively engaged in turning the higher education sector into profit-making schemes at the expense of education (Ferguson, Illsko, & Roofe, 2018). Most private institutions have resorted to offering vacancies to students from affluent backgrounds at the expense of students from poor backgrounds (Hill, 2015). Most private universities have widely dished out vacancies to students based on how much they can afford it economically instead of students’ qualifications. Consequently, private facilities have been forced to offer education to low-ranking students in terms of academics.

Additionally, the monetization of education has led to a decrease in diversity in higher education. Diversity is a fundamental tool in assessing and implementing quality control measures in the education sector (Kapfudzaruwa et al., 2018). On the contrary, when private institutions enrol students based on social class, they leave a diverse population of students from other social classes that are academically endowed or have other talents integral in realizing the high quality of education (Krampf & Heinlein, 2014). The practice of engaging only with students from a certain background denies the students the ability to learn and appreciate other students’ cultures, which is critical in fostering critical thinking skills inside and outside universities.

Moreover, the massivization of the education sector has lowered the quality of education by creating a shortage of qualified faculty members. For quite a long time, public institutions of higher education have enjoyed a wide range of professors and lecturers (Kapfudzaruwa et al., 2018). However, the proliferation of private institutions has led to the scramble for faculty members, which has created an artificial shortage of human resources (Krampf & Heinlein, 2014). The lack of a proper framework to increase the training and employment of professors has lowered the quality of higher education. Even though many of the current professors themselves are educated in developed Europe or the U.S., the current system built on old values makes the pass-through of the western educational values difficult. Most of the activities of universities require the close supervision of lecturers and other members of staff (Ivy, 2001) in

the initial stages of employment. However, the shortage of qualified lecturers lowers the ability of learners to research and innovate.

Nonetheless, massivization has scaled down the quality of higher education by lacking valid institutional data. The general understanding would be that the increase in student enrolment has improved institutional data storage (United Nations, 2018). However, most institutions have failed to integrate technology to store and retrieved the data of students, examinations, and faculty members. The government and other educational stakeholders have been unable to conduct extensive research on the quality of education in Western Balkans countries (Thoresen, Doyle, & Klein, 2015).

Equally important, massivization has led to an increase in corruption cases, which has lowered the quality of education. Corruption cases have been rampant in higher education, especially after the massivization of the entire education sector (United Nations, 2018). Many corruption cases have occurred during examinations where unscrupulous lecturers have conspired with students to reduce the validity of examinations. There are evident cases, where lecturers have solicited bribes from students to award them good grades (Thoresen, Doyle, & Klein, 2015). Also, there are several public accusations and lawsuits against male professors allegedly conditioning female students for sexual favours to pass exams, as a by-product of massivization and lack of/or lowered internal controls. In addition, the employment of members of staff has been marred with cases of corruption where administrators hire their relatives, friends, or people who pay and meet certain obligations before they are given the jobs (Thoresen, Doyle, & Klein, 2015). It is imperative to note that the government and registration authorities have engaged in dubious dealings where they offer accreditations and charters to institutions that do not meet certain criteria, especially private institutions (Hiebert, 2013).

Notably, universities and colleges have witnessed massive intakes of students, forcing the education institutions to start other campuses (Mazzarol, 1998). The increase in student enrolment in higher education institutions has led to the establishment of satellite campuses (Hughes, 2018), which are not necessarily located far away from original campuses, meaning they were not opened to facilitate education but to increase the clientele. In Kosovo, public universities have seen a drastic rise in the number of students who wish to study which has prompted various institutions to institute mechanisms of moving some students to satellite campuses (Sokoli, Koren, & Gutierrez, 2018). However, the establishment of additional branches of higher education organizations has downgraded the quality of education because they were not opened to facilitate education for students but rather to increase the clientele, i.e., students enrolled.

Most of the satellite campuses in the Western Balkans cannot offer quality education to students. The universities lack the financial resources to build large structures that can accommodate all the students (Ofei-Manu, 2014). Also, the “satellite” campuses lack competent professors since some private institutions are driven by their passion for generating money but do not offer quality education that meets the needs of learners and the requirement of learners (Veloutsou, Lewis, & Paton, 2004). Additionally, massivization has led to the employment of inexperienced and inept lecturers since the satellite campuses are not closely monitored by the various universities that fall under them (Hemsley-Brown & Oplatka, 2006).

Equally important, massivization has largely contributed to lowering the quality of education through the introduction of irrelevant courses. Notably, the world is evolving at a first-rate in terms of innovation and technology (Srikatanyoo & Gnoth, 2002). It is the responsibility of universities and colleges to introduce courses that align with the market's demand and increase employment probability. However, the higher education system in the Western Balkans still holds to old syllabuses and irrelevant courses that do not serve the labor market needs nor current technology and innovation trends (McMahon, 1992). The courses have declared some graduates redundant since they lack the qualification of meeting the various employment obligations set by companies (Cubillo, Sánchez, & Cerviño, 2006). The desire to increase profits and reduce expenditures in higher education institutions prompts various institutions to introduce courses that do not meet the criteria set by the various departments of education.

