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The Status of Quality Assurance in Two Lebanese Universities

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Abstract. This study was set to assess and analyze the status of two private university quality measures such as the quality audit, control, and ranking in Lebanon. In addition, it was set to discuss and evaluate the programs given by these universities. Finally, it was set to synthesize and analyze different tools that could be applied on the quality services these universities have. The sample of this study is two private universities in Lebanon where interviews were conducted separately with 6 deans, 6 chairpersons, and 6 coordinators. In addition to the universities, plenty of information was taken directly from the Ministry of Education and Higher Education of the Republic of Lebanon.

Thus, qualitative data analyses were conducted. Main results showed that one of the main aims of both universities is to get new students registered and have better quality of education. They always take into consideration the quality audit, control, and ranking, which allow them to be ranked from the top universities in Lebanon. One University has been accredited in 2015, which makes it necessary to follow up with the quality control; the second university is still working on getting accredited.

The study concluded with recommendations addressed to private universities in Lebanon.

Keywords: *higher education, education, quality, quality measures, quality audit, quality control, and quality ranking.*

Introduction

To begin with, the question of quality management has been a great worry for higher education institutions. Nowadays, we live in a world where new universities are becom-

ing available in the market. This is making the choice of choosing the best university become harder. People started having a wider choice and the decision of choosing the best university that offers their children the best education is becoming complicated.

Thus, the purpose of this study is to assess and analyze private universities' status of qualities measures such as the quality audit, control, and ranking, to discuss and evaluate the programs given by this university, and to synthesize and analyze different tools that could be applied on the quality services these universities have.

The objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study are: (1) To assess and analyze Lebanese private universities status of quality measures such as the quality audit, control, and ranking; (2) To discuss and evaluate the programs given by this university; and (3) To synthesize and analyze different tools that could be applied on the quality services these universities have.

Research Questions

The research questions of this study are:
1. To which extend do Lebanese private universities rely on quality measures in evaluating their programs?
2. How frequent do Lebanese private universities go over their education standards in order to be ranked from the top universities in Lebanon?
3. Do Lebanese private universities rely on specific quality management in recruiting their professors?

Literature of the study

All around the world and particularly in many countries, the issue of quality management has been a great concern for higher education institutions. In addition, in a world where more universities became available in the market, the choice of choosing the best university became harder. People are largely spoilt for choice. How does one decide which university is better than others? How does one decide which university supports its students with the best teaching methodologies and requirements? To emphasize, higher education institutions are emphasizing assessing their quality. Accordingly, Becket and Brookes (2005) say that there is a need for effective quality management which include a growing climate of increasing accountability, an expansion in the size of student populations, an increasingly diverse student population as a result of widening participation initiatives and targeting international markets, diminishing resources by which to deliver programmes of study, greater expectations of students as paying customers, more flexible

educational provision at both undergraduate and postgraduate level, and an increase in collaborative provision between institutions (p. 1).

We always hear from the ministers of higher education in several conferences about the drawbacks of the qualities the public and especially the private universities supply their consumers with. To clarify, consumers refer to the students in the case of studying quality measures since they are the people who benefit from the outcomes of the universities. The term quality is not defined in a clear way. Quality is a concept that lacks a common definition that could be applicable in all fields. The guiding principle is that the more complex the object under quality measurement is, the more difficult it is to come up with a satisfactory definition (Parri, 2006). Cheng and Tam (1997) state that "education quality is a rather vague and controversial concept" (p. 23). The reason why it is not possible to find the one and only definition for higher education in literature lies in the fact that higher education is one of these objects. Education quality can be analyzed from a set of elements that represent "the input, process and output of the education system, provides services that completely satisfy both internal and external strategic constituencies by meeting their explicit and implicit expectations" (Becket & Brookes, 2005, p. 2). If higher education institutions are considered as systems; then one should study their input, process, and output. Several factors may contribute to the decision process; however, the only factor that differentiates itself and is a direct experience of the students is the service quality the university has. In other words, in the education sector, teaching is a service that can be measured while learning is an experience. The improvement of higher education service quality lies in the ability of the organization to promote different standards. These standards lie under the different "decision-making systems, operating systems, and human resource practices" (Khodayari & Khodayari, 2011). According to Harvey and Green (1993), quality undergoes different dimensions. These dimensions are excellence, fitness for purpose, consumer satisfaction approach, basic standards approach, zero errors, reshaping, quality threshold, and value for money.

Research Tools of the Study

This study adapts the qualitative methodology approach. First, it bases its quality assessment and analysis on different documents taken from two Lebanese Universities and the Ministry of Education and Higher Education in Lebanon. Second, it focuses on deep qualitative thinking where interviews are conducted with several administrators such as the deans, chairpersons, and coordinators of different departments, regarding the programs given in different subject areas in various Lebanese higher education institutions. Finally, in addition to the interviews, the study evaluates the programs supplied in different departments in both private universities through evaluating their different syllabuses.

Findings and Discussion of the Study

As a reminder, the purpose of this study is to assess and analyze private universities status of qualities measures such as the quality audit, control, and ranking to discuss and evaluate the programs given by this university, and to synthesize and analyze different tools that could be applied on the quality services these universities have. This study aims to answer 4 main research questions. Summary of each data analyses is discussed in this part of this paper.

