Challenges Facing the Quality of Education in the Libyan Higher Technical Colleges

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Abstract: Libya is a country with a high literacy rate; however, its higher education sector has been facing certain challenges that are a hindrance in its way of providing a quality of education in higher technical colleges. In order to identify those challenges and to come up with certain solutions, a survey was conducted. A group of participants from the academic teaching staff in three different technical colleges within the city of Tripoli-Libya were approached and were presented with 17 closed statements regarding problems that their institution facing in order to respond to the quality of education to which they had to respond in ‘Yes’, ‘No’, or ‘To some extent’. They were also asked two open questions about the other problems faced by their institution and their possible solutions. The results showed that the leading challenge faced by most of the technical colleges was a lack of planning, lack of well-equipped labs and libraries and lack of Quality Assurance System in high schools. Some other notable challenges pointed out by the respondents were a lack of criterion of selecting qualified leaders, outdated curriculum, lack of experienced academic teaching staff and well-trained technicians, and the unstable political state of Libya. They suggested a constant upgradation of curriculum according to the changing world of technology, increased funding and formation of well-equipped labs and libraries.

Keywords: Quality of Education, Higher Education, Technical Colleges.

Introduction

Libya, a country of approximately 6.4 million people, became an independent state 66 years ago, in 1951. Since then it has over gone a number of revolutions, accompanied by revolutions in its educational sectors. After the independence from British and French oversight, Quranic schools reopened, recovering the educational gap that had been created. Its first university, University of Libya, was also established after the independence in Benghazi. There are seven general universities and three universities of special nature in Libya right now in which about 340,000 students enrolled in all universities in Libya in the academic year 2008/09, about 57% of them are female, and more than 90% are enrolled in public universities. However, the fate of technical colleges and institutes experienced a backlash, due to lack of adequacy of such institutes to provide quality education. On one hand, the state of Libya provides free basic education to all of its citizens and secondary education has been made compulsory. The adult literacy rate, as of 2010, has risen to 89.2%. There has been a remarkable increase in the number of students, with a huge number enrolled in higher technical colleges. In response to this rise, the number of institutes of higher education has also ascended up the graph rapidly (Kalifa et al, 2016).

On the other hand, however, the quality of education in technical and vocational colleges has been unable to reach the desired mark. Currently, there are more than 84 institutes that offer degrees in vocational and technical education, with even more than 15 vocational centers converted into high technical colleges. Even then, there exist certain challenges and hindrances in the way of quality technical education.

Previous researches that were carried out to examine the situation of technical education and the reasons for failure of quality of technical education in Libya, showed lack of planning in the organization of academic curriculum, inefficiency of teachers to provide quality education, failure to use scientific methods of study, and simply inability of teachers and academic curriculum to facilitate students in a way that they can perform professionally in their respective fields.

In an attempt to have a better and clearer picture of all the challenges and problems that the quality of technical colleges come across, a survey was conducted and academic teaching staff were asked about where, according to them, the quality of higher technical education lacked, what were the issues in their institutes, and to serve those challenges, what suggestions they had. Then based on the findings of this survey, effective steps can be taken in order to counter those problems and elevate the quality of higher technical colleges.
Literature review

Libyan educational system has been a subject of concern since the earliest of times due to the constant imbalance in the quality of education. Higher education institutes are deemed as the most important subfield of a greater education system that requires institutes to exhibit optimum facilities which are useful for quality education. For this purpose, various researchers have attempted to probe into the matter by formulating studies that can account for presenting empirical evidence regarding the challenges that are prevalent in the Libyan higher educational institutes.

In light of globalization and the growing technological advancements, Libyan higher technical colleges have been subjected to extreme outdated educational measures as a result of lack of appropriate tools. This is evident from a study that aimed to assess the issues in Libyan higher institutes, on the basis of experiences of a student. This study utilized the qualitative method of analysis that helped to evaluate the shortcomings of the Institute which were believed to directly influence the quality of education. Among these challenges, three most prominent issues were identified as the unavailability of the internet, inability to incorporate e-learning programs, and limited availability of important software (Abod-her, 2013). This implies that the basic ground upon which Libyan higher institutes lag behind is technological advancement which has caused the educational systems unable to deliver quality. Thus, it establishes the need for institutes to adopt developmental levels that can act upon the technological requirements of education.