One of the most effective teaching methods that positively impact the quality of higher education is lectures. Particularly, lectures are vital in instructing many students, especially in non-technical courses that do not require close supervision (Shahsavari & Sudzina, 2017). Common units such as communication skills and entrepreneurship can be effectively taught using lectures. Additionally, lectures are cost-effective as one lecturer can attend to many students (Tam, 2002). Also, the use of lectures in learning gives students the flexibility and freedom of closely following discussions put forth by teachers. Hence, training lectures in teaching methods is a highly effective tool for bolstering the quality of higher education (Sokoli & Hajrizi, 2020).

Digital learning is another teaching method by organizations, especially concerning the hands-on courses, to ensure that they foster a high quality of education administered to students. In the advent of digital transformation, most public and private institutions have embraced technology to run their activities (Sokoli & Koren, 2017). Digital learning allows tutors to teach students remotely with the use of computing devices and the internet. A student should not necessarily be in the school compound for them to study. A student needs a laptop, smartphone, and strong internet service for them to be in a position to connect to online classes.

Many universities have embarked in profit-making schemes that have been largely dependent on tuition fees paid by students. The education levels have deteriorated to a point where grades and certificates are issued even to students not attending classes at all. In Albania, there have been numerous cases reported by the media of private universities soliciting money from politicians to award them with degrees to seek elective posts. The monetization of higher education has drastically contributed to the loss of confidence in higher education by the public, which has forced some employers in North Macedonia to hire people based on experience as opposed to qualifications (Podolsky et al., 2019). On the contrary, students who acquire certificates from higher education institutions lack critical thinking skills that are integral in helping a person solve workplace problems.

## **Data**

This study intends to investigate several aspects of HE in the Western Balkans, such as teaching quality, massivization, and other factors that may distort the relationship between professors, students, and the labour market. Ideally, these aspects would be treated using institutional data, nevertheless, several relevant variables are not reported and there are inconsistencies between reported data in Western Balkans countries. Therefore, we have directly contracted information from those involved hands-on in this process, i.e., professors and students. The data used in this study are from a primary source, retained via two questionnaires designed for professors and students. The questionnaires were distributed in eight different universities, public and private in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia, from October 2021 - February 2022. The questionnaires were intended for public and private universities in three countries, covering around 60 percent of all HE institutions in three sample countries. The questionnaires were sent to the Quality Assurance offices and rectorate, which were then distributed to all mailing lists of Bachelor students and professors, as per our instruction. The distribution of questionnaires was realised at the discretion of universities. The questionnaires were distributed in an online format, i.e. Google forms, containing 14 questions each. The same questionnaires were distributed to professors and students, changing the questions' perspectives. For example, if professors were asked 'what teaching method do you use,' students were asked the same question as in 'what teaching method do your professors use.'

The response rate was more satisfactory from the students' side. There were 764 students and 197 professors who answered the full list of survey questions (Tables 2-3).

Rather than basing the questions on the standardised HESQUAL question styles and institutional-based questionnaire format, the conducted surveys go one step further by engaging in this conversation with two main stakeholders in the education system – professors and students. By taking their views on the quality of the HE and massivization, we took a closer look at the more intimate factors impacting this relationship, in terms of the quality of teaching, personal relations, and other factors that may distort this relationship and incentives for the labour market. The questionnaires seek to contract information on perceptions of four aspects of the HE in the Western Balkans: a) teaching quality, b) massivization of HE, c) employment, and an aspect not frequently ignored or avoided in academic studies, d) professors' ethics. Each variable is described in Table 1.



