

The role of strategic planning in the performance of Universities in Afghanistan

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Abstract:

Purpose: This study examines the strategic planning in improvement the performance of Universities in Afghanistan, assessing its impact on academic quality, institutional efficiency, and long-term sustainability.

Methods: This, descriptive, and explanatory research design to analysis the role of strategic planning in improving performance in Afghan Universities. A structured questionnaire distributed to 308 academic and administrative staff used convenience sampling. Data collected via physical and online forms and analyzed through SPSS. Statistical techniques exist descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, correlation, multiple regression, and moderation analysis to assess the impact of strategic planning on academic quality, efficiency, and sustainability.

Results: The research show that strategic planning significantly improves academic quality, institutional performance, and long-term sustainability in universities. Strong correlations and regression results confirm its positive impact, while implementation challenges also play a meaningful role in shaping outcomes.

Conclusion: Strategic planning significantly improves academic quality, institutional efficiency, and long-term sustainability in universities. However, implementation challenges may hinder its full impact. Strengthening institutional support and building capacity are essential to maximize the benefits and achieve strategic educational goals.

Recommendation: To improve higher education performance, universities should strengthen support, build staff capacity, engage stakeholders, address implementation barriers, promote collaboration, use technology, monitor progress, and when needed update strategic plans to ensure alignment and sustainability.

Keywords: Afghanistan Universities, Strategic planning, Performance

Introduction:

Strategic planning is an important management process that enables universities to establish clear priorities, allocate resources effectively, respond to environmental changes, and achieve their long-term institutional goals. In higher education, effective strategic planning can contribute to improved academic quality, administrative efficiency, research productivity, financial sustainability, and overall institutional performance. Universities operating in developing and changing environments particularly require well-designed strategic plans to address emerging challenges and make effective use of limited resources.

In Afghanistan, universities play a significant role in developing human capital and supporting the country's social and economic development. However, higher education institutions face various challenges, including limited financial and human resources, administrative weaknesses, changing educational

demands, and difficulties in maintaining academic quality. Strategic planning may help universities address these challenges by establishing clear objectives, improving decision-making, coordinating institutional activities, and aligning available resources with organizational priorities. Therefore, examining the role of strategic planning in the performance of universities in Afghanistan is important for understanding how planning practices contribute to institutional effectiveness and sustainable development. This study aims to investigate the role of strategic planning in improving the performance of universities in Afghanistan.

Problem Statement:

In recent years, Universities in Afghanistan have faced significant challenges financial and related to academic quality, institutional management, and long-term sustainability. Despite global recognition of the importance of strategic planning in driving institutional performance and development, many Afghan Universities lack structured and effective strategic planning processes. The absence of clear strategic direction often results in inefficient resource allocation, inconsistent academic standards, and weak administrative performance. While some institutions have begun to adopt planning frameworks, there is limited empirical research assessing how these efforts influence key performance indicators such as academic outcomes, operational efficiency, and long-term viability. This study seeks to address this gap by examining the role of strategic planning in enhancing the performance of Universities in Afghanistan.

Higher education plays a pivotal role in the social, economic, and political development of any country, including Afghanistan. As centers of knowledge creation, human capital development, and innovation, Universities have the potential to shape the future of a nation. However, in Afghanistan, the higher education sector faces a unique set of challenges ranging from limited financial and infrastructural resources to political instability, and a lack of qualified academic staff. These issues have significantly affected the performance, quality, and global competitiveness of Afghan University.

In such a challenging and unpredictable environment, strategic planning becomes an essential managerial tool for institutional survival, growth, and improvement. Strategic planning refers to the systematic process by which an organization defines its direction, sets goals, identifies priorities, allocates resources, and establishes mechanisms for monitoring and evaluation. In the context of higher education, effective strategic planning helps universities and colleges align their academic, administrative, and financial functions with national development goals and global educational standards.

