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Mission Statements in the Gulf Cooperation Council Higher Education Industry: An Analysis of their Association with Sustainability-Oriented Performance

Abstract

Purpose: The purpose of this paper is to use Pearce and David's eight-items typology of mission statement components to examine how ranked higher education institutions (HEIs) in Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries articulate their mission statements, and whether the way they do so impacts their performance.

Study design/methodology/approach: The study reviewed the academic literature and adopted a qualitative methodology combining content analysis and qualitative comparative analysis (QCA).

Sample and data: The focus of this study was on all ranked HEIs in GCC countries. Data were collected from institutional websites and online sources.

Results: The findings indicate that the most important mission statement components used are 'products and services' and 'commitment to survival, growth, and profitability'. There are variations in how mission statement components are configured and how these configurations relate to performance. The study also provides guidance on formulating mission statements aligned with organizational characteristics to achieve higher performance.

Originality/value: The mission statement is an important strategic tool. However, little attention has been paid to analyzing how HEIs express this guiding tool and how it relates to performance using a configuration-based approach (e.g., QCA). This study contributes to expanding knowledge on the mission–performance link in under-researched regions such as the GCC, particularly in the context of sustainability-oriented and international ranking performance. Moreover, it helps HEI administrators design more effective mission statements.

Research limitations/implications: The findings do not reveal the factors influencing the mission–performance relationship. Therefore, further research is needed to investigate this issue.

Keywords: Mission Statement, Performance, Strategy, Higher Education Institutions, Content Analysis, Qualitative Comparative Analysis.

JEL classification: O21, O31, L21, L25

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الملخص

بيانات الرسالة في قطاع التعليم العالي بدول مجلس التعاون الخليجي: تحليل ارتباطها بالأداء الموجّه نحو الاستدامة

محمد بن حمدان العنزي

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المملكة العربية السعودية

هدف الدراسة: تهدف الدراسة، باستخدام تصنيف بيرس وديفيد لمكونات بيان الرسالة المكون من ثمانية عناصر، إلى فهم كيفية صياغة مؤسسات التعليم العالي المصنفة في دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي لبيان رسالتها، وما إذا كان لهذه الطريقة تأثير على أدائها. تصميم/ منهجية/ طريقة الدراسة: راجعت الدراسة الأدبيات الأكاديمية، واعتمدت بناءً على ذلك منهجية نوعية تجمع بين تحليل المحتوى والتحليل المقارن النوعي. عينة الدراسة وبياناتها: ركزت الدراسة على جميع مؤسسات التعليم العالي المصنفة في دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي، وجمعت البيانات من موقع المؤسسة الإلكتروني ومصادر إلكترونية عامة. نتائج الدراسة: تشير النتائج إلى أن أهم مكونات بيان الرسالة المستخدمة هي "المنتجات والخدمات" والالتزام بالبقاء والنمو والريحية"، وأن هناك تباينات بين التشكيلات الخاصة بصياغة مكونات بيان الرسالة وفي كيفية ارتباط هذه التشكيلات بالأداء، كما تقدم الدراسة إرشادات حول صياغة بيان الرسالة وفقاً للخصائص التنظيمية لتحقيق أداء أعلى.

أصالة الدراسة: يعد بيان الرسالة أداة استراتيجية مهمة، ومع ذلك، لم يُولَ اهتمام يُذكر لتحليل كيفية تعبير مؤسسات التعليم العالي عن هذه الأداة التوجيهية، وكيفية ارتباطها بالأداء باستخدام المنهجية القائمة على التشكيلات (مثل التحليل المقارن النوعي)، وتسهم هذه الدراسة في توسيع نطاق المعرفة حول العلاقة بين بيان الرسالة والأداء في المناطق التي لم تُجرَ عليها أبحاث كافية، مثل دول مجلس التعاون الخليجي، وبشكل خاص في سياق الأداء الموجّه نحو الاستدامة والتصنيف الدولي، علاوة على ذلك، تُساعد هذه الدراسة مسؤولي مؤسسات التعليم العالي على تصميم بيانات رسالة أكثر فاعلية.

حدود الدراسة وتطبيقاتها: لا تكشف النتائج عن العوامل المؤثرة على العلاقة بين بيان الرسالة والأداء، لذلك هناك حاجة إلى مزيد من البحث لدراسة هذه القضية.

الكلمات المفتاحية: بيان الرسالة، الأداء، الاستراتيجية، مؤسسات التعليم العالي، تحليل المحتوى، التحليل المقارن النوعي.

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Introduction

Mission statements have become a fundamental element of the strategic tools used by organizations (Alegre et al., 2018; Aljebrini et al., 2025; Mion et al., 2024). They are widely regarded as an essential part of the tools used by every manager (Desmidt et al., 2011), and are considered among the most commonly used management tools globally (Brosch, 2023; Grimes et al., 2019). Furthermore, mission statements form the basis for guiding the strategic plans developed by organizations (Thompson et al., 2022); they are also a key component of comprehensive management frameworks that organizations may adopt (e.g., business excellence models) (Alanazi, 2020, 2025).

In parallel to this trend among practitioners, a plethora of mission statement literature has also emerged (e.g., Alawneh, 2015; Alegre et al., 2018; Aljebrini et al., 2025; Baetz & Bart, 1998; Bart, 2001; Dermol, 2012; Mion et al., 2024; Palmer & Short, 2008; Sidhu, 2003). Previous academic contributions have focused on a number of aspects related to the mission statement, such as defining the mission concept, mission development, factors influencing mission definition, and analyzing the impact of the mission on performance, as well as studying the mission statement in various contexts, such as the for-profit, non-profit, and healthcare sectors.

The concerning aspect of this context is that despite the mission statement's importance, its widespread use, and the relatively long history of related research efforts, little empirical research has been conducted on mission statement components and their impact on organizational performance using a configuration-based approach (e.g., qualitative comparative analysis (QCA)). Furthermore, research has lacked sufficient geographical coverage (often focusing on a national level and ignoring the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region, particularly the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries), and mixed findings have been reported (Alegre et al., 2018) (see Table 1). The QCA approach is beneficial, in particular, because of its ability to examine configurations of factors in relation to an outcome, considering how factors interact with each other.