To begin with the first and second research questions, which are "to which extend does Lebanese private universities rely on quality measures in evaluating their programs?" and "how frequent do Lebanese private universities go over their education standards in order to be ranked from the top universities in Lebanon?" the deans, chairpersons, and coordinators of both private universities agreed that the universities should always enhance their quality measures and should always reconsider their programs in order to stay ranked as the top universities in Lebanon. This goes in line with the review of this study where research stresses on the fact that there is a need for effective quality management which include a growing climate of increasing accountability. In addition to that, they agreed that it is of great importance to always be updated; especially that they are in the process of being accredited and one university received their accreditation in year 2015 and will renew it after 5 years under certain standards. One of the professors said while being interviewed: "Being one of the few universities that got their accreditation in Lebanon is a responsibility. This is why we should try all our best to keep it; especially that members of the accreditation organization will be visiting us regularly and digging deep in our documents, syllabi, and exams."

As for the third research question which is "do Lebanese private universities rely on specific quality management in recruiting their professors?", the findings go in line with the review of this study where Khodayari and Khodayari (2011) discuss the fact that the improvement of higher education service quality lies in the ability of the organization to promote different standards. These standards lie under the different "decision-making systems, operating systems, and human resource practices. The professors of the first private universities agreed that they don't recruit any new professors unless they have PhD degrees in the field they are going to teach. However, when it comes to part-time instructors, the universities don't ask for PhD degrees; however, MA degrees will be sufficient. On the other hand0221, two deans from two departments in the other university stressed on the idea that both full-timers and part-timers should be professors because the major courses need professors in order to be able to teach effectively and be able to enhance the students' knowledge. The third department administrators did not stress on recruiting professors. A senior instructor can teach the same course as a full-time professor.

Conclusion and Recommendations of the Study

As a conclusion, and as Harvey and Green (1993) explain, quality control undergoes different dimensions. These dimensions are excellence, fitness for purpose, consumer satisfaction approach, basic standards approach, zero errors, reshaping, quality threshold, and value for money. It is concluded from this study that university administrators do care about their reputation and accreditation progress. They do not emphasis a lot on the importance of the quality of education inside the classrooms. They still recruit instructors with MA degrees to teach courses that are not even related to their major. Even though these university administrators claim that the quality of education inside the classroom is a priority and that the students are the center of the education system, they unfortunately do not a follow-up system to monitor the teaching skills used by the teachers inside the classrooms.

In the light of this study, several recommendations may be mentioned for the field of educational administration and quality assurance. To begin with, it is recommended that private universities in Lebanon take into consideration the degrees when hiring the full-time and part-time instructors. If a multi-section course being offered require PhD holders; then all the instructors teaching this course should be holding the same degree. This will minimize the problem that some students might be taught by a PhD holder and another section might be taught by a junior instructor for example. Also, it is recommended that university administrators take into consideration and monitor the teaching skills of the instructors. Research show that Professional development programs show positive impact on enhancing the teaching skills and knowledge and enhancing the teaching quality and allows teachers to integrate new teaching methodologies into their university classroom (Al Chibani, 2016). Thus, such programs can be conducted regularly in order to enhance the teaching skills of the teachers and keep them updated with new methodologies and raise the quality of the education. Another recommendation to be taken into consideration is the students' feedback and evaluation at the end of each semester. The objective evaluation of the students can be considered as a tool for renewing instructors' contracts. Although this not previously mentioned in the study, it is still a major point for renewing instructors' contracts. This recommendation can lead to a new study in the future.

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Kokybės užtikrinimas dviejuose Libano universitetuose ir jo poveikis studentų priėmimui

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Santrauka

Šio tyrimo tikslas yra išanalizuoti ir įvertinti dviejų privačių universitetų kokybės užtikrinimo priemones, tokias kaip kokybės auditas, kontrolė ir reitingas Libane, ir jų poveikį studentų priėmimui. Be to, siekiama aptarti ir įvertinti šių universitetų studijų programas. Galiausiai sukuriamos ir analizuojamos įvairios priemonės, kurios galėtų būti taikomos paslaugų kokybei šiuose universitetuose užtikrinti. Darbe tiriami privatūs Libano universitetai, kuriuose atskirai buvo apklausti 6 dekanai, 6 studijų programų vadovai ir 6 koordinatoriai. Taip pat remiamasi Libano Respublikos švietimo ir aukštojo mokslo ministerijos pateikiama informacija.

Atliktos kokybinių duomenų analizės rezultatai parodė, kad abu universitetai deda didžiules pastangas siekdami priimti naujus studentus. Jie visada atsižvelgia į kokybės auditą, kontrolę ir įvertinimą. Tai leidžia jiems būti vieniems geriausių universitetų Libane. Vienas universitetas buvo akredituotas 2015 m., todėl jam būtina tęsti kokybės kontrolę, kitas universitetas vis dar siekia akreditacijos.

Tyrimas užbaigiamas rekomendacijomis, skirtomis privatiems Libano universitetams.

Esminiai žodžiai: *kokybė, kokybės priemonės, kokybės auditas, kokybės kontrolės ir kokybės reitingavimas.*