In developed and many developing countries, strategic planning is already integrated into the governance and management systems of Universities. These institutions use strategic plans to improve academic quality, enhance operational efficiency, promote research and innovation, and ensure sustainability. In contrast, many Afghan Universities either lack a formal strategic planning process or do not fully implement their plans due to insufficient capacity, limited stakeholder involvement, and weak institutional leadership.

The lack of strategic planning contributes to a range of performance issues, such as poor student outcomes, inefficient use of resources, low research productivity, and inadequate institutional accountability. Therefore, there is a growing need to explore how strategic planning can be used more effectively to improve the performance of Universities in Afghanistan.

This research aims to examine the role of strategic planning in enhancing the performance of Universities across Afghanistan. It will analyze the current planning practices, assess the extent of their implementation, and evaluate their impact on key performance indicators such as academic quality, administrative efficiency, financial management, and institutional development.

Research Objective:

The objective of this study is to investigate the role of strategic planning in enhancing the performance of Universities in Afghanistan. Specifically, the study aims to assess how strategic planning influences academic quality, institutional efficiency, and long-term sustainability to achieve organizational goals within these institutions.

Research Questions:

How effectively is strategic planning practiced in Universities across Afghanistan?

What is the impact of strategic planning on academic quality and institutional performance?

In what ways does strategic planning contribute to the long-term sustainability of Afghan Universities?

What are the major challenges faced by institutions in implementing strategic planning processes?

Literature Review:

According to the Akyel, N., KorkusuzPolat, T., & Arslankay, S. (2012) Universities are increasingly required to adopt strategic planning due to legal mandates and the need for institutional transformation amid rapid technological advances. Sakarya University began its pursuit of excellence in 2001 through ISO initiatives, aiming to enhance administrative and support services. Since 2003, it has implemented Total Quality Management across all units. This study explores Sakarya University's strategic planning efforts, driven by the vision of embedding excellence into its institutional culture.

According to the Owolabi, S. A., & Makinde, O. G. (2012). The study investigated the impact of strategic planning on corporate performance used Babcock University as a case study. Utilizing both primary and secondary data, including employee questionnaires, the research applied descriptive and inferential statistics. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient revealed a significant positive relationship between strategic planning and performance. The study concluded that strategic planning enhances organizational effectiveness and efficiency, recommending its adoption by universities and corporate bodies to improve goal achievement and overall performance.

According to the Kolade, A. B., Olanipon, O. O., & Olumuyiwa, O. M. (2018). The study explored the impact of strategic planning on corporate performance at the University of Ibadan. used questionnaires and inferential statistics, it found a significant positive correlation between strategic planning

and performance. The study recommends that universities adopt strategic planning to improve management efficiency, effectiveness, and goal achievement.

According to the Mahardhika, B. N., & Raharja, S. (2023) This study examines strategic planning in education as a tool to enhance quality in line with modern trends. used literature-based research, it emphasizes how strategic planning helps institutions assess environments, define long-term goals, and implement strategies. It concludes that strategic planning is essential for sustainable educational improvement and success.

According to the HAYWARD, F. M., & NCAYIYANA, D. J. (2011). Strategic planning in higher education is a continuous process of evaluating institutional strengths, weaknesses, and goals to build a more effective institution. It must be flexible and responsive to changing environments, shaped by national policies, available resources, and the needs of faculty, students, the community, and the nation.

According to the This Falqueto, J. M. Z., Hoffmann, V. E., Gomes, R. C., & Onoyama Mori, S. S. (2020). study examines stakeholder influence on strategic planning implementation at a Brazilian university used qualitative methods. Based on Frooman and Mitchell et al.'s models, it finds that institutions prioritize stakeholders with control power. The results help university managers strategically align institutional goals with stakeholder influence for effective planning.

According to Jalal, A., & Murray, A. (2019). the article explores the growing importance of strategic planning in higher education amid increasing competition and institutional pressures. It highlights a gap in research on its application in academia and proposes a new model to guide university leaders in strategic plan development, addressing challenges and outlining key planning steps.