Higher education institutions (HIEs) are expected to play a central role in local and international economic and social development. These institutions pursue financial and non-financial objectives, including sustainability-oriented (SO) objectives, and target international excellence strategies (Breznik & Law, 2019).

The SO performance of HEIs and their international ranking (IR) are considered strategic resources that can result in competitive advantage (Breznik & Law, 2019; Claudy et al., 2016). In this context, empirical research using the configuration-based approach to investigate mission statement components in the HEI sector, particularly in the GCC countries, and their impact on SO (social, environmental, and industry) and IR performance, is scarce (Breznik & Law, 2019); therefore, more research is needed. This paper seeks to contribute to filling that gap.

The purpose of this paper is to use Pearce and David's (1987) eight-item typology of mission statement components to understand how ranked HEIs in GCC countries articulate their mission statements, and whether the way they do so has an impact on their performance. Performance is measured in terms of SO and IR outcomes. To this end, the following research question illustrates the research objective: What components should be included when developing a mission statement for HEIs to achieve higher performance?

The remainder of the paper is arranged as follows. First, a review of the literature on the mission statement's definition, benefits, components, and its impact on performance is provided. Next, the sample, data, and method adopted are described. The results are then presented. Finally, a discussion and conclusions are reported, with particular emphasis on the implications arising from this research.

Table 1
Sample of Literature on the Analysis of Mission Statement Components and their Impact on Performance

Authors	The Paper's Objective	Data Collection	Approach		Performance Examined	Industry	Location
			Configuration-based	Others			
Aljebrini et al. (2025)	To explore the extent to which sustainability is included in the mission statement of Palestinian companies.	Organization website and secondary data		Word frequency analysis (co-word analysis)		Manufacturing and service	Palestine
Bartkus et al. (2006)	To analyze mission statement quality in relation to financial performance.	Organization website and online sources		Correlation and t-test	= (1)	Manufacturing and service	Europe, Japan, and USA
Bart (2007)	To determine differences between hospitals in terms of mission statement components and the mission–performance relationship	Survey		Mann–Whitney U test	= (1,2)	Healthcare	Canada
Fitzgerald and Cunningham (2016)	To investigate the association between mission components and university technology transfer offices' performance.	Public secondary data		Correlation	+ (4)	HEIs	Ireland

Cont. Table 1
Sample of Literature on the Analysis of Mission Statement Components and their Impact on Performance

Authors	The Paper's Objective	Data Collection	Approach			Industry	Location
			Configura- tion-based	Others	Perfor- mance Examined		
Jungblut and Jungblut (2017)	To explore how German universities can be grouped according to their mission statements, and how these groups relate to success.	University website	Cluster analysis (to identify distinct groups based on mission statement components)	Word frequency analysis and Fisher Test	-(3)	HEIs	Germany
Kirk and Beth Nolan (2010)	To explore mission statements and their link to performance	Organization website and IRS		Regression analysis	=(1)	Non-profit	USA
Kim et al. (2024)	To conduct a content analysis of firms' missions in the Henokiens Association, aiming to clarify the association between a firm's mission and business longevity, and the configurations of long-lived companies' missions	Firm website		Word frequency analysis	+(6)	Manufacturing and service	Japan, Austria, UK, Netherlands, Belgium, Switzerland, Germany, Italy, and France
Macedo et al. (2016)	To investigate the mediation effect of organizational commitment on the mission–performance link	Survey		Partial Least Squares (PLS)	+(1,5)	Healthcare	Portugal

Cont. Table 1
Sample of Literature on the Analysis of Mission Statement Components and their Impact on Performance

Authors	The Paper's Objective	Data Collection	Approach		Performance Examined	Industry	Location
			Configuration-based	Others			
O'Gorman and Doran (1999)	To replicate Pearce and David's (1987) study of mission statement	Survey		Correlation	-(1)	Small and medium-sized firms	Ireland
Palmer and Short (2008)	To examine the association between mission statements and metrics of business school characteristics, including performance	The AACSB website	Cluster analysis (to determine configurations of schools based on structural characteristics used)	F-test	+(1, 3)	HEIs	USA
Pearce and David (1987)	To analyze mission statement components and their link to higher performance	Survey		T-test	+(1)	Manufacturing and service	USA

Notes: (+): positives link, (-): negative link, (=): inclusive finding. 1: financial performance, 2: workforce-related performance, 3: education-related performance, 4: industry performance, 5: non-profit organization-related performance, 6: corporate longevity.

Literature Review

Mission Statement Definition

Investigating the mission statement has its roots in several fields, such as management, political science, legal studies, and philosophy, and the literature has focused on exploring mission statements since the late 1980s (Alegre et al., 2018; Brosch, 2023).

Revealing insights into the concept of the mission statement may be obtained by drawing on its original conceptualization. In this context, early perspectives on mission statements focused on the value the organization provides to customers and on viewing the organization from the customer's perspective. For example, Drucker (1974) illustrated this thought by defining the mission as the answer to the fundamental question “What is our business?”

Subsequent definitions reflect back on Drucker’s initial conceptualizations. For example, David (1989) describes a mission statement as “*an enduring statement of purpose that reveals product and market information about a firm’s operations*”. According to this definition, the purpose of the organization is reflected by focusing on the operational aspects of the organization. In other word, a mission statement identifies the unique, fundamental purpose that sets an organization apart from others of its types. It defines the scope of the organization’s operations in terms of product and market, stipulates the essential reason for the organization's existence, and creates an identity that transcends the boundaries placed on it by any individual (Pearce & David, 1987). Desmidt et al. (2011) define a mission statement as “*a formal document that articulates an organization’s distinct and enduring purpose*”. In addition, Cady et al. (2011) define mission statements as formalized statements that show why the organization exists, what it stands for, what it is striving to accomplish, and its plans to achieve its objectives. Rey and Bastons (2018) describe a mission statement as a “*formal expression of the scope of a company’s activity in terms of the value brought to its customers*”.

