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La misurazione della performance accademica: un’analisi applicata al “costo standard per studente in corso”

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ABSTRACT: (MEASURING ACADEMIC PERFORMANCE: AN ANALYSIS OF THE “STANDARD COST PER REGULAR STUDENT”). The recent introduction of the “standard cost per regular student”, as a criterion adopted by the Italian Ministry of Education to measure public university performance, implies a deep afterthought of those methods underlying the design of performance management and measurement systems in Italian universities. This has also to be extended – through a systemic perspective – to the evaluation of the Third Mission activities influencing the corresponding socio-economic context. With the intent to support a diagnostic activity related to the academic performance, this paper aims at introducing a system of output-outcome indicators – within a consistent framework – oriented to measure the drivers of the “standard unit cost to educate a regular student”, as well as their impact on the socio-economic development of the area where the university operates. We, therefore, bear in mind the following research questions: (i) What are the main elements of the standard unit cost per student and how do they interact each other? (ii) Is it possible to measure the contributions of these elements through a performance indicator system, able to balance outputs and outcomes? (iii) If and how this system could help the academic decision-making process? In order to address these issues, we adopt a qualitative research method. The research is structured in two stages: (i) examination and application of the main theories on Public Value and Public Sector Performance Management, with specific reference to the Key Performance Indicator (KPI) analysis, and study of the relevant regulation (Gelmini Reform); (ii) design of an academic performance measurement framework, based on the elements of the “standard unit cost to educate a regular student”, according to a balanced “output-outcome” perspective. Apart from the general doubts raised by the algorithm to calculate the “standard unit cost to educate a regular student” provided by the Legislator, the main limitations of this study are that the proposed model cannot represent the whole academic performance, but just part of it, and that it must be validated by empirical evidence afterwards. Nevertheless, we believe that this academic performance measurement framework could help academic decision makers to foster a strategic view in order to better define policies and strategies, aiming to improve the academic performance and their impact on the context of reference.

KEYWORDS: Standard Unit Cost to Educate a Regular Student Output-to-Outcome Management HEI Performance Indicators

1. Introduzione

Con l’intento di rilanciare la qualità e l’efficienza del sistema universitario, il Legislatore ha dato avvio negli ultimi anni ad un profondo processo di riforma delle realtà accademiche che ha investito, fra gli altri ambiti, anche il sistema contabile e di bilancio, nonché le modalità di finanziamento degli atenei. È in questa prospettiva che si colloca il “costo standard unitario di formazione per studente in corso” (CSFSC) quale metodo per la

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