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University Dropout in Italy

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Abstract:

Student drop-out rates are a longstanding issue in Italian universities. The number of students who graduate is traditionally around 30% of the students who enroll for the first year of a university course. This outcome is considered an indicator of low performance of Italian universities.

The literature shows that after the 2001 reform of the university system, drop-out probability is lower. It is also argued that the reform had a significant impact on students' motivation to complete a university degree. However, empirical analyses are still limited.

The aim of this work is to carry out an analysis of Italian university drop-outs, by emphasizing the supply side of university education. The argument put forth in this paper is that higher students drop-out rates may be explained by structural characteristics of each University (such as number of courses, students per lecturer, etc.) rather than by students' personal motivations. This would imply that a better reorganization of University courses might allow to achieve a lower number of drop-outs and, overall, a better performance of Italian students.

In our study, the dependent variable selected for the analysis is the number of drop-outs both for university students who enroll for the first time and all the other students, proxied by the number of students who did not obtain any University credit (cfu). Explanatory variables are related to supply (number of degree courses, number and location of peripheral sites for each university, students per lecturers, etc.); postgraduate opportunities (PhD courses); students background (type of high school attended before university enrollment, average marks); macroeconomic variables.

Italian universities have been observed since the implementation of the reform. A common feature related to cross sectional time series data is unobserved heterogeneity, i.e. the possibility of unobserved time invariant effects due to each unit: for example, some universities, in spite of efforts to overcome some structural weaknesses, might maintain a

reputation which is not aligned to the current quality of service. Hence, a fixed effects model has been selected.

The analysis shows which factors, among those considered, have a higher impact on students drop-outs: number of courses, especially offered at peripheral sites, and financial incentives as scholarships appear to be particularly significant, especially for new enrolled students. Our analysis also suggests that universities with peripheral branches have a relevant impact on dropouts; therefore, corrective measures should point at the reorganizing of universities with branches located in peripheral areas.

JEL: I23, C33, H52

- 1.- Introduction
- 2.- Literature review
- 3.- Methodology
- 4.- The Italian university system: statistics
- 5.- Econometric analysis and results
- 6.- Conclusions
- 7.- References

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