The concept of a mission statement can also be clarified by distinguishing it from other organizational guiding statements, such as vision and values. Compared to these statements, and in addition to the definitions previously established, the mission statement must be responsive to the question "What does an organization do?", focus on customers as key stakeholders, and maintain a present-oriented temporal focus (Brosch, 2023).

Thus, previous studies emphasize the processes and forms by which organizations create a unified expression of purpose through their mission statements, highlighting the importance of how a mission statement is formulated and the specific text that captures its essence. Generally, these studies conceptualize the mission statement as a tool that identifies what an organization does, what value it provides to customers, and what its business is.

Mission Statement Benefits

When organizations seek to define their strategies and goals, they must first define a mission statement before setting goals. This underscores the importance and benefits of the mission statement, which has grown to become a prerequisite for business practice and one of the most widely used management tools (Desmidt et al., 2011). Among the most important benefits of a mission statement are (Bart, 2001; Lynch, 2021; Thompson et al., 2022):

- *A framework for resource allocation:* The mission statement provides a general framework for allocating the organization's resources and facilitates decision-making by transcending temporary and individual needs and providing a common direction.
- *A tool for effective communication:* A mission statement can persuade stakeholders to provide the essential resources needed for core business operations by clarifying organizational direction and goals. Therefore, it plays an important role in communicating with both internal and external stakeholders.
- *A foundation for strategic development:* Only a clear definition of the organization's scope and purpose can enable the development of strategic objectives, the selection of strategic initiatives, and the prioritization of those initiatives. Hence, the mission statement plays a significant role in developing and implementing strategy in a sound, coherent, and understandable manner.
- *A mechanism for guiding individual behavior:* The mission statement provides a mechanism for coordinating and controlling the cultural and value-based behavior of employees toward strategic goals by offering a shared sense of values and purpose, along with a guiding and inspiring description.

Mission Statement Components

Previous studies have focused on several mission-related aspects, such as mission statement definition and components, as well as related organizational characteristics and context. Academics have adopted various approaches to this end (Bart, 2007; Desmidt et al., 2011). A review of the academic literature reveals that there is no consensus on the definition of a mission statement, and thus no consensus on its components, highlighting the need to analyze how to effectively define a mission statement and identify its core elements.

For instance, in his study on the components of a mission statement, Abell (1980) suggested that a mission statement should identify who customers are, what their needs are, and how they will be met. The seminal work of Pearce and David (1987) suggested that more comprehensive mission statements are linked with organizations that demonstrate higher performance and proposed eight groups of components that should be included in mission statements: (1) identification of target customers and markets; (2) specification of principal products/services; (3) identification of the geographic domain; (4) expression of commitment to survival, growth and profitability; (5) description of the organization's desired public image; (6) explanation of the organization's core technology; (7) statement of key elements in the organization's philosophy; and (8) description of the organization's self-concept. In addition, Bart (1997) proposed a new method based on stakeholder theory and identified five components: employees, customers, suppliers, society, and investors. This study uses the component-based characterization approach from the seminal work by Pearce and David (1987). Given that there is no agreement on a specific framework—and although Pearce and David's (1987) framework is several decades old—it remains widely used and accepted as an established foundation for studying the content of organizational mission statements (Alegre et al., 2018; Aljebrini et al., 2025; Lin et al., 2019). Thus, the high number of citations of Pearce and David's (1987) seminal paper reflects its continued relevance in organizational mission statement research. Moreover, research has shown its suitability for examining many contemporary issues, such as university technology transfer offices (e.g., Fitzgerald & Cunningham, 2016), as well as social entrepreneurship and ESG (e.g., Mion et al., 2024).

Mission Statement and Performance

Scholarly efforts have contributed to studying the impact of mission statement content and components on organizational performance (see Table 1). However,

studies that focus on the impact of a sound mission statement on performance are often limited to traditional metrics and do not consider performance related to social, environmental, and economic development (i.e., SO performance), despite growing global interest in this area (Mion et al., 2024). In addition, inconclusive findings have been reported in this literature (e.g., Alawneh, 2015; Alegre et al., 2018; Aljebrini et al., 2025; Baetz & Bart, 1998; Bart, 2001; Dermol, 2012; Kim et al., 2024; Mion et al., 2024; Palmer & Short, 2008; Sidhu, 2003). Furthermore, academic efforts focused on analyzing mission statements and their impact on sustainability and international ranking (IR) in the context of the HEI sector—and in GCC countries in particular—are very limited (Alegre et al., 2018).

For example, Pearce and David (1987) found a positive association between three mission components (company philosophy, self-concept, and public image) and high-performing companies. Conversely, other academic works revealed a negative relationship between these same components and company performance, as reported by O'Gorman and Doran (1999). Furthermore, Bartkus et al. (2006) examined the relationship between mission statement components and performance (ROA and ROS) for Fortune Global 500 firms. Their results indicated a positive association between specific components (employees and society) and performance, while no association was found between other components (customers, investors and suppliers) and performance.

In the context of HEIs, Palmer and Short (2008) examined the association between mission statements and metrics of business school characteristics, including performance indicators such as operating budget per full-time faculty, undergraduate and graduate rankings, and percentage of faculty holding a Ph.D. Their study, based on a sample of 408 US colleges of business, found a significant relationship between the vector of eight mission components proposed by Pearce and David (1987) and performance. Similarly, the study by Jungblut and Jungblut (2017) analyzed mission statements from German universities. Their results indicated differences among universities, but no relationship was found between mission statement components and performance. Likewise, Fitzgerald and Cunningham (2016), utilizing Pearce and David (1987) eight components, investigated the association between mission components and performance—operationalized by the number of patents granted—for university technology transfer offices. Their findings showed a positive relationship between the number of mission statement components and performance, with two components (customers and products/services) emerging as dominant.