According to the Mirani Sargazi, N., Hafezi, A., Mofakhami, A., & Besharat Nia, M. S. (2021). The study examines the role of strategic planning in applying e-learning at Isfahan University. used surveys and SPSS analysis, results show a significant positive relationship between strategic planning and e-learning adoption. Specifically, defining strategic issues impacts e-learning use, though components like perceived usefulness and multimedia education showed no significant correlation.

According to the Ameen, A. I. M. (2019). the study examines how strategic planning has improved higher education performance at the University of Duhok, aligned with UNESCO standards. Findings reveal a significant correlation between strategic planning and institutional efficiency, with 14.8% of performance improvement attributed to strategic planning, highlighting its role in educational development and reform.

According to the Habeeb, Y. O., & Eyupoglu, S. Z. (2024). The study explores the impact of strategic planning on transformational leadership and organizational performance in Nigerian higher education. used data from 388 staff across 48 state universities, findings show strategic planning enhances both leadership and performance. Transformational leadership also mediates this relationship, underscoring its importance in institutional development.

According to the Obaid, N. (2022). the study investigates the impact of strategic planning on organizational performance in private universities in Nangarhar, Afghanistan. used data from 172 academic leaders and SPSS

analysis, findings reveal a strong positive relationship. Key strategic planning dimensions like mission, SWOT analysis, and R&D significantly influence growth, innovation, and institutional success.

According to the Williams, D. A. (2021). the paper addresses the complexity and inefficiency of strategic planning in Universities by proposing a simplified model—B-VAR (Brainstorming-Visioning Action Results). used action research with the University of the West Indies, the model integrates elements from global practices and existing theories to provide a practical, adaptable planning framework.

According to the Fantauzzi, C., Colasanti, N., Fiorani, G., & Frondizi, R. (2021) the study analyzes mission statements of 98 Italian universities to assess their focus on societal engagement and sustainability. Findings reveal only 36% address social issues, and just three mention sustainability targets. The study highlights a lack of sustainability commitment, urging universities to strengthen societal roles and external engagement.

According to the Bantilan, J. C., Deguito, P. O., Otero, A. S., Regidor, A. R., & Junsay, M. D. (2023). This systematic review, used the PRISMA framework, examined strategic planning in education from 2020–2022. Analyzing 15 studies across eight countries, it identified challenges including lack of planning skills, poor implementation, and limited stakeholder involvement. Findings emphasize strategic planning's role in gaining competitive advantage and guiding educational institutions' future direction.

According to the Liu, B. (2024) the paper explores the critical link between strategic planning and resource allocation in higher education, foc used on challenges faced by Rongo and Sakarya Universities. It highlights how misalignment can hinder efficiency and growth, and offers best practices and solutions to help institutions achieve sustainability in a competitive academic environment.

According to Shawyun, T. (2016). the paper presents the QMIPS framework, linking Strategic Planning, Quality Management, and Information Systems through a Strategic Performance Management System (SPMS). It addresses execution challenges in higher education by aligning strategic plans with action plans, budgets, and quality metrics to ensure measurable, structured, and mission-driven institutional success.

According to the Elderderi, S. H., Albadawi, M. A., & Abdelhay, S. M. (2024). This study examines the impact of strategic planning on institutional performance at Sudan University of Science and Technology from a total quality perspective. Findings reveal significant positive relationships between vision, mission, goals, and performance. The study recommends adopting quality principles in strategic planning and involving staff in goal-setting processes.

Research Methodology:

In this research methodology used to examine the role of strategic planning in enhancing the performance of Universities in Afghanistan. It includes details on the research design, population and sample, data collection instruments, procedures, and the statistical techniques for data analysis Used SPSS.

Research Design

The study adopted a quantitative research approach used a descriptive and explanatory research design. This design appropriate for investigating the relationship between strategic planning practices (independent variable) and key institutional performance outcomes such as academic quality, institutional efficiency, and long-term sustainability (dependent variables). The design also allowed the researcher to test hypotheses and explain the nature and strength of these relationships.