Table 1. Variable Description and Descriptive Statistics

Variable name	Information category	Students Freq. %	Professors' Freq. %
<b>Dependent: qualityhe</b>	<b>2. Which of the following factors most influences the quality of university education?</b>		
	a) Number of enrolled students and study tariffs = 1	13.59	9.64
	b) Quality of professors' publications in scientific journals = 2	22.61	19.8
	c) Number of employed graduates = 3	40.92	55.84
	d) University rigour in student evaluation, number of graduates = 4	22.88	14.72
H E  Q u a l i t y	<b>1. Are you a student in?</b>		
	1.studentpubal a) Albania - Public University 1	23.66	13.2
	2.studentprivat b) Albania - Private University 2	1.44	58.88
	3.studentpubks c) Kosovo - Public University 1	9.21	0.51
	4.studentprivks d) Kosovo - Private University 2	54.9	9.14
	5.studentpubmk e) Northern Macedonia - Public University 1	1.57	17.26
	6.studentprivmk f) Northern Macedonia - Private University 2	9.15	1.02
	<b>3. Are your professors competent for the subjects they teach?</b>		
	1.competent a) Are qualified, both theoretically and practically for the subjects they teach = 1	52.16	45.69
	2.competent b) Lectures are up to date with the latest developments in the field of teaching = 2	20.00	25.89
	3.competent c) Have the expertise but lack communication skills (knowledge transfer skills) = 3	16.47	9.64
	4.competent d) Often lack subject expertise and communication skills (knowledge transfer) = 4	11.37	18.78
	<b>4. Are university laboratories, digitized etc. conditions for teaching/learning purposes?</b>		
	1.conditions a) Yes, administration, labos, workspaces, teaching system are modern and digitized = 1	56.97	68.53
	2.conditions b) No, we continue to learn in the same environment and labs. as a decade ago = 2	11.84	5.08
	3.conditions c) Partly invested in modernization and digitalization = 3	31.18	26.4
	<b>5. Do you think that HE education also depends on students' motivation/commitment?</b>		
	1.studmotiv a) No, because the quality of education depends on the quality of professors' lectures = 1	7.5	26.9
	2.studmotiv b) Yes, student motivation is most important, regardless of teaching quality = 2	63.16	58.88
	3.studmotiv c) The quality of education also depends on the quality of the professors = 3	26.71	-
	4.studmotiv d) The quality of education depends on the quality of education in secondary schools = 4	2.63	14.21
E m p l o y m e n t	<b>6. Which teaching method your professors apply?</b>		
	1.lectmethod a) Classic lecture (ex cathedra) = 1	17.37	na
	2.lectmethod b) Interactive lectures where student participation is stimulated = 2	38.03	na
	3.lectmethod c) Application of digital platforms during the lecture = 3	20.92	na
	4.lectmethod d) Practical exercises with active participation of students = 4	19.08	na
	<b>7. The knowledge gained at university will help you (or have helped you) to find a job?</b>		
	1.emplskills a) Yes, it has helped me (will help me) = 1	31.63	59.39
	2.emplskills b) No, the labour market depends more on e.g. nepotism, political support, bribery = 2	38.43	9.64
	3.emplskills c) It has (will help me) but additional training outside the university is also needed = 3	26.54	30.96
	4.emplskills d) No (will not help me), because firms and institutions require other skills = 4	3.4	-
	<b>Would you rather prefer?</b>		
	1.professchool a) Vocational education (university level) but get a <i>professional degree</i> = 1	62.11	57.36
	2.professchool b) Academic studies (university level) and receive a Bachelor degree (ac. degree) = 2	37.89	42.64

Table 1. Contd.'

Variable name	Information category	Students Freq. %	Professors' Freq. %
<b>8. Have you ever been sexually harassed by a professor?</b>			
P 1.sexassual	a) Yes, it happened to me personally = 1	2.1	9.64
r 2.sexassual	b) No, it did not happen to me = 2	76.18	79.7
o 3.sexassual	c) I have heard cases against other students = 3	19.34	10.66
f 4.sexassual	d) I am a witness of such cases against other students = 4	2.37	-
<b>9. Did a professor ever asked for a bribe to pass an exam or enroll at a university ?</b>			
s e 1.bribe	a) Yes, it happened to me personally = 1	3.03	6.09
o h 2.bribe	b) No, it did not happen to me personally = 2	75.92	85.28
r i 3.bribe	c) I have heard cases from other students = 3	17.76	8.63
s c 4.bribe	d) I am a witness of such cases against other students = 4	3.29	-
<b>Do you think that the number of students in universities affects the quality of teaching?</b>			
1.nrstudents	a) Yes, it is excessive and based on infrastructure, academic staff and market needs = 1	47.24	30.46
2.nrstudents	b) It is adequate, we do not have any problem with this number of admitted students = 2	36.71	53.3
3.nrstudents	c) No, there is no impact = 3	16.05	16.24
<b>10. Do you think there are enough universities in your country ?</b>			
H 1.enoughcollg	a) There are many universities / colleges (more than enough) = 1	53.03	76.65
E 2.enoughcollg	b) No, because the classrooms are overcrowded = 2	15.39	7.11
M 3.enoughcollg	c) No, because youth unemployment is very high = 3	31.58	16.24
<b>11. If you were given the opportunity, would you prefer to study abroad?</b>			
s i 1.studabroad	e) Yes = 1	92.24	na
v i 2.studabroad	f) No = 2	7.76	na
<b>12. If the answer to the previous question is yes, then is it because:</b>			
a 1.aboadbes	a) The quality of education in our country is lower than in other countries = 1	26.84	na
t 2.aboadbes	b) Foreign diplomas increase employment opportunities in our country = 2	26.32	na
i 3.aboadbes	c) Just for experience = 3	16.71	na
n 4.aboadbes	d) For easier employment abroad = 4	30.13	na

Source: Authors (2022).