These mixed results concerning the impact of mission statement content and components on organizational performance may result from several factors. One key challenge is the variation in how performance is measured or operationalized. Furthermore, the lack of agreement on the definition of a mission statement—and, consequently, its components—plays another important role in this regard, as studies may emphasize certain components over others. In addition, differences in research design and adopted approaches/methodologies may lead to discrepancies in the resulting findings.

Methodology

Data and Sample

This study seeks to examine the components of mission statements of ranked HEIs in the GCC countries, using a qualitative approach based on the Pearce and David (1987) framework. To achieve this, the study reviewed the academic literature and accordingly adopted a qualitative methodology combining content analysis and QCA.

The GCC countries are witnessing an increasing focus on economic diversification to reduce their dependence on oil revenues. One important approach adopted by these countries is leveraging the role of HEIs in development and social advancement (Sowmya et al., 2010; Syed et al., 2023). Furthermore, HEIs in the GCC region are among those experiencing significant improvements in performance (QS, 2025a).

Since it was not possible to obtain the required data from unranked HEIs in the GCC, the focus of the present study was on all HEIs ranked in the 2025 QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) Sustainability Rankings (39 institutions) (QS, 2025b). The QS Sustainability Rankings is a comparative assessment of universities and colleges compiled by the British higher education analytics company (Quacquarelli Symonds). For each institution, descriptive and characteristic-related information (size, focus, and research intensity) was obtained from the 2025 QS World University Rankings document (QS, 2025a). Additionally, information about the mission statements of the institutions was obtained directly from their websites. Lastly, data on HEI performance were obtained from the QS Sustainability Rankings for social and environmental impact metrics, while information on industry and IR metrics was sourced from the THE (Times Higher Education) University

Rankings (Times Higher Education, 2025). The final sample comprised 39 HEIs. Table 2 highlights some of the sample characteristics.

Table 2
Sample Characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Institution size	Small	9	23
	Medium	8	21
	Large and extra large	22	56
	Total	39	100
Focus	Specialist	6	15
	Focused	8	21
	Comprehensive and full comprehensive	25	64
	Total	39	100
Research intensity	Low	0	0
	Medium	4	10
	High and very high	35	90
	Total	39	100
Country	Saudi Arabia	25	64
	United Arab Emirates	10	25
	Qatar	1	3
	Kuwait	2	5
	Bahrain	0	0
	Oman	1	3
	Total	39	100

Notes: size (large and extra-large: ≥ 12000 students, medium: ≥ 5000 and < 12000 students, small: < 5000 students), focus: the range of an institution's program offerings (specialist: ≤ 2 faculty areas, focused: 3 or 4 faculty areas, comprehensive and full comprehensive: ≥ 5 faculty areas), research intensity: four levels of research activity evaluated based on the number of documents retrievable from Scopus during the five-year period preceding the application of the classification.

Data Analysis

The current study investigated which mission statement components were present in the selected sample using content analysis as the first step of the analysis. Content analysis was adopted as the approach, as it enables the examination of written messages (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005; Moss et al., 2011).

Table 3
Mission Statement Content and the Representing Keywords

Component	Keywords
Target consumers and markets	Practitioners, consumer, user, donor*, client, student, alumni, researcher customer, purchaser, undergraduate, graduate, citizens, residents, employers, beneficiary*, recipient*, individual*, people, man, men, woman, women, youth, community*, firms, non-profit organizations, administration, government
Products and services	Product, service, degree, program*, knowledge management, education, teaching, learning, training, opportunity*, technology*, research, scholarship, business and economic development, lifelong-learning, innovation, solution*
Geography	Geographic area, worldwide/international market, region*, country*, tradition, heritage, history
Commitment to survival, growth, and profitability	Grow*, profitability, value creation, excellence, success, survival, benefits, advantage, socio-economic development, productivity
Core technology	Science, technology*, wireless, distance-learning, video, Internet, web, audio
Public image	Respect, responsibility*, society*, citizen, environment*, reputation, public
Self-concept (self-image)	Lead*, ability*, capability*, energy*, responsive or treat*, strength*, foremost, largest, pacesetter, authority, innovate*, productive*, preeminent
Philosophy and values	CSR, cultural development, responsibly, well-being, sustainable development, common good, environment, generate employment, ethics, social needs, environmental protection

Note: *the root and its variants were used.

To identify each of the components, a list of key terms was used to avoid subjectivity, based on previous related literature (e.g., Bartkus et al., 2006; Jungblut & Jungblut, 2017). Table 3 presents examples of these terms. Following the work of Pearce and David (1987) in scrutinizing the presence of mission statement components, a value of “1” was assigned when the component (see Table 4) was present in the mission, and “0” otherwise. A team of three independent researchers conducted the analysis. The final evaluation was reached based on consensus among the raters. The inter-rater reliability coefficient indicated consistency among independent ratings (i.e., 0.815) (Neuendorf, 2017). Figure 1 depicts the distribution of mission statement components.

Table 4
Variables Description and Type

Antecedent condition	Description	Type
Customer	Dichotomous variable that specifies the extent to which the target consumers and markets are addressed in the mission statement	Crisp value
Products and services	Dichotomous variable that specifies the extent to which the products and services are addressed in the mission statement	Crisp value
Geography	Dichotomous variable that specifies the extent to which the geographic domain is addressed in the mission statement	Crisp value
Commitment to survival, growth, and profitability	Dichotomous variable that specifies the extent to which the commitment to survival, growth, and profitability is addressed in the mission statement	Crisp value
Technology	Dichotomous variable that specifies the extent to which the core technology is addressed in the mission statement	Crisp value
Public image	Dichotomous variable that specifies the extent to which the public image is addressed in the mission statement	Crisp value
Self-concept	Dichotomous variable that specifies the extent to which the self-concept (self-image) is addressed in the mission statement	Crisp value