Population and Sample

The target population for this study consisted of academic and administrative staff from public and private Universities in Afghanistan. These individuals were selected because of their direct involvement or awareness of their universities' strategic planning processes and performance outcomes.

A total of 308 respondents participated in the study. For the sample selection used a convenience sampling technique, while this method may limit the generalizability of findings, it allowed for the collection of relevant data within the available resources and timeframe.

Data Collection Instrument

For Data collection used a structured questionnaire which designed specifically for this study. The questionnaire consisted of closed-ended statements measured used a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Strongly Disagree) to 5 (Strongly Agree). The questionnaire included items covering the following constructs:

- Strategic Planning Practices (Independent Variable)
- Academic Quality, Institutional Efficiency, and Long-Term Sustainability (Dependent Variables)
- Challenges in Strategic Planning Implementation (Contextual/Moderating Variable)

The questionnaire developed and. A pilot test conducted with a small group to ensure clarity and reliability.

Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire distributed both in physical form and via online platforms (Google Forms) to reach participants from various public and private institutions across Afghanistan. Respondents were assured of confidentiality, and participation voluntary.

Data Analysis Techniques

Data were entered into IBM SPSS Statistics for analysis. The following statistical procedures were implemented:

Descriptive Statistics: To summarize the demographic characteristics of respondents and calculate the mean, standard deviation, and frequency of responses for each variable.

Reliability Analysis (Cronbach's Alpha): To assess the internal consistency of each construct. A reliability coefficient of $\alpha \geq 0.70$ considered acceptable.

Composite Variable Computation: Mean scores were calculated for each construct (e.g., Strategic Planning, Academic Quality) to simplify analysis.

Correlation Analysis: Pearson's correlation coefficients were computed to examine the relationships between strategic planning and institutional performance outcomes.

Multiple Linear Regression Analysis: Conducted to determine the predictive influence of strategic planning on academic quality, institutional efficiency, and long-term sustainability. Each dependent variable analyzed separately used strategic planning as the independent variable.

Moderation Analysis (Interaction Term): An interaction variable created to examine whether challenges in implementation moderated the relationship between strategic planning and performance outcomes.

Findings:

This study shows the influence of strategic planning on the performance of Universities in Afghanistan, focused on academic quality, institutional efficiency, and long-term sustainability. The analysis is based on data collected from 308 respondents, with results presented across several tables which stated below:

Table 1:

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Strategic Planning Practice	308	11.00	25.00	20.6364	3.32950
Academic Quality and Institutional Performance	308	14.00	30.00	24.8636	3.79965
Long-Term Sustainability	308	13.00	25.00	20.5455	2.87660
Challenges in Strategic Planning Implementation	308	15.00	25.00	19.5909	2.72905
Valid N (list wise)	308				

The above table stated that All variables are measured on a scale, revealing averages and how spread out the responses are within the sample size (N = 308). The mean score for Strategic Planning Practice (20.64) which indicates a generally positive view toward its practice among educational institutions.

The Academic Quality and Institutional Performance (24.86) is the highest mean score, which suggesting that respondents perceive academic quality to be strong.

The Long-Term Sustainability (20.55) also has a positive average, but lower than academic quality, indicating for improvement.

Challenges in Strategic Planning Implementation (19.59) reflects potential barriers, but the means suggest that they are manageable.

Table 2:

Correlations					
		Strategic Planning Practice	Academic Quality and Institutional Performance	Long-Term Sustainability	Challenges in Strategic Planning Implementation
Strategic Planning Practice	Pearson Correlation	1	.904**	.716**	.350**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.000	.000
	N	308	308	308	308
Academic Quality and Institutional Performance	Pearson Correlation	.904**	1	.800**	.500**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.000	.000

	N	308	308	308	308
Long-Term Sustainability	Pearson Correlation	.716**	.800**	1	.604**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000		.000
	N	308	308	308	308
Challenges in Strategic Planning Implementation	Pearson Correlation	.350**	.500**	.604**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.000	
	N	308	308	308	308
**. Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).					