## Methodology

All questionnaire data are categorical, including the dependent variables, with more than two possible discrete outcomes (table 1). The Linear Probability Model has the disadvantage of rendering fitted probabilities less than zero or greater than one and the partial effect of any explanatory variable (appearing in level form) is constant. This limitation can be overcome by using binary choice models, such as Logit or Probit models (Wooldridge, 2013). Therefore, given that the dependent variable is a categorical variable, this study employs the logit model. Furthermore, the dependent variable has more than two outcomes of no particular order, which requires using an ordered logit model.

Because all of your independent variables are categorical, it is necessary to calculate marginal effect for each outcome using the values of independent variables for each observation, and then averages these individual level marginal effects across the sample, instead of calculating margins at means, which intuitively does not help with the interpretation.

In ordered logit the proportion assumption may be violated, hence we estimate the model using multinomial logistic regression (mlogit). One disadvantage of the multinomial logit is that it may not perform very well if the distribution of possible

outcomes is not balanced, i.e., too few frequencies for an outcome. However, the mlogit model uses only variables that describe the characteristics of the individuals and not of the alternatives, which limits the usefulness of the model for counterfactual predictions.

The mlogit model works best when the alternatives are dissimilar and not just substitutes for one another, i.e., do not overlap, which is our case (Table 1). Mcfadden (1973) states that a mlogit should be used only in cases where the outcome categories are “plausibly assumed to be distinct and weighted independently in the eyes of the decision maker”. In the students’ estimated model (equation 1), the Hausman test was carried out to verify the difference of coefficients on the models.

$$\log(\text{qualityhe})^S = \alpha_0 + \alpha_1 \text{studpubprivalksmk} + \alpha_2 \text{competent} + \alpha_3 \text{lectmethod} + \alpha_4 \text{studmotiv} + \alpha_5 \text{conditions} + \alpha_6 \text{studyabroad} + \alpha_7 \text{abroadbcs} + \alpha_8 \text{emplskills} + \alpha_9 \text{professchool} + \alpha_{10} \text{nrstudents} + \alpha_{11} \text{enoughcolleg} + \alpha_{13} \text{sexassault} + \alpha_{14} \text{bribe} + \varepsilon_i \quad (1)$$

Comparing the coefficients of the unrestricted model (where conditions was excluded); the results indicate that the null hypothesis that ‘the odds are independent of other alternatives’ cannot be rejected therefore there is no evidence of a violation of the IIA assumption, i.e., adding or deleting alternative outcome categories does not affect the odds among remaining outcomes (Table 2). Also, for each question, respondents can choose only one option and the response options on the questionnaires are no close substitutes, which helps maintain the IIA assumptions. The likelihood ratio chi-square of 112.93 with a p-value of 0.011 indicates that the model as a whole is statistically significant, as compared to the null model with no predictors. The pseudo  $R^2$  statistic indicates that the model fit has increased at least 5.6%.

In the professors’ estimated model (equation 2), the Hausman indicates that there is no evidence of a violation of the IIA assumption (Table 2). The likelihood ratio chi-square of 117.58 with a p-value of 0.002 indicates that the model as a whole is statistically significant, as compared to the null model with no predictors. The pseudo  $R^2$  statistic indicate that the model fit is increased at least 2.6%.

$$\log(\text{qualityhe})^P = \beta_0 + \beta_1 \text{professorpubprivalksmk} + \beta_2 \text{competent} + \beta_3 \text{studmotiv} + \beta_4 \text{emplskills} + \beta_5 \text{professchool} + \beta_6 \text{sexassault} + \beta_7 \text{bribe} + \beta_8 \text{nrstudents} + \beta_9 \text{enoughcolleg} + \varepsilon_i \quad (2)$$

In professors’ questionnaire, certain variables that do not apply, like reasons for studying abroad, are not in the variable list. Additionally, it was noted that students’ responses pertaining to the lecture method were more honest compared to those of professors, because choice 1 (ex-cathedra lecturing method) was reported only 2 times in professors’ dataset. Based on practitioners’ knowledge, we are aware that this method still prevails, especially in public universities<sup>1</sup>. As this variable could render biased results, it was excluded from the model.

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<sup>1</sup>Authors have more than 10 years of teaching experience in HE.

## Results

In the following the results from two estimated models for students and professors using multinomial logit will be presented. The mlogit predicts the impact of different factors (teaching methodology, infrastructure, ethics and employability) have on HE quality, by estimating parameters describing marginal utilities. The results are interpreted as follows: if the explanatory variable is increased by one unit, what is the probability of quality in HE changing, compared to the baseline group (conditional on the baseline group). The purpose of the analysis is to investigate how well a multiple choice response can be predicted, conditional on the base category (baseline group = 0).