Cont. Table 4
Variables Description and Type

Antecedent condition	Description	Type
Philosophy and values	Dichotomous variable that specifies the extent to which philosophy and values are addressed in the mission statement	Crisp value
Size	Continuous variable that specifies the size of the institution	Fuzzy value
Focus	Continuous variable that specifies the range of the institution's program offerings	Fuzzy value
Research	Continuous variable that specifies the research intensity	Fuzzy value
Social	Continuous variable that specifies the institution's performance in terms of social impact	Fuzzy value
Environment	Continuous variable that specifies the institution's performance in terms of environmental impact	Fuzzy value
Industry	Continuous variable that specifies the institution's performance in terms of industry (income and patents)	Fuzzy value
Rank	Continuous variable that specifies the institution's international ranking	Fuzzy value

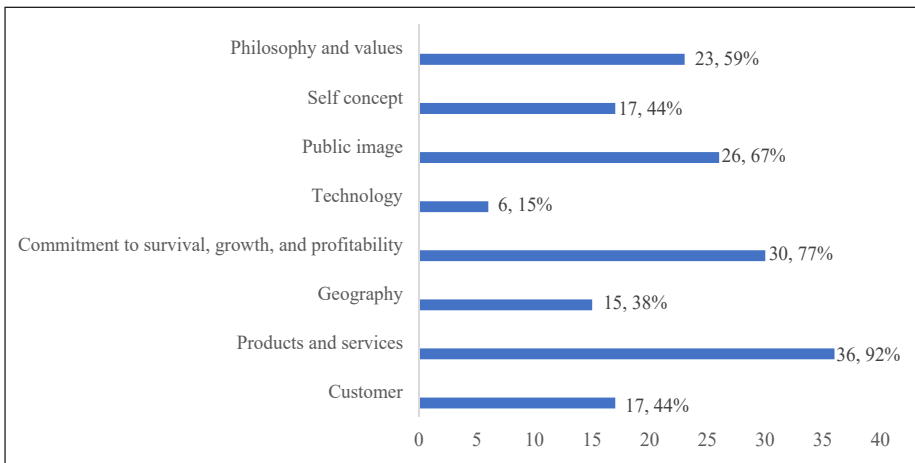


Figure 1: Distribution of the Mission Statement Components of HEIs

In the second step of the analysis, QCA was selected as the most appropriate approach for conducting the empirical study, given the research purpose and sample size (Ragin, 2014). This approach has several advantages, such as providing a comprehensive assessment by discovering the causal combinations of antecedents that predict outcomes, simultaneously combining qualitative and quantitative elements, and being suitable for small sample sizes. Specifically, QCA analyzes relationships that detect configurations which might lead to the same outcome. These configurations are based on a combination of factors that can be positive, negative, or absent. These factors are called antecedent conditions (Haefner et al., 2023; Kumar et al., 2022). The analysis was performed using QCA software (version 4.1).

Results

The first stage of QCA is to calibrate (transform) factors into crisp or fuzzy sets. The 90th, 50th, and 10th percentiles were used as thresholds for full membership (0.95), cross-over point (0.5), and full non-membership (0.05), respectively. Table 5 illustrates how the factors have been calibrated.

Table 5
Definition of Variables and Calibration Thresholds

Antecedent Condition/Outcome	Full Member-ship	Crossover Point	Full Non-Mem-ber-ship
Customer	1		0
Products and services	1		0
Geography	1		0
Commitment to survival, growth, and profitability	1		0
Technology	1		0
Public image	1		0
Self-concept	1		0
Philosophy and values	1		0
Size*	1	0.5	0
Focus**	1	0.5	0

Cont. Table 5
Definition of Variables and Calibration Thresholds

Antecedent Condition/Outcome	Full Membership	Crossover Point	Full Non-Membership
Research***	1	0.5	0
Social	72.54	57.2	35.22
Environment	62.02	36	22.62
Industry	73.92	32	17.98
Rank	255	550	1100

Notes: *size (1: large and extra-large, 0.5: medium, 0: small), **focus (1: specialist, 0.5: focused, 0: comprehensive and full comprehensive), ***research intensity (1: high and very high, 0.5: medium, 0: low).

To contribute to the emergence of different expected patterns in shaping performance, three control factors were added in addition to the mission statement components, as shown in Table 5. These factors are size, focus, and research intensity. Next, for each antecedent condition related to a specific outcome, necessity analysis was conducted. Accordingly, the analysis was performed four times, and the outcomes of the necessity analysis showed adequate results, as none of the antecedent conditions exhibited a consistency score above the cut-off value of 0.9 (Greckhamer et al., 2018; Schneider et al., 2010).

The next stage involved performing a sufficiency analysis to detect the configurations that lead to the outcome and to produce a logical reduction of statements (Schneider et al., 2010). A model is considered acceptable with a minimum coverage (indicating the empirical relevance of a solution) of 0.45 and consistency (which represents the extent to which cases sharing the same conditions exhibit the same outcome) of 0.8 (Ragin, 2009). The results of the intermediate solution were adopted following Michael (2015). Based on the selected outcomes of the study, four models were analyzed. The first model addresses social impact, while the second focuses on environmental impact. The third model illustrates the industry outcome, and the fourth relates to the ranking (IR) outcome. Table 6 and Figure 3 depict the results of the sufficiency analysis. The current study focuses on the two causal paths with the highest raw coverage for each model, based on the suggestion of Ragin (2009). Consequently, eight configurations are presented—two for each outcome.

As can be observed, different pathways can lead to the desired outcomes. In all models, the solution coverage and solution consistency scores exceed the suggested cut-off values (0.45 and 0.8, respectively); accordingly, the approach is appropriate. Specifically, the solution coverage is 0.5039 and the solution consistency is 0.96 for model 1. For model 2, the values are 0.5123 and 0.92, respectively. Model 3 has a solution coverage of 0.4993 and a solution consistency of 0.9155, while Model 4 shows values of 0.6542 and 0.9377, respectively. Similarly, the consistency values are above 0.8, and the raw coverage scores are high, indicating that the data align well with the configurations in all eight paths (recipes) that emerged from the analysis.