The above table explain that the correlation coefficients show the strength and direction of relationships between variables. Here the highest correlation (0.904) between Strategic Planning Practice and Academic Quality and Institutional Performance indicates a strong influence, which suggesting that better strategic planning leads to improved academic outcomes. Moreover, the Significant correlations are noted with a p-value less than 0.01, reinforcing these relationships are statistically significant.

While Challenges in Strategic Planning shows weaker correlations with other variables, it still highlights its relevance.

Table 3:

Model Summary										
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics					
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. Change	F
1	.904 ^a	.818	.817	1.62353	.818	1375.533	1	306	.000	
a. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic Planning Practice										

The above table stated that This table reflects the regression model's fit. An R value of 0.904 which indicates a very strong relationship between the predictors and the outcome. The R² value of 0.818 means that about 81.8% of the variance in Academic Quality and Institutional Performance is explained by Strategic Planning Practice. The change statistics indicate that the model significantly improves by adding the predictor.

Table 4:

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3625.702	1	3625.702	1375.533	.000 ^b
	Residual	806.571	306	2.636		
	Total	4432.273	307			
a. Dependent Variable: Academic Quality and Institutional Performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic Planning Practice						

The above table stated that The ANOVA table tests the overall significance of the model. The F statistic of 1375.533 and a p-value of 0.000 suggest that the model is statistically significant, indicating that Strategic Planning Practice is a strong predictor of Academic Quality.

Table 5:

Coefficients ^a				
Model	Unstandardized Coefficients	Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.

	B	Std. Error	Beta		
1 (Constant)	3.564	.582		6.126	.000
Strategic Planning Practice	1.032	.028	.904	37.088	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Quality and Institutional Performance

The above table stated that the unstandardized coefficient for Strategic Planning Practice (1.032) which indicates that for each unit increase in strategic planning, academic quality and institutional performance increase by approximately 1.032 units. This strong positive beta (.904) confirms its significant impact, with a p-value of 0.000, satisfying the threshold (<0.05) for statistical significance.

Table 6:

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.716 ^a	.513	.511	2.01162	.513	321.776	1	306	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic Planning Practice

The above table stated that R of 0.716 indicates a strong relationship between strategic planning and long-term sustainability. R^2 value of 0.513 suggests that 51.3% of the variance in long-term sustainability can be explained by strategic planning practices. An Adjusted R^2 of 0.511 accounts for the number of predictors in the model and confirms that the model fits well. The F Change (321.776, $p < 0.000$) indicates a significant improvement in explaining long-term sustainability.

Table 7:

ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	1302.102	1	1302.102	321.776	.000 ^b
	Residual	1238.262	306	4.047		
	Total	2540.364	307			

a. Dependent Variable: Long-Term Sustainability

b. Predictors: (Constant), Strategic Planning Practice

The above table stated that the regression has a significant, F statistic (321.776) and a p-value of 0.000, which shows that the model is statistically significant. This indicates that the predictor, Strategic Planning Practice, meaningfully contributes to stating the variance in Long-Term Sustainability.

Table 8:

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	7.781	.721		10.795	.000
	Strategic Planning Practice	.619	.034	.716	17.938	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Long-Term Sustainability

The above table stating that the unstandardized coefficient for Strategic Planning Practice (0.619) which, indicates that for each unit increase in strategic planning, long-term sustainability increases by approximately 0.619

units. The standardized beta value (.716) which suggests that Strategic Planning Practice is a strong predictor of Long-Term Sustainability, confirming its significance with a p-value of 0.000.

