The Role of Academic Governance in Strengthening the University Education System in the Faculties of Educational Sciences in Lebanon -A Case Study on a sample of Private Universities-

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Abstract

This study aims to describe the relationship between academic governance and enhancing performance in the education system in Faculties of Educational Sciences in private universities in Lebanon. It also examines the role that this relationship plays in achieving university education requirements. The descriptive approach was adopted to examine a purposeful sample of (139) instructors chosen randomly from Faculties of Educational Sciences in private universities in Lebanon to complete a questionnaire. We came to the conclusion that the mean related to the role of universities in community service has reached (3.56), while the mean related to the extent of application of the principles of academic governance was (3.43). As for the mean related to challenges that prevent the application of academic governance standards, it was (3.45). Recommendations included reinforcing academic governance through facing the 21st century challenges to ameliorate universities performance.

Key words: academic governance, higher education, university performance, faculties of educational sciences

Introduction

The governance system in universities is based on the application of comprehensive quality standards (Abdul-Muttalib, 2012), and this in turn contributes to the process of reform and development of higher education. What made the urgent need to implement these reforms is the rapid and advanced transformations imposed by the twenty-first century. These transformations give rise to challenges facing higher education systems in applying the standards of democracy, citizenship and the culture of law (Solomon, 2010). Note that this culture is applied in different forms according to regions and universities, especially in terms of law enforcement, fighting corruption, transparency, accountability and professional ethics, as well as the rights of students and workers in these institutions.

The reason behind the great interest in education in general and higher education in particular is due to studies that linked its importance to economic growth (studies of Dinson, Schultz, Baker, etc.); With the current developments and rapid changes in the environment of societies,

and the emergence of a knowledge economy, new studies emerged according to these changes and linked the importance of education and the individual's acquisition of twenty-first century skills, such as the study presented by Bernie and Charles in 2009 (Trilling & Fadel, 2009).

The increase in demand for enrollment in higher education is due to the belief that obtaining a university degree will enhance individuals' social standing and enable them to improve their financial situation through their enrollment in the labor market. This has prompted governments to define a specific mechanism for a student to enroll in higher education (Al-Ziyadat, 2008) in order to organize this education through the following steps:

Only those who have successfully completed the secondary level have the right to get enrolled in higher education, provided that this is proven through the degree they acquired, regardless of their age, gender, or race.

The chosen university major is determined by the high school diploma or what is equivalent to it, in addition to the general average obtained by the student in the general secondary examination.

Accordingly, universities in countries that conduct an official examination upon completion of the secondary education stage rely on accepting students based on the results of that exam, while in other countries, universities depend on the ability of the candidates themselves to pass the entrance exam. Therefore, the criteria for admitting a student to enroll in higher education differ from a country to another, regardless of the challenges that higher education faces today. We are in an era in which transformations of power and knowledge are accelerating and the methods of production and distribution are changing dramatically. Such an era is in vital need of new thinking, new skills, and knowledge that contribute to making and directing progress so that society and its individuals would withstand some of the following recurrent challenges.

The challenge of the learning community: Learning societies in educational systems adopt contemporary methods of learning, which are represented in active learning, participatory learning, cooperative learning, constructive learning and many others, as they adopt modern educational research models and work on these educational curricula. From here, universities, in order to ensure their survival and continuity, must respond to the continuous shifts and the rapid changes in order to produce knowledge and improve performance.

The challenge of evaluating the performance of educational institutions: Performance evaluation is an administrative process of utmost importance in any institution, regardless of the nature of its work, as through it, any institution can compare its current situation with the goals planned, and the extent of its implementation and commitment to the vision by submitting proposals to improve institutional performance in general (Fawzy, 2008). This is what would liberate universities from personal judgments, the resulting obstruction of knowledge, and the decrease in motivation, which would affect universities performance in general.

Challenges of the professional development of faculty members: In light of all these contemporary challenges, universities must introduce fundamental changes in their programs, policies, and social roles, which require continuous professional development for their faculty members to be ready to keep up with everything new.