Along with the problems regarding technological inefficiencies, the basic pedagogical nature is also found to have a huge impact on the quality of education. To further analyze this challenge, another research study was carried out using TPACK (Technological Pedagogical Content Knowledge) which concerned the issues related to educators. For this purpose, educational staffs from different higher institutes were approached with questionnaires regarding academic content, teaching methodologies, and the use of technological programs. The findings of this study indicated the inadequacies of teaching and learning methodologies, and thus demanded revision within these processes (Alzain, Clark & Ireson, 2014).

At this point, it is necessary to acknowledge that there are also certain social issues that render its influences on the quality of education. One such issue as highlighted by a study revolves around the sudden upsurge in a number of students that have incurred in Libya. To facilitate these students, the higher education sector has attempted to build institutes that may serve their educational needs (Elzalitni, 2008). However, there still exists a gap in the provision of quality education to all. This study therefore presents the idea that there is a need to utilize an in-depth analysis of the Libyan higher institutes so that a better comprehension may be achieved. This helps to eliminate the unequal provision of education to students and thus, provides commendable solutions that may be implemented effectively.

Moreover, according to the result of a research carried out by Bukhatowa, Porter & Nelson (2010), these institutes are required to assess the educational quality by strategically financing the budget allocated to higher education institutions. This further demands promotion of scientific research and IT in these colleges through which quality of education can be elevated and made compatible with the modern academic needs.

In addition to this, various other studies have been attended to; however, a loophole that exists is the absence of teachers and academic staff’s opinion in this matter. A teacher can have a professional understanding of all the flaws of the educational sector, as to where they lack and suggestions on how to raise the bar of technical education (Kibasan & Singson, 2016). This is a necessary step for students so that they can benefit from it and serve their career fields and their country, in the bigger picture.

Methodology

A group of 110 participants, some of which were head of departments while the rest were academic teaching staffs, were approached from three different technical colleges in an attempt to carry out a survey regarding the quality of higher technical education in Libya. The total number of respondents who returned eligible and usable questionnaires was 95, which represents a response rate of 86.36%. Table 1 summarizes the key characteristics of the respondents. The survey consisted of 17 closed statements about the problems faced by their institutions that were a hindrance in the way of improvement of the quality of education, to which the respondent had to answer in ‘Yes’, ‘No’, or ‘To some extent’. The researcher came across this survey designed by Khan (2010) while attempting to develop a tool for collecting the data for this study. In addition to this, two open questions were also asked, regarding the participant’s opinion about other challenges faced by the quality of education and their suggestions to counter those problems. The data collected, was then analyzed on the basis of frequency percentage

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Gender</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>80.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>20.00</td>
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Reliability

Reliability is a measure of the ability to produce the same results on repeated trials. Cronbach’s alpha is the most commonly used to measure internal consistency of a scale. An alpha value of 0.70 and higher is often considered the criterion for internally consistent established scales (Hair et al., 1998). The overall value of Cronbach’s alpha is 0.72, thus exhibiting a satisfactory level of reliability.

Results

Table 2 shows descriptive statistics regarding the problems faced by the higher technical colleges. The problems are rated on the ‘Yes %’ of the participants’ responses. The survey results showed that lack of planning was found to be the leading challenge in the path of improvement of quality of higher technical colleges, to which 79 (83.2%) participants responded with a ‘Yes’, 12 (12.6%) responded with ‘To some extent’, while only 4 (4.2%) responded with a ‘No’, out of a total of 95. Another notable reason that was affecting the quality of education was found to be the lack of well-equipped libraries and labs, with which 71 (74.7%) respondent agreed, 16 (16.8%) agreed to some extent and only 8 (8.4%) disagreed. A third problem that respondent viewed it as a major problem is the lack of quality assurance system at the feeding schools, with which 69 (72.6%) respondent agreed, 23 (24.2%) agreed to some extent and only 3 (3.2%) disagreed.