In general, the results show that the most important mission statement components positively related to the desired performance are products and services, followed by self-concept, and commitment to survival, growth, and profitability. This pattern is also generally true for highly research-intensive HEIs. Configurations 1 and 2 represent the combination of factors that lead to social impact performance. According to these configurations, the social impact metric is high for large HEIs with a comprehensive focus, high research intensity, and mission statements comprising products and services and self-concept components.

Similarly, configurations 3 and 4 signify the combination of factors that lead to environmental impact performance. According to these configurations, the environmental impact metric is high for large HEIs with a comprehensive focus, high research intensity, and mission statements comprising products and services, and self-concept components, regardless of the inclusion of the commitment to survival, growth, and profitability component. However, the findings also indicate that small HEIs perform better on the environmental impact metric when they have high research intensity, a specialist focus, and mission statements comprising geography, commitment to survival, growth, and profitability, self-concept, and philosophy and values components—regardless of the inclusion of the products and services component.

In addition, Configurations 5 and 6 show the combination of factors that lead to institutional performance in terms of industry (income and patents). According to these configurations, the industry metric is high for large HEIs with a comprehensive focus, high research intensity, and mission statements including products and services, commitment to survival, growth, and profitability, and self-concept components. In contrast, small HEIs perform better on the industry metric when they have a specialist focus, high research intensity, and mission statements in-

cluding geography, commitment to survival, growth, and profitability, self-concept, and philosophy and values components.

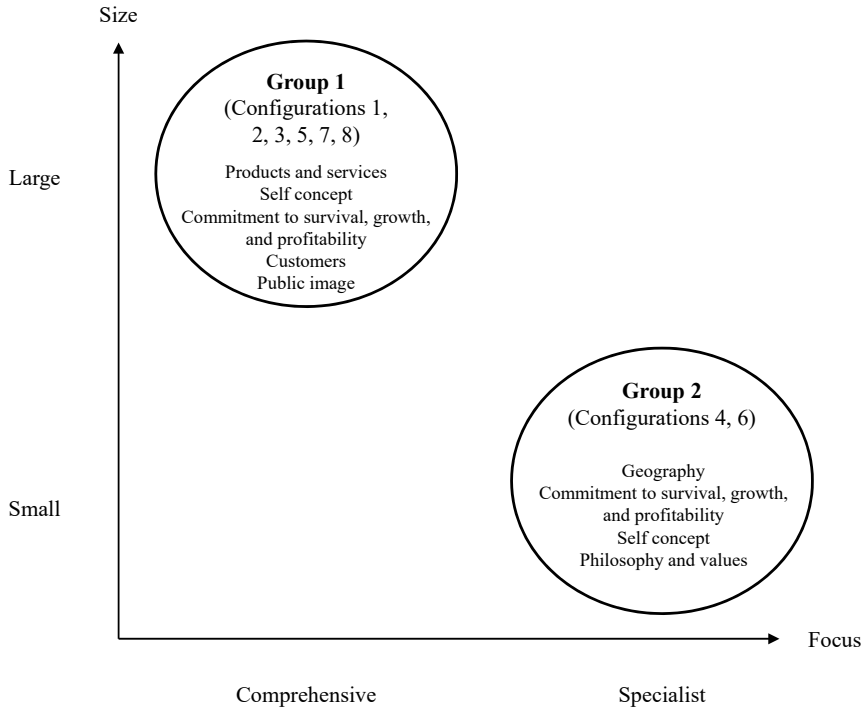


Figure 2: Configurations Explain the Desired Outcomes for HEIs

Moreover, configurations 7 and 8 represent the combinations of factors that lead to IR performance. According to these configurations, the IR metric is high for large HEIs with a comprehensive focus, highly intensive research, and mission statements comprising customers, products and services, commitment to survival, growth, and profitability, public image, and self-concept components, regardless of the inclusion of the philosophy and values component.

Finally, it appears that the research intensity factor is not a determinant for classifying HEI patterns, while size and focus factors can be used for this purpose. Therefore, considering the results and taking all configurations into account, HEIs can be classified into two main groups: (1) large HEIs with low focus, and (2) small HEIs with high focus. Figure 2 demonstrates these groups and the recommended components for each. Specifically, for HEIs in group 1 (large and comprehensive), configurations 1, 2, 3, 5, 7, and 8 serve as the best benchmarks.

For example, one of the HEIs that represents the profile of this group was established 28 years ago; it has five branches in cities surrounding the headquarters and 31,953 students. The organization's mission is: "we are committed to providing distinguished student-centered learning experiences to prepare them for effective engagement in key projects and the local community within an innovative and attractive environment." As can be observed, the organization's mission specifies the target customers (students), indicates products and services (student-centered learning experiences), highlights commitment to survival, growth, and profitability (committed to providing distinguished student-centered learning experiences), specifies public image (to prepare them for effective engagement in key projects and the local community), and defines self-concept (within an innovative and attractive environment). Hence, this organization fits well with configuration 8. Generally, considering other HEIs that belong to this group, it can be noted that the main emphasis is placed on products/services, self-concept, commitment to survival, growth, and profitability, customers, and public image. Accordingly, efforts should be directed toward improving market awareness, identifying the organization's competitive advantage, defining how the organization commits to performance objectives, and clarifying how it will be responsible to society and addresses environmental concerns. Configurations 4 and 6 might be the best benchmarks for HEIs in Group 2 (small and specialist). For instance, one of the HEIs that matches the profile of this group was established in 1989; it specializes in science and technology, has 13 specialized research centers, and 4,099 students. The organization's mission is: "catalyze growth in the rapidly evolving knowledge-based economy of our city and country, being a destination of choice for world-class education, research, innovation, and enterprise." As can be observed, the organization's mission specifies geography (our city and country); highlights commitment to survival, growth, and profitability (world-class education, research, innovation, and enterprise); defines philosophy and values (catalyze growth in the rapidly evolving knowledge-based economy); and specifies self-concept (being a destination of choice and enterprise). Hence, this organization fits well with configurations 4 and 6. In general, it can be concluded that HEIs within this group should take into consideration the geographic domain, commitment to survival, growth, and profitability, philosophy and values, and self-concept. Building on this, the mission statement should clearly define geographical scope, express commitment to performance objectives, specify basic values and priorities, and identify a distinctive competence or competitive advantage.