Challenges of higher education outputs: The real success for universities is to always improve the quality of higher education, and to match their outputs to the requirements of the labor market. This in turn would reduce unemployment because graduates would possess the skills required by the knowledge society. In order to maintain the quality of the inputs, universities should link the theoretical and the practical side through the planning that is based on the integration of theory and practice.

The challenge of globalization: Globalization has become an inevitable reality which is embodied by the advanced means of communication and electronic devices in all its forms and types (Madkour, 2009), as it has turned the whole world into a small electronic room, especially since one of the basics of progress in all societies is the golden square (education, Economics, technology, and culture). Among them, education contributes to improving the quality of life, prospering the economy, and developing production. All of this would affect the culture and behavior of individuals, who in turn must be prepared to face these accelerating challenges via knowledge and creativity.

The main objective of this research is to study the extent to which higher education institutions apply and care about the notion of governance, especially since some studies concluded that Lebanon is ranked in the last countries implementing the standards of governance in the world (Garaman, 2012).

Therefore, this study seeks to clarify the concept of governance and the principles of integration and interaction with quality standards assurance in higher education institutions. In addition, the study aims to examine higher education institutions' role in the quality of the outputs that will subsequently be employed in community service.

Research problematic

Kaufmann, Kraay, and Mastruzzi (2007) define governance as the "traditions and institutions by which authority in a country is exercised for the common good". As for education, governance includes four "enabling conditions: the existence of standards, information on performance, incentives for good performance, and, arguably most importantly, accountability" (Lewis & Pettersson, 2009). The concept of university governance contributes to developing scenarios that simulate the obstacles that higher education institutions may face. However, some university administrations place executive authorities above students and faculty members, to be tasked with making decisions without consulting people who are involved. Students and faculty members have no right to discuss or object to these decisions. This weakens the university role as the academic institution responsible for training students to actively participate in public life and promoting the values of democracy and respect to others. The following questions are to be answered throughout this study:

• Do the programs of the Faculties of Educational Sciences in the private universities in Lebanon respect academic governance standards?

• Do the Faculties of Educational Sciences apply the principles of academic governance in private universities in Lebanon?

• What are the challenges that prevent the application of academic governance standards from the instructors' point of view in private universities in Lebanon?

Research hypotheses

• The first hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between the programs of Faculties of Educational Sciences in private universities in Lebanon and the application of academic governance standards.
• The second hypothesis: There is a statistically significant relationship between the programs of the Faculties of Educational Sciences and the application of academic governance principles.
• The third hypothesis: There exist challenges that prevent the application of academic governance from the instructors 'point of view in the Faculties of Educational Sciences in private universities in Lebanon.

Research Methodology

We relied in this research on the descriptive approach by describing the intended phenomenon, gathering accurate information about it, and describing it in a quantitative and qualitative manner (Mahmoud, 2006). The research population includes the private universities in Lebanon. The questionnaire instrument was used to collect data a by means of the purposeful sample. Purposeful sampling is useful when we want to directly reach the target groups in the research. To ensure the validity and reliability of the questionnaire directed to instructors, we used the Cronbach alpha test to determine the degree of reliability of the measuring instrument. "Cronbach's alpha is computed by correlating the score for each scale item with the total score for each observation (usually individual survey respondents or test takers), and then comparing that to the variance for all individual item scores." (Goforth, 2015, p. 1).

Table No. (1): Reliability test

Number of questions	Reliability analysis
60	Cronbach's Alpha Coefficient for Teacher Survey = 0.79

The result in the above table reflects the accuracy of the measuring items. It also shows the low percentage of random errors of measurement that affect the accuracy of the test scores. As for ensuring the validity of the instrument and results, we used three methods: referring to three experts in the field, conducting a pilot study, and consulting an external auditor.