**Table 2.** Estimated Results from Students' Perspective

base = 4 (rigour)	outcome=1 qualityhe		outcome=2 qualityhe		outcome=3 qualityhe		outcome=4 qualityhe		Diagnostics
	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se	
1.studentpubal									LR chi2(105) 112.93
2.studentprival	-0.044	0.094	-0.049	0.140	0.198	0.155	-0.105	0.095	
3.studentpubks	0.038	0.057	-0.110*	0.062	0.056	0.069	0.017	0.057	p = 0.011
4.studentprivks	0.004	0.040	-0.077	0.051	0.024	0.052	0.049	0.044	
5.studentpubmk	0.086	0.137	-0.306***	0.042	0.311**	0.153	-0.091	0.108	N= 764
6.studentprivmk	-0.070	0.045	-0.222***	0.054	0.274***	0.073	0.018	0.062	
1.competent									Pseudo R2 = 0.056;
2.competent	0.007	0.034	0.062	0.041	-0.004	0.046	-0.065*	0.040	
3.competent	-0.004	0.037	0.053	0.045	0.021	0.052	-0.070*	0.043	Hausman iaa = 0.999
4.competent	-0.028	0.041	0.076	0.058	0.068	0.065	-0.116***	0.043	
1.conditions									
2.conditions	-0.048	0.044	-0.086*	0.046	0.036	0.065	0.098	0.062	
3.conditions	-0.083	0.029	-0.005	0.038	0.049	0.043	0.038	0.037	
1.studmotiv									
2.studmotiv	0.007	0.028	-0.042	0.034	0.015	0.039	0.020	0.033	
3.studmotiv	0.101	0.104	0.068	0.111	-0.096	0.111	-0.074	0.074	
1.lectmethod									
2.lectmethod	-0.019	0.038	0.001	0.044	0.061	0.053	-0.043	0.047	
3.lectmethod	0.019	0.042	0.027	0.048	-0.059	0.055	0.013	0.051	
4.lectmethod	-0.002	0.042	0.013	0.050	0.005	0.060	-0.016	0.053	
1.empskills									
2.empskills	-0.001	0.031	-0.035	0.038	0.025	0.045	0.01	0.038	
3.empskills	0.043	0.033	0.009	0.041	-0.029	0.047	0.02	0.041	
4.empskills	0.034	0.076	0.100	0.098	-0.066	0.098	-0.07	0.077	
1.professchool									
2.professchool	0.003	0.026	0.006	0.031	0.058	0.037	-0.067**	0.031	
1.sexassual									
2.sexassual	0.068	0.068	-0.248***	0.124	0.134	0.108	0.047	0.098	
3.sexassual	0.077	0.073	-0.329***	0.126	0.237**	0.114	0.015	0.101	
4.sexassual	0.021	0.090	-0.399***	0.138	0.305**	0.155	0.072	0.137	
1.bribe									
2.bribe	0.013	0.035	0.012	0.041	0.024	0.049	-0.05	0.046	
3.bribe	-0.031	0.070	0.134	0.096	-0.079	0.093	-0.02	0.096	
1.nrstudents									
2.nrstudents	-0.073	0.027	-0.029	0.034	0.099***	0.040	0.004	0.035	
3.nrstudents	-0.018	0.039	0.016	0.045	0.041	0.038	-0.040	0.042	
1.enoughcollg									
2.enoughcollg	0.045	0.038	-0.134***	0.037	0.073	0.053	0.016	0.043	
3.enoughcollg	0.043	0.028	-0.031	0.034	-0.119***	0.038	0.108***	0.034	
1.studabroad									
2.studabroad	-0.010	-0.010	-0.075	0.050	-0.07	0.064	0.152**	0.066	
1.aboadbcs									
2.aboadbcs	-0.050	0.033	-0.040	0.043	0.019	0.048	0.071*	0.042	
3.aboadbcs	0.007	0.044	-0.021	0.051	0.010	0.056	0.004	0.047	
4.aboadbcs	0.004	0.035	-0.066*	0.039	0.015	0.046	0.047	0.039	

In Table 2, 4. *Rigour* (University rigour in student evaluation, number of graduates) is chosen as the base category (*rigour* = 0). The predicted marginal effects rendered no significant variables, when outcome = 1, i.e., number of enrolled students and study tariffs (*1.qualityhe*), compared to base category.