Table 6
Analysis of Sufficient Antecedent Conditions for Outcome

Outcome	Config-uration no.	Cus-tomer	Prod-ucts and Services	Geog-raphy	Mission Components				Tech-nology	Pub-lic Image	Self-con-cept	Philos-ophy and Values	Size	Control		Coverage		Con-sist-ency	
					Commi-ment to Survival, Growth, and Profitability									Focus	Re-search	Raw	Unique		
Model 1: So-cial impact	#1	○	•	○	○	○	•	○	•	○	•	○	•	○	•	0.1228	0.0633	0.81	
	#2	○	•	○	○	○	○	•	•	•	•	•	○	•	0.1177	0.0582	0.93		
	Solution coverage: 0.5039																		
Model 2: Environmen-tal impact	#3	○	•	○	○	○	•	○	•	○	•	○	•	○	•	0.2061	0.2461	0.85	
	#4	○	•	•	•	•	○	○	○	•	•	○	•	•	•	0.1061	0.0559	0.97	
	Solution coverage: 0.5123																		
Model 3: Industry	#5	○	•	○	•	○	○	○	○	•	○	•	○	•	○	•	0.3104	0.2681	0.88
	Solution consistency: 0.92																		

Cont. Table 6
Analysis of Sufficient Antecedent Conditions for Outcome

Outcome	Mission Components										Control		Coverage		
	Config-uration no.	Cus-tomer Services	Prod-ucts and Services	Geog-raphy	Comm-itment to Survival, Growth, and Profitability	Tech-nology	Pub-lic Image	Self-con-cept	Philos-ophy and Values	Size	Focus	Re-search	Raw	Unique	Con-sist-ency
Model 4: Ranking	#6	○	○	•	•	○	○	•	•	○	•	•	0.2314	0.2046	0.99
	Solution coverage: 0.4993														
	Solution consistency: 0.9155														
	#7	•	•	○	•	○	•			•	○	•	0.1825	0.0823	0.9133
	#8	•	•		•	○	•	•		•	○	•	0.1596	0.0592	0.8601
	Solution coverage: 0.6542														
	Solution consistency: 0.9377														

Notes: ● denotes the presence of the condition, “○” shows its absence, and blank spaces represent ambiguity of the condition (Ragin, 2009).

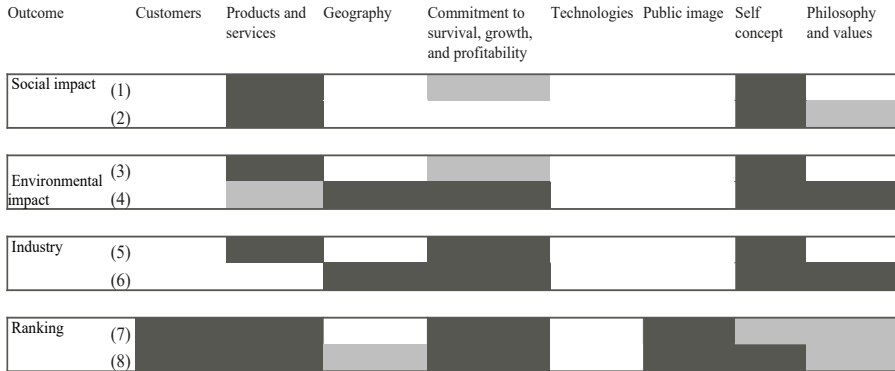


Figure 3: Summary of Findings: Empirically Relevant Causal Paths (with Eight Conditions: Mission Components)

Notes: Dark gray denotes the presence of the condition, light gray shows ambiguity of the condition, and blank spaces represent its absence. The numbers in parentheses refer to configuration numbers.

Discussion and Conclusions

Discussion

The mission statement is an important strategic tool, as reported in strategic management studies, because it plays a key role as a framework for allocating resources, serves as a means of effective communication, is considered a foundation for other strategic components, and helps control individual behavior. Furthermore, the SO performance of HEIs and their international rankings can lead to competitive advantage (Breznik & Law, 2019; Claudy et al., 2016). According to Alegre et al. (2018), little attention has been paid to analyzing how HEIs express this important strategic guiding tool using a configuration-based approach, and how it relates to performance. This study contributes to filling this gap by exploring the form of mission statements for ranked HEIs in the GCC countries and how this relates to their SO and IR performance using the QCA approach.

The findings of this study demonstrate the breadth of the mission statement for HEIs, the most important mission statement components used by HEIs, the linkages between mission statement components and performance, patterns of selecting mission components according to the characteristics of these institutions, and guidelines for selecting mission components to achieve higher performance.

The results reveal the breadth and diversity of how organizations express their mission statements. All eight mission statement components appeared in different ways and combinations, as shown in Figure 1. Furthermore, this indicates the relevance and comprehensiveness of Pearce and David (1987) categorization of mission statements, given its ability to accommodate different formulations.

In particular, the results underline that the most present component in the mission statements of HEIs was “products and services”, reflecting their tendency to emphasize this element in shaping strategic direction. One possible explanation is the organizations’ recognition of the mission statement’s role in defining the scope of the HEI’s strategic direction (product and service offering); this clarifies an important aspect of what the organization is fundamentally intended to do (Whittington et al., 2024). This component is followed by “commitment to survival, growth, and profitability”, which indicates the desire to communicate what produces value for key stakeholders. The least-cited component was “core technology”, which refers to the key technologies that enable the HEI’s products and services. These results align with several studies on mission statement components (e.g., Pearce & David, 1987).