Distribution of the questionnaire

Chart No. (1) shows the number of questionnaires distributed to instructors of private universities in Lebanon that were included in the sample, as follows:
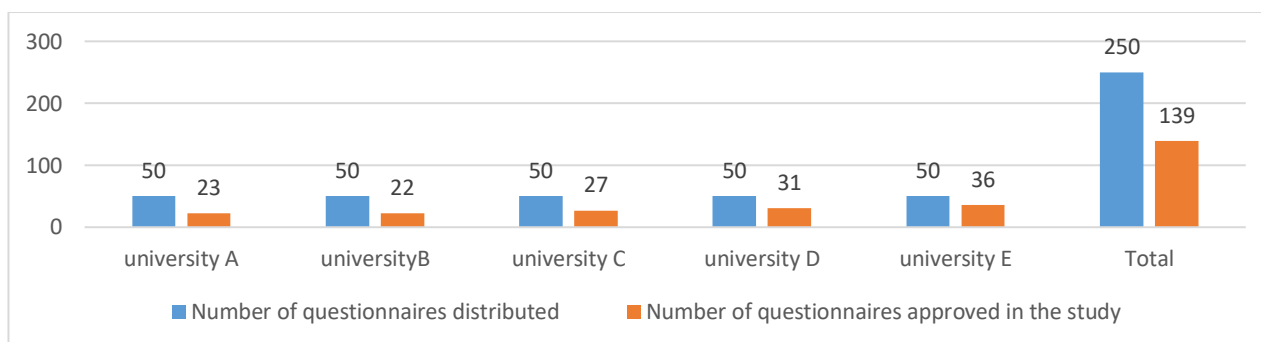

Chart No. (1): Distribution of the questionnaire among private universities in Lebanon

Chart No. (1) Shows that the researchers distributed (250) questionnaires to the instructors of the private universities; however, only (139) instructors responded to them, i.e. (55.6%).

Population

The research population consists of instructors and department heads in the Faculties of Educational Sciences in private universities in Lebanon for the academic year 2019-2020. The sample included five private universities, specifically the Faculty of Educational Sciences from each university.

Terminology of study

University governance: There is a wide variety of governance models, most of which can be defined on the basis that they are based on the balance between three main forces: the government, the market forces, and the academic excellence and the ability to impose academic freedom (Melio, 2012).

- Quality assurance: Quality assurance is a structured process with an extended process of time (from one to two years) in which the higher education institution as a whole is evaluated (institutional assurance) or a particular program (specialized assurance) is evaluated based on a list of agreed criteria (simulations or measures). This combination of external assurance and self-assurance is the basis for the quality assurance process comprising two basic components: self-evaluation and external evaluation (Adnan Al-Amin, 2008).
- The culture of law: It is the set of knowledge, values, skills, and aptitudes acquired and entrenched in people, individuals, and groups (Nofal et al., 2014).

Section One: Demographic Results

Demographic results include a set of characteristics of the instructors included in the sample, which are quantitative characteristics, including the gender, age, and other qualitative characteristics, including social factors such as university specializations and years of experience (Popova, 2014). The demographic results were as follows:

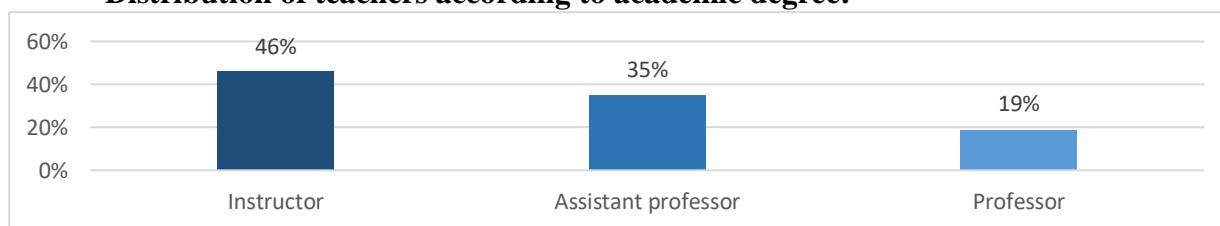Distribution of teachers according to the gender variable:

Graph No. (2): the distribution of teachers according to the gender variable

Chart No. (2) shows that the percentage of female instructors participating in the study reached (41%), while the percentage of male instructors reached (59%).
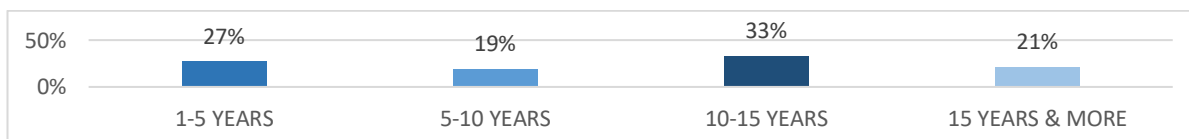
– **Distribution of teachers according to academic degree:**

Graph No. (3): the distribution of teachers according to the degree variable

Graph No. (3) Shows that the instructors who participated in this study were divided in terms of academic degrees into four categories. (46%) of instructors with the rank of lecturer participated in this study, while (35%) participated in the rank of assistant professor, followed by (19%) with the rank of professor (professor).