Table 9:

Model Summary									
Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.877 ^a	.770	.769	1.82695	.770	1021.926	1	306	.000
a. Predictors: (Constant), TV									

The above table stated that The R-value of 0.877 indicates a very strong correlation between TV (Target variable) which compute from strategic planning and challenges in strategic planning implementation and academic quality/performance. The R² value of 0.770 means 77% of the variance in academic quality can be explained by the variable TV, which stating a very high explanatory power. the model also shows a significant improvement to explain variance (F Change = 1021.926, p < 0.000).

Table 10:

ANOVA^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	3410.924	1	3410.924	1021.926	.000 ^b
	Residual	1021.348	306	3.338		
	Total	4432.273	307			
a. Dependent Variable: Academic Quality and Institutional Performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), TV (challenges in strategic planning implementation)						

The above table stated that the F statistic is 1021.926 with a p-value of 0.000, indicating a statistically significant model for predicting academic quality used the TV variable. This reinforces the strength of the TV's contribution to explaining academic performance.

Table 11:

Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-2.011	.847		-2.375	.018
	TV	.668	.021	.877	31.968	.000
a. Dependent Variable: Academic Quality and Institutional Performance						

The above table stated that the unstandardized coefficient for TV (0.668) indicates that for each unit increase in TV, academic quality/performance increases by approximately 0.668 units. The standardized beta value of 0.877 indicates a very strong positive relationship between TV and academic quality. The significant p-value (0.000) further confirms that TV is a major predictor of academic performance.

Conclusion:

According to the study the strategic planning is strongly associated with the performance of universities in Afghanistan. Strategic planning showed a very strong positive relationship with academic quality and institutional performance and a strong positive relationship with long term sustainability. The regression results further indicated that strategic planning explained a substantial proportion of the variation in both institutional performance and sustainability. These findings are consistent with previous studies that emphasize the importance of strategic planning for improving institutional effectiveness, resource allocation, quality, and long-term development. The study also identified implementation challenges as an important factor related to university performance. Overall, the results suggest that Afghan universities can strengthen their performance by improving strategic planning practices, involving relevant stakeholders, aligning resources with institutional priorities, and establishing effective systems for implementation, monitoring, and evaluation.

Conclusion:

Overall, the findings consistently illustrate that strategic planning significantly enhances the performance of universities in Afghanistan. Effective strategic planning not only boosts academic quality but also contributes to long-term sustainability and institutional efficiency. These results underscore the necessity for educational institutions to adopt robust strategic planning practices to achieve their organizational goals effectively. Moreover, the findings of this study support that strategic planning plays a crucial role in improving the performance of Universities in Afghanistan. Specifically, it contributes significantly to enhancing academic quality, institutional efficiency, and long-term sustainability. However, implementation challenges can act as barriers to maximizing these benefits. The results highlight the need for stronger institutional support and capacity-building to effectively implement strategic plans and achieve organizational goals.

Recommendations

On the bases of result, the key several recommendations can improve the performance of higher education through effective strategic planning:

Strengthen Institutional Support: Allocate resources and establish a dedicated strategic planning department to guide the planning and implementation processes.

Enhance Capacity Building: Provide required training for faculty and staff on strategic planning such as methodologies, focused on data analysis and goal-setting to empower effective participation.

Engage Stakeholders: Involve stakeholders, including faculty, students, and community members, in the strategic planning process to incorporate diverse perspectives and enhance relevance.

Address Implementation Barriers: Identify and mitigate challenges to implementation, fostering a culture that values adaptability and continuous improvement.

Implement Monitoring and Evaluation: Establish frameworks for assessment of strategic initiatives to ensure alignment with institutional goals and facilitate timely adjustments.

Promote Collaboration: Foster partnerships with international educational institutions to facilitate knowledge-sharing and best practices in enhancing academic quality and sustainability.

Leverage Technology: Utilize technology and data analytics to inform strategic planning, improving decision-making and institutional performance.

Update Plans: Periodically review and revise strategic plans when required to reflect changing conditions, ensuring continued relevance and commitment to institutional goals.

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