The least founding factor was found to be a lack of adequate space to which 27 (28.4%) disagreed, 41 (43.2%) answered with ‘To some extent’ while only 27 (28.4%) thought of it as a valid issue and responded with a ‘Yes’.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problem Statements</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>To Some Extent</th>
<th>No</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1- Lack of financial resources.</td>
<td>41 43.2</td>
<td>38 40.0</td>
<td>16 16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2- Lack of physical resources (buildings, libraries, labs etc.)</td>
<td>55 57.9</td>
<td>26 27.4</td>
<td>14 14.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3- Lack of human resources (qualified teaching staff etc.)</td>
<td>38 40.0</td>
<td>42 44.2</td>
<td>15 15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4- Lack of adequate space.</td>
<td>27 28.4</td>
<td>41 43.2</td>
<td>27 28.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5- Lack of well-equipped libraries and labs.</td>
<td>71 74.7</td>
<td>16 16.8</td>
<td>8 8.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6- Out-dated curriculum.</td>
<td>45 47.4</td>
<td>43 45.3</td>
<td>7 7.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7- Poor governance.</td>
<td>67 70.5</td>
<td>23 24.2</td>
<td>5 5.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8- Resistance to change.</td>
<td>53 55.8</td>
<td>31 32.6</td>
<td>11 11.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9- Lack of facilities and poor pay structure for the teaching staff.</td>
<td>47 49.5</td>
<td>33 34.7</td>
<td>15 15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10- Lack of incentives for the teachers for professional growth and performance</td>
<td>62 65.3</td>
<td>26 27.4</td>
<td>7 7.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11- Lack of planning.</td>
<td>79 83.2</td>
<td>12 12.6</td>
<td>5 4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12- External interference in the affairs of the institution.</td>
<td>48 50.5</td>
<td>32 33.7</td>
<td>15 15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13- Favoritism and nepotism in decision making and appointment of staff and employees.</td>
<td>52 54.7</td>
<td>37 38.9</td>
<td>6 6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14- Lack of quality assurance system at the feeding schools (e.g. High school).</td>
<td>69 72.6</td>
<td>23 24.2</td>
<td>3 3.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15- Centralized decision making.</td>
<td>65 68.4</td>
<td>24 25.3</td>
<td>6 6.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16- Lack of communication between the teaching staff and the administration.</td>
<td>45 47.4</td>
<td>34 35.8</td>
<td>16 16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17- Lack of communication between the students and the administration.</td>
<td>42 44.2</td>
<td>39 41.1</td>
<td>14 14.7</td>
</tr>
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</table>
Discussion

A survey which was conducted to recognize the problems faced by the quality of education of Libyan higher technical colleges suggested the lack of planning as the confounding factor behind the challenges faced by the educational quality. Another notable factor was a lack of well-equipped libraries and labs within the institutions, whereas, the lack of adequate space was the least significant factor in this regard. In addition to these factors, some other issues were also identified. Out-dated curriculum, lack of qualified teachers and staff, lack of efficient equipment, poor management, political issues of Libya were some of the important problems identified by the respondents. Some even blamed it on the lack of awareness and responsibility in students themselves.

The respondents offered a number of valuable suggestions to improve the educational quality, such as, a constant update of curriculum, hiring of only experienced and well-educated teachers, incorporation of efficient and latest equipment, use of an experienced model for the implementation of effective total quality management, and even restructuring of educational institutes from the scratch.

Challenges

- **Lack of planning**

Lack of planning is the major challenge faced by the educational quality of Libyan higher technical colleges. This refers to an absence of a model that is needed to structure the complete course of an institution and the outline of curriculum, beforehand. A planned structure facilitates the quality of education in a way that it provides a framework of the syllabus that has to be carried out over time. A planned layout must be able to predict the position of the institution in the times ahead, must set its future goals and work out a time draft of all the goals. Lack of planning may result in the failure of quality improvement and may demolish the whole structure (Holland, 2016).