The predicted marginal effects, when outcome = 2 (*2.quailtyhe*, i.e., quality of professors' publications in scientific journals), compared to base category, other things being equal, are as follows. If the number of students increases in any of the universities in WB, the education quality is more likely to decrease in all cases, though significantly in *studentinpubks*, *studentinpubmk* and *studentinprivmk*. If lecturing conditions continue to be the same as a decade ago, then HE quality education is less likely by 8.6pp. Based on data tabulations, 18 students have reported personal sexual harassment from professors, 147 have heard of such cases from other students 18 others have witnessed such cases, indicating the presence of such phenomenon and low criteria and monitoring in HE in the Western Balkan countries. The results indicate that any type of sexual context (heard or experienced) in the HE significantly decreases the education quality in HE. If *2.enough* (no, because the classrooms are overcrowded) increases by 1 unit then the *2.qualityhe* is less likely by 13.4pp, confirming our postulation that more universities are feeding into more HE massivisation and less employment. If students who want to study abroad for easier employment abroad (*4.abroadbcs*) increase by one unit, then the *2.qualityhe* is less likely by 6.6pp, as compared to *rigour*, possibly because local universities are left with lower end of quality students.

The predicted marginal effects, when HE quality depends on number of graduates i.e., outcome = 3 (*3.quailtyhe*), compared to base category, other things being equal, are as the following. If the number of students in all countries increases, then the HE quality determined by number of employed students is more likely in all sample countries, but significant only in North Macedonian universities. This is consistent with our postulation that the more students entering HE, the more selection criteria should be in place in HE. If *3.sexassual* (I have heard cases against other students) and *4.sexassual* (I am a witness of such cases against other students) increase by one unit, the probability that the quality in HE is determined by number of employed students is more likely. Some students may not particularly be preoccupied with the internal ethical standards of the university, probably more so in those universities where there is no punishment culture, but rather the economic capitalisation of their studies. In WB sexual education is not part of the education system, thus students' awareness may not be optimal. Furthermore, despite public and legal accusations against professors, there were no suspensions or dismissals.

The predicted marginal effects, when HE quality depends on number of graduates i.e., outcome = 4 (*4.quailtyhe*), compared to base category, other things being equal, are as the following. If professors' competencies increase for one unit (in all categories), then education quality is more likely to drop. This may be explained by the lack of proper didactic training and deficiencies in knowledge transfer from professors to students. If the number of academic universities increase by one unit, the HE education quality is likely to drop by 6.7pp. This is in line with prior expectations that academic universities are prone to massivization and lack proper coordination with the needs of the labour market. If the number of colleges'

increases for one unit because the unemployment is high in the WB, then the *4.qualityhe* is more likely to happen by 10.8pp. This is also in line with prior expectations that the increasing number of colleges should be faced with stricter accreditation criteria and monitoring processes to prevent further massivization. If the number of students not preferring to study abroad increases by one unit, then the *4.qualityhe* is more likely to happen by 15.2pp. Lastly, if the number of students wanting to study abroad because foreign diplomas enable more employment opportunities locally, then the *4.qualityhe* is more likely to happen by 7.1pp.

Table 3. Estimated Results from Professors' Perspective

base = 4 (rigour)	outcome=1		outcome=2		outcome=3		outcome=4		Diagnostics
	qualityhe		qualityhe		qualityhe		qualityhe		
	b	se	b	se	b	se	b	se	
3.professorpubks									LR chi2(105)
4.professorprivks	0.071	0.053	-0.010	0.108	0.007	0.121	-0.068	0.103	117.58
3.professorpubmk	-0.062	0.036	-0.226**	0.098	0.448	381.1	-0.160	381.1	p = 0.002
4.professorprivmk	0.180	0.107	-0.137	0.115	-0.041	0.157	-0.002	0.130	
1.professorpubal	-0.036	0.047	-0.053	0.127	0.213	0.138	-0.124	0.105	N= 197
2.professorprivl	-0.062	0.037	-0.226**	0.098	0.496***	0.105	-0.207**	0.093	
1.competent									Pseudo R2
2.competent	-0.045	0.045	-0.099*	0.061	0.012	3.294	0.133	3.294	
3.competent	0.188	0.130	0.102	0.120	-0.247	1.104	-0.043	1.099	0.258
4.competent	0.188	0.052	-0.055	0.081	0.218	4.305	-0.132	0.071	Hausman
1.conditions									
2.conditions	0.168	0.166	-0.0478	0.834	0.032	0.191	-0.153	0.031	ia = 0.957
3.conditions	0.127	0.077	0.063***	0.063	0.021	0.102	0.004***	0.071	
1.studmotiv									
2.studmotiv	0.110	0.042	-0.078	0.067	0.027	0.080	-0.059	0.058	
3.studmotiv	0.042	0.047	-0.028	0.096	-0.052	0.117	0.038	0.098	
1.emplskills									
2.emplskills	-0.053	0.059	0.040	0.113	0.091	0.131	-0.08	0.074	
3.emplskills	-0.048	0.048	0.128*	0.072	0.264*	0.083	0.054	0.065	
1.professchool									
2.professchool	0.055	0.046	-0.019	0.057	0.005	0.072	-0.041	0.050	
1.sexassual									
2.sexassual	-0.072	0.081	-0.022	0.108	-0.066	0.124	0.160***	0.027	
3.sexassual	0.055	0.125	-0.108	0.131	-0.091	0.171	0.143	0.092	
1.bribe									
2.bribe	-0.047	0.111	0.053	0.125	0.342***	0.122	-0.348*	0.199	
3.bribe	-0.087	0.107	-0.013	0.150	0.304*	0.169	-0.204	0.211	
1.nrstudents									
2.nrstudents	-0.126	0.059	-0.019	0.069	0.109	0.083	0.036	0.054	
3.nrstudents	-0.137	0.063	-0.160**	0.074	0.264**	0.105	0.033	0.082	
1.enoughcollg									
2.enoughcollg	-0.096	0.021	0.078	0.113	0.103	0.127	-0.085	0.081	
3.enoughcollg	0.043	0.073	-0.097	0.065	0.141	0.094	-0.088*	0.051	