Distribution of teachers according to the variable of practical experience:

Graph No. (4): the distribution of teachers according to the variable of practical experience

Graph No. (4) shows that the instructors who participated in this study were divided according to practical experience into four categories. The percentage of instructors who have work experience of between ten to fifteen years is (27%), followed by instructors who have work experience between one to five years (27%), and then those who have practical experience of 15 years or more (21%), and all the way to instructors with practical experience ranging between five to ten years (19%).

Findings

This section has been divided into three themes as follows:

Theme One: Measuring the university role in community service:

In this part, we are going to answer the first research question, through which the role of universities, specifically the Faculties of Educational Sciences, in community service was measured.

Table No. (2): measuring the university's role in community service					
	Mean	**Max**	**Min**	**N**	**Std. Deviation**
1. The faculty in which I teach adopts scientific policies, plans, goals, programs, and community service activities stemming from its mission, goals and objectives.	3.58	5	1	139	1.371
.2The issues of democracy, human rights, citizenship, social justice, and sustainable development are among the basics of the study programs in the faculty in which I teach.	3.48	5	1	139	1.217
3. The faculty seeks, through its programs, to provide the community with various services, including the service of commitment to democracy and activating community discussions about the different local culture, and whether it is a support of democracy or an obstacle to it.	3.45	5	1	139	1.218
4. The faculty, through its programs, contributes to building democracy and good citizenship based on the awareness of rights and duties by individuals and groups within a single society.	3.55	5	1	139	1.148
5. The faculty seeks to grant university students the freedom to receive education by providing opportunities to choose a major in light of their capabilities.	3.57	5	1	139	1.073
6- The faculty provides students with a safe university environment and allows them to express their views through various means of activities.	3.6	5	1	139	1.160
7. The aim of the educational programs in the faculty is to produce leaders and the elite in society and politics.	3.55	5	1	139	1.124
8. The knowledge and skills acquired by students can be used to face challenges by focusing on an effective model of responsible community democracy.	3.6	5	1	139	1.158
9. The notions of democracy, good governance, citizenship, and civil issues are integrated in the faculty curriculum.	3.62	5	1	139	1.112
10. The faculty programs focus on initiatives and quick responses to changes in the university and society, especially those related to accountability.	3.65	5	1	139	1.121
The university has an effective role in community service.	3.56	5	1	139	0.97035

Table No. (2) shows that the mean in this theme has reached (3.56), and this means that most of the instructors have responded with (neutral) or (agree) to the phrases related to this theme. The highest mean of instructors' responses was to the phrase " The faculty programs focus on initiatives and quick responses to changes in the university and society, especially those related to accountability", and it reached (3.65). While the lowest mean was for the instructors' answers to the phrase "The faculty seeks, through its programs, to provide the community with various services, including the service of commitment to democracy and activating community discussions about the different local culture, and whether it is a support of democracy or an obstacle to it", and it reached (3.45).

Theme Two: Applying the principles of academic governance in the Faculties of Educational Sciences in private universities in Lebanon.

The second research question was answered in this theme, in which the extent of application of the principles of academic governance in the Faculties of Educational Sciences was studied, in addition to the standards that were adopted to measure these variables.