- **Lack of well-equipped labs and libraries**

Lack of well-equipped libraries and labs is another flaw of the Libyan technical colleges as it disrupts the flow of quality education. Apart from the classrooms where theory is conducted, labs are essential to conducting practical classes to give an experience of the professional field. In addition, it must be well equipped with the modern and latest apparatus in order to keep the students updated with the ever-changing technologies. Lack of efficient and well-maintained libraries may also affect the provision of quality education (Almansuri and Elmansuri, 2015).

- **Poor management**

The inability of management and administration to deliver effective desired results leads to faulty quality of education. Management is the fundamental necessity of any institution. Poor management of educational institutions leads to poor and inadequate quality of education. For this purpose, there has been an increased interest in the approach of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the Libyan higher educational sector. It refers to a whole set of management system whose key purpose is to ensure that every employee or member of a company or an institution participate in improving and maintaining the standards of the organization in their respective fields. It is basically a management approach which is used to enhance and elevate the quality of the institute by utilizing the efforts of all of its members. However, in spite of the increase in the approach of TQM in Libyan educational sectors, numerous higher technical colleges lack proper management systems, as a result of which the quality of education is descending down the graph continuously (Khoja, 2016).

TQM is both, a philosophy and methodology. It can help the institutions to keep up and manage the change, and also assist them in setting their aims and goals for dealing with different kind of external pressures. However, it is important to note that this is a slow and gradual process and it cannot bring changes and revolutions overnight. It is a time-consuming process, but if applied properly, it can prove itself as a transformational process and an essential tool that can be effectively employed in the management of educational institutes (Sallis, 2002).

- **Centralized decision-making**

Centralized decision-making is also seen as a problem faced by the quality of higher education of Libya. All of the decisions, policies, and principles regarding every aspect of the educational institute are made by a central governing body. This interferes with the effective decision-making as a single body cannot decide the fate of the whole institution without the right expertise. This creates friction between different bodies and a state of conflict is created (Nilson, 2016).

- **Out-dated curriculum**

Continuous updating of technical colleges’ curriculum is a common challenge for almost all the technical colleges. Technical fields require constantly revising and reviewing their curricula in order to keep up with the quality of their programs and clearing the gap between the curricula provided and the needs of students and employers. Out-dated
curriculum tends to interfere with the quality of education (Albashiry et al, 2015).

- **Political condition of Libya**

  The deteriorating quality of higher education in technical colleges of Libya has also been associated with the political conditions of Libya. The fall of Gaddafi, not only affected the socio-economic development but also shook up higher education sector (Cecchini et al, 2015).

  Despite being among one of the highest states investing in the education sector in the whole world, the higher education of Libya experienced a huge fall back as it was confronted by problems that were foreign to it. As the population increased, the number of students also increased consequently. To accommodate these large numbers of students, more and more educational institutes were established. This increase in the rate of enrollment in higher education in Libya is considered as a positive development indicator which helped in the growth of the educational sector, however, the quality of education dropped down eventually due to lack of experienced and well-educated teaching staff, efficient equipment, and failure to use modern technologies. All of these problems can be contributed to the political state and instability of Libya (Ayub et al, 2016).

- **Lack of Quality Assurance System**

  The lack of quality assurance system in high schools is also contributed as a major reason of low-quality education being delivered in higher technical colleges. If the quality of education is not up to the mark from the basic step, a student may never be able to develop a better understanding. This may go on and affect the educational background negatively; as a result, the whole educational structure of the student may come down and deteriorate (Elkaseh et al, 2014).

  Some other challenges faced by the Libyan higher educational quality include unqualified technical staff, unavailability of a criteria of hiring teaching staff, restrictions put up by the government, lack of efficient educational programs within the institute, inefficient buildings that are unable to accommodate all the students, academic teaching staff, and the technical staff, lack of nationalism, and lack of financial resources, while according to a few respondents, all these systems and standards are available, and the only need is to actually implement all those policies and procedures.