In Table 3, to be consistent with the students' approach, *rigour* (university rigour in student evaluation, number of graduates) is chosen as the base category

(*rigour* = 0). The predicted marginal effects rendered no significant variables, when outcome = 1 (*1.qualityhe*), compared to base category.

The predicted marginal effects, when outcome = 2 (*2.quailtyhe*, i.e. quality of professors' publications in scientific journals), compared to base category, other things being equal, are as follows. If the number of professors increases in any of the universities in WB, the education quality is more likely to decrease in all cases, though significantly in *professorpubmk* and *professorprival*. This could be explained by the increasing criteria from the accreditation agencies to have at least three PhD lecturers per program at a period of lacking doctorates. In addition to the massivisation of Bachelor's studies, the increased demand for PhDs led to a massivisation of doctorate studies, too. If *2.competence* (lecturers are up to date with the latest developments in the field of teaching) increases by one unit, the HE quality will likely drop by 9.9pp, as compared to *rigour* (base category). This finding may initially sound as an anomaly. Nevertheless, as mentioned in the theory section, students received at the HE come with a lot of education gaps from elementary and secondary education system, as confirmed by the PISA rankings. Therefore, students may face difficulties catching up with the latest developments and technologies. If *3.conditions* (partial modernisation and digitalization) increases by one unit, the *2.quailtyhe* is likely to increase by 6.3pp. If *3.emplsills* (it has (will help me) but additional training outside the university is also needed) increases by one unit, then *2.quailtyhe* increases by 12.8pp. This is in line with prior expectations, postulating that the current education system is insufficient in terms of quality and employment generation. If *3.nrstudents* (professors' perception that number of students does not impact teaching quality) increases by one unit, the drop of *2.quailtyhe* (quality of professors' publications in scientific journals) is more likely by 16pp. Professors may be accustomed with the historically large classrooms, therefore do not sense the marginal time consumption by additional students. Therefore, less time disposal for professors may naturally be associated with the diminishing quality of professors' publications.

The predicted marginal effects, when HE quality depends on number of graduates i.e., outcome = 3 (*3.quailtyhe*, i.e., HE quality depends on number of students employed), compared to base category, other things being equal, are as follows. If the number of *professorprival* increases by one unit, the probability that *3.quailtyhe* () is more likely by 49.6pp. As expected, if additional training is acquired for students (*3.emplsills*), *3.quailtyhe* is more likely by 26.4pp. Two significant variables *2.bribe* (*did not happen*) and *3.bribe* (have heard of bribe cases) provide contradictory results. As expected, more *2.bribe* (number of those who were not subject to bribe) lead to less need for *4.quailtyhe* (university rigour in student evaluation, number of graduates). However, *3.bribe* (the number of professors who have heard about bribe cases in HE) increases by one unit, the *3.quailtyhe* (number of employed graduates) again increases. The latter could be explained by distortions in the labour market, such as pervasive incentives and dishonest practices, i.e., nepotism and cronyism, especially in the public sector institutions of WB.

The predicted marginal effects, when HE quality depends on rigour in HE i.e., outcome = 4 (*4.quailtyhe*, i.e. University rigour in student evaluation, number of graduates), compared to base category, other things being equal, are as the following.

As expected, the increasing number of professors in the three WB countries, is more likely to decrease *4.qualityhe*, even though the difference is more significant in *professorprival*. Partial investments in HE are more likely to increase *4.qualityhe* by 0.4pp. Around 40 professors have declared that have either heard or were personally had an issue of a student being sexually harassed. However, only in outcome 4 the results are significant. If the number of those who were not sexually assaulted increases by one unit, the *4.qualityhe* is more likely by 16pp. If *2.bribe* (number of those who were not subject to bribe) increases by one unit, then *4.qualityhe* is less likely by 34.8pp. If the number of professors thinking that more colleges are needed because unemployment is high (*3.enoughcollg*) increases by one unit, the *4.qualityhe* is less likely by 8.8pp.