In addition, the study confirms the relationship between performance (SO and IR performance) and certain mission statement components. It is recognized that this relationship is indirect and depends on a number of other factors. This finding underscores the importance of the mission statement and its value to organizations. Specifically, the results demonstrate that the manner in which the mission is articulated is linked to the achievement of sustainability and international excellence objectives. These findings are consistent with previous studies (Berbegal-Mirabent et al., 2020; Palmer & Short, 2008) and with what some holistic management frameworks for HEIs (such as the Baldrige excellence framework) have identified regarding the role of the mission in achieving institutional success (NIST, 2023).

Additionally, patterns of formulating mission statement components according to the different characteristics of HEIs that pursue higher performance may emphasize the components of commitment to survival, growth, and profitability as well as self-concept.

Also, the mission statement components of successful HEIs (i.e., those achieving SO and international institutional excellence (IR)) do not hold equal importance. Their relevance depends on the characteristics of these institutions (such as

size and focus) and how these characteristics are consolidated, as shown in Table 6. This suggests that high-performing HEIs in sustainability and institutional excellence follow different strategies. Accordingly, Figure 2 provides guidance for HEIs when defining their mission.

Moreover, the transition of small HEIs to large ones is typically accompanied by a shift in focus from high to low. In these circumstances, it appears that, in addition to the components required in various contexts, these HEIs may benefit from shifting their emphasis from the mission statement components of geography and philosophy and values to those of products and services, customers, and public image.

Thus, in terms of theoretical advancement, the current study contributes to existing knowledge and offers new insights. First, it advances strategic management studies by extending researchers' efforts and illuminating the articulation of mission statements and their link to SO and IR performance. This particularly relates to studies that focus on analyzing mission statement components and understanding related organizational behavior (e.g., Aljebrini et al., 2025; Kim et al., 2024), those focused on developing mission statements (e.g., Koch et al., 2015), and studies examining the relationship between mission statements and performance (e.g., Macedo et al., 2016). More broadly, it complements research in strategic management that explores other ways of conveying organizational goals (e.g., Aguilera et al., 2024; George et al., 2023), given that the mission statement is one such vehicle. Second, it adds value to studies focused on the higher education sector (e.g., Fitzgerald & Cunningham, 2016; Jungblut & Jungblut, 2017). The results of this study provide insights expected to be useful for HEIs formulating mission statements aimed at achieving higher performance (i.e., SO and IR performance); and offer new knowledge of how HEIs in the GCC countries have approached this task. Third, another aspect of the study's contribution is its response to calls in the mission statement literature for more rigorous and alternative methodologies. Prior research has been dominated by case studies and basic descriptive statistics or mean comparison *t*-tests (Alegre et al., 2018)—i.e., a non-configuration approach. This study adopted a methodology combining content analysis and QCA to provide a configuration-based approach.

Managerial Implications

The study's findings are also important for practitioners involved in formulating the strategy and mission statements of HEIs and monitoring their perfor-

mance, as well as for researchers interested in studying how mission statements are formulated and expressed, and their relationship to performance.

Considering the pivotal role HEIs can play in national and international social and economic development, on the one hand, and the pivotal role of mission statements as strategic guiding tools without which objectives cannot be established, this study makes an important contribution to knowledge in a rarely explored area by academic efforts—exploring the patterns through which mission statements are formulated and how these patterns relate to performance. It also focuses on two other important aspects: SO and IR performance, along with control factors that may affect the mission-performance relationship.

Practitioners should be aware of the benefits that a properly crafted mission statement can bring. On the one hand, it is important that the mission statement reflects the key elements of strategic direction and targeted performance, and that it be revised as necessary. Failure to do so may negatively impact the development of other strategic elements and the chances of achieving targeted success. On the other hand, the mission statement has critical communication and persuasive power for various internal and external stakeholders. Understanding the positive impact of a properly crafted mission statement on performance encourages practitioners to use it effectively for this purpose. Also, the process of formulating a mission statement should not be underestimated or copied from other parties. The study's findings demonstrate that there is no single ideal formulation of a mission statement for all organizations. In this regard, the study provides practitioners with guiding suggestions for formulating mission statements to achieve higher performance. It also urges practitioners to consider developing a strategy development framework that enables planning teams to articulate mission statements based on organizational characteristics and overall direction. Furthermore, the study results demonstrate that mission statement length is not associated with higher performance. Therefore, practitioners should avoid practices that imply a longer and more comprehensive message is preferable. On the contrary, this may negatively impact message clarity and the ability to focus efforts. More specifically, for benchmarking and strategic planning, decision-makers in HEIs within the GCC countries can benefit from the guidance provided when defining their mission. This may help them address region-specific challenges (e.g., rapid HE expansion, internationalization pressures) through a better understanding of GCC HEIs' strategic positioning via their mission statements. For instance, ranked GCC HEIs that are large and have a comprehensive focus should emphasize the

“products and services” and “self-concept” components in their mission statements to enhance social impact.

Limitations and Directions for Future Research

This study makes an important contribution to understanding mission statement formulation and its relationship to performance. However, as with other academic studies, it is not without limitations that open up avenues for future research. Although the findings of this and previous studies affirm the association between mission statements and performance, they do not reveal the nature of the factors influencing this relationship, as it is not direct; nor do they explore reverse causality (e.g., performance influencing mission articulation). Therefore, further research is needed to investigate the factors and mechanisms influencing this relationship, using methods such as mixed-methods research, longitudinal studies, or interviews with HEI administrators. In addition, sustainability-oriented and international excellence (i.e., IR) metrics play an important role in achieving competitive advantage and institutional success for HEIs, but other metrics that may compete with these are also important. Therefore, exploring the relationship between the mission statement and these competing metrics in the context of HEIs will deepen our understanding of the role of the mission statement in performance. Moreover, Pearce and David’s (1987) framework was adopted as a characterization approach for mission components. Although it is a well-established framework, future studies might consider comparing it with other competing frameworks to analyze how well it responds to modern management challenges (e.g., ESG, societal impact). Future research efforts could also build on the study’s findings by addressing questions that have not been directly investigated, such as those related to mission–performance linkage theories and broader strategic management or organizational identity theories.

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