### Suggestions

Few suggestions presented by the respondents to counter the challenges faced by the Libyan higher technical colleges are, to strengthen and improve the standard of the educational institute, an effective leader must be present who can pull out the institute out of its misery and make it stand at the highest position of quality and excellence. This requires an experienced model structure according to which, its goals must be decided and pattern of its progress and development must be established.

Institutions offering technical education system should be based on certain accreditation criteria that fulfill the modern day requirements for a technical school. Policies of the organization should be redefined on the roots of the certain quality management system and continuous efforts should be made to improve and develop the system.

There is a dire need to constantly change and update the syllabus in order to keep up with this transitional world of science and technology. The backward curriculum may lead to zero quality education and the student may be left behind in the race of new and modern information. Therefore, it is a vital requirement in this regard that the curriculum approved in the colleges should be up-to-date and standardized which prepares individual for practical work on the field. Modern software and teaching aids should replace the traditional teaching methods. Proper and efficient setup for laboratories and, lab equipment plays a key role in this aspect.

Provision of financial support is another basic necessity of any educational institute in order to benefit its students with the desired quality.

The staff itself should be groomed professionally. Modern technologies must be employed to train the staff as well as systemic supervision must be introduced within the departments and faculties. The examination system should be made as fine as possible and all unfair means must be strictly dealt with. Associations with technical companies that can offer training programs are essential for the professional development of the individuals.

### Limitations

This study provided a rough estimate of the challenges faced by most of the Libyan technical colleges; however, due to security reasons, it failed to provide the exact statistics, as only 95 respondents were approached for this purpose which is not sufficient enough to serve the purpose of this study, which is to identify the problems of all the Libyan technical colleges. Moreover, a majority of teaching staff were made the part of this survey, due to which only one side of opinion surfaced. A student can have a better understanding of all the flaws and faults of the educational sector, as to where they lack, what and where the improvements are needed, and suggestions on how to raise the bar of technical education so that more and more students can benefit from it and serve their career fields and their country.
in the bigger picture (Kibasan and Singson, 2016). The administration staff and ministry of higher education sector were not approached and this restricted their part of the story. In addition to this, the challenges faced by all of the Libyan technical colleges were not addressed. This study only focused on the issues of a small part of technical colleges of Libya.

Recommendations

In the case of the conduction of similar surveys in the future, it is recommended to carry out the survey in a more vast population so that a more calculated estimation can be gained. Furthermore, a diversified population should be approached in order to bring out opinions of all the relevant people. It must also cater to the challenges of almost all of the technical colleges of Libya so that a huge area can be covered in the research

Conclusion

National level educational policies are being formulated and renewed at domestic level as well as international level; commitments are being made to improvise the technical education system in Libya which focuses on enhancing the literacy rate and enrollment in educational institutions. However many challenges are being faced by these institutions in technical terms. The numbers of technical and vocational training institutes are not sufficient and many are devoid of the basic infrastructure. A survey was conducted to evaluate the problems faced by the Libyan higher technical colleges and its relevant suggestions. The issues highlighted by the respondents can be grouped into, Lack of planning, according to which, there is an inefficient planning of development and improvement in the technical colleges on the higher education sector’s part, possibly due to financial management issues as well as lack of interest from the institutes itself to improvise their curriculum, buildings, and facilities. Lack of quality management as there is no quality benchmark in current technical institutes.

Therefore these institutes are unable to produce proficient graduates. Lack of funds, as the quality of education, cannot be raised without provision of adequate funds which is necessary for staff incentive and salaries as well as to fulfill expenditure on the modernization of teaching system, facilities, and tools for training. Private institutes might be providing better quality education but the cost is high while the government sector is accessible by general population but quality provided in these institutes is not up to the mark. Poverty, law and order situation, lack of access to technical institutes, poor quality and governance have also contributed in fewer enrollments.

Recommendations derived from the survey include; funding resources from government level as well as programs from the local government to promote technical education in masses, renewal and implementation of education policies, implementation of standardization by means of certain quality guidelines, provision of economic incentives to academic teaching staff and employees, comprehensive vocational training of staff, introduction of a uniform and up-to-date curriculum, utilization of modern teaching tools and methods and an alliance with technical companies for the purpose of student training.

References