### Conclusions and Policy Implications

Western Balkans (WB) is a region that has started the education reforms, amongst other structural reforms, relatively late and later than the developed part of Europe. In a region where economic growth is sluggish and youth unemployment is high, education – as the main pillar of each society, is one of the key proxies to determine future development. However, the higher education (HE) system in this region does not rank well on international agencies and has been criticised for massivization. Therefore, this study has investigated the factors leading to the massivization and deterioration of HE quality in WB, by taking the perspective of two main stakeholders – professors and students – in Albania, Kosovo, and North Macedonia. Using survey data of primary source, the empirical model tackles typical factors pertaining to professors' competencies and teaching methods, students' motivation and academic curiosity and study conditions, but equally as important controls for circumstantial factors directly linked to the general education system standards, such as massivisation of colleges, employability of students and dishonest behaviour from professors.

The findings from the students' perspective are as follows. An increasing number of students in all three countries are more likely to decrease their HE quality in public and private universities. Increasing professors' competencies may not necessarily reflect better teaching quality, due to the lack of knowledge transfer capabilities and proper didactic training for professors. The increasing number of universities, reflecting massivization of the HE education in WB, is seen as a substitute for unemployment. There is a considerable number of students who prefer to study abroad to increase employment probability either locally or internationally. This perception of the students once again points to the lower education quality in WB. Furthermore, the majority of students have declared a preference for a professional university system that enables partial employment, as compared to the prevailing academic HE system. A critical finding of this study is the evidence of bribes and sexual assaults testified by students. The presence of such phenomena (confirmed also by public lawsuits and not only by students' perceptions) boils down to low monitoring and controlling criteria in the HE system.



Consistent with students' findings, the results have indicated that the increasing number of professors also reduced the quality of HE. This could be explained by the increasing criteria from the accreditation agencies to have at least three PhD lecturers per program at a period of lacking doctorates. In addition to massivization of Bachelor studies, the increased demand for PhD's led to a massivization of doctorate studies, too. Partial modernisation and digitalization were found to have an increasing impact on the quality of HE. Likewise, the results indicated that professors, too, agree that the current education system is not sufficient to provide student employment, and additional trainings are needed. The rapid increase of Ph.D.'s in the recent years may have created a non-complaining culture among current professors concerning the rising number of students and colleges. Despite disturbing results concerning professors ethics (sexual harassment cases and bribe cases), students seem to primarily be preoccupied with economic capitalisation of their studies, given the non-punishing culture of universities towards professors, pervasive incentives and dishonest practices, especially in the public sector institutions of WB. A bias in professors' response was detected in declaring fewer sexual assault cases than students, but nevertheless agree that such phenomena decrease the quality of the HE system.

The massivization of HE in WB is not only deteriorating the teaching quality in WB, but also impeding future economic and institutional development.

In order to stop the massivization of HE in WB, a joint commitment and coordination of actions of all institutions of HE, accreditation agencies and ministries of education is necessary to improve the quality of the teaching process. First and foremost, the HE institutions need to engage in a robust education system where they educate various people on the importance of embracing and practicing integrity in education. Creating awareness on improving the quality of education will go a long way in improving the confidence of people in the education system in Albania, Kosovo and North Macedonia (Pavlova, 2010).

Admission quotas need to be established to bridge the gap between graduated students in each faculty and economy needs and hence, reduce the excessive cadres and increase those required today and potentially in the future. Depending on the changing needs of the economies, admission quotas should be adaptable and if need be, certain programs should stop re-accreditation when market needs are filled or in excess of graduates.

Appropriate mechanisms and policies need to be established to evaluate the performance of professors and make their selection and re-election based on these performance indicators and not only on formal documents. The education system needs to be reformed by initially addressing the lack of teaching quality. Investments need to be made in the transfer of knowledge from the OECD and EU higher education institutions to Western Balkan one. Teaching quality should be a subject of external reviews carried out by dedicated bodies (quality assurance, accreditation, or evaluation agencies) to encourage institutions to set up and reinforce internal quality assurance policies and mechanisms that will include processes in safeguarding the quality of teaching, whereas the teaching criteria should be legally binding and set out by the ministries of education.

Low academic ethics are to a large extent the responsibility and culpability of governmental institutions. It is of utmost importance that universities in WB increase social responsibility, academic and financial transparency, and be subject to continuous internal and external audits.

It is imperative to note that research is the backbone of higher education and critical in triggering sustainable developments in WB countries. Nevertheless, the research investment in WB is less than 0.5% of GDP. Public funds need to raise for scientific research and support of both, professors, and students, in conducting scientific research.

Students are a high-interest stakeholder in this process, as the ultimate beneficiary or the damaged part, therefore their opinion and feedback regarding professors' performance should be formally taken into account. Each university should establish close cooperation with employers and adapt curricula based on market needs and demands.

Lastly, the HE system should be open to international applicants, in order to change the internal dynamics and steer up the competition for better publications and teaching methods.

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