Table No. (3): Application of the principles of academic governance					
	Mean	**Max**	**Min**	**N**	**Std. Deviation**
11. The faculty contributes through its programs to active education.	3.37	5	1	139	1.24
12. The faculty contributes to educating citizens who respect human rights and democratic values.	3.51	5	1	139	1.11
13. The faculty contributes to disseminating values related to citizenship.	3.41	5	1	139	1.11
14. The university provides adequate material and financial resources to manage community service.	3.42	5	1	139	1.12
15. The faculty provides incentives to participate in community service.	3.41	5	1	139	1.21
16. The faculty prepares independent study materials for citizenship education.	3.46	5	1	139	1.15
17. The faculty administration works on the interaction of democracy between students and instructors.	3.45	5	1	139	1.02
18. The faculty administration seeks to provide democracy for student activities.	3.30	5	1	139	1.05
19. The faculty administration gives freedom to the instructors to choose the research they want to participate in.	3.24	5	1	139	1.06
20. The faculty administration gives instructors the freedom to participate in all academic activities.	3.78	5	1	139	1.10
The faculty applies the principles of academic governance.	3.43	5	1	139	1.01

Table No. (3) shows that the mean of "The faculty applies the principles of academic governance" has reached (3.43), and this means that most of the instructors in the faculties of education sciences have responded with (neutral) or (agree). The highest mean is (3.78) for the item "The Faculty administration gives instructors the freedom to participate in all academic activities." While the lowest mean is (3.24) in the instructors 'answers to the phrase" the faculty administration gives the instructors freedom to choose the research they want to participate in."

Theme Three: Challenges that prevent the application of Academic Governance Standards

We answered the third research question in this theme which is related to the existence of challenges that prevents the application of academic governance standards in the Faculties of Educational Sciences in private universities in Lebanon.

Table No. (4): Challenges that prevent the application of academic governance standards	Mean	Max	Min	N	Std. Deviation
21. There is an absence of national strategies that oblige universities to apply academic governance.	3.83	5	1	139	1.12
22. The lack of a single model or one-size-fits-all approach to "university governance".	3.22	5	1	139	1.02
23. There is a lack in strategic planning to implement academic governance.	3.26	5	1	139	1.13
24. University leaders do not attach importance to implementing academic governance standards.	3.63	5	1	139	1.17
25- There is a lack in independent academic work that leads to confusion in the work of instructors.	3.32	5	1	139	1.10
26- There is a lack in full awareness among some of the importance of community work and participation in it.	3.45	5	1	139	1.01
There exist challenges that prevent the application of academic governance standards	3.45	5	1	139	1.04

Through Table No. (4) We have found that the mean of the item "There exist challenges that prevent the application of academic governance standards" is (3.45). The highest mean is (3.83) for the item "There is an absence of national strategies that oblige universities to apply academic governance", and this indicates that most instructors have responded with (agree). While the lowest mean is (3.26) for the item "There is a lack in strategic planning to implement academic governance".

Conclusion

Today, more than any day, universities are facing great challenges that have been added to their role and multiple contributions in the society. They are also required to ensure training and at the same time to conduct research in different disciplines and go beyond the traditional tasks related to teaching, in which we urgently need to form a good citizen has a sense of belonging to his/her country, a democratic personality, and is able to face future challenges with civility and holistic thinking.

The biggest problem that most of our Arab universities face is the problem of confusion in decision-making, wasting time in debate and discussion, and disagreements about each issue presented for research, and the reason for this is the lack of recourse to sound and clear foundations in the conduct of the academic process, and in the absence of a comprehensive

view of all parties to the relationship: stakeholders, government financiers or investors, and ending with students. All this is taking place at the expense of the competitive advantage in the quality of the material and intangible outputs, and the scientific and academic reputation. In addition to the political, economic and social factors that affect the overall general situation in our Arab countries, we may become more convinced of governance as a decisive means in dealing with these factors and preserving the institutional entity of universities, and therefore it is very important to adopt governance by universities in order to show their seriousness in comprehensive reform processes, and in putting an end to mismanagement and slackness, combating corruption, and even in its march towards democracy. Governance also allows expanding the base of popular participation in decision-making, establishing the principles of transparency and the right of citizens to obtain information, as well as improving accountability in its two dimensions, reward and punishment.

Recommendations

- Measuring performance is indispensable for ensuring efficiency.

- Designing educational programs should be compatible with good governance.

- Academic governance still needs emphasis in the Lebanese private universities. A transitional phase is needed to disseminate the culture of academic governance.

- A lot of obstacles are facing the implementation of academic governance such as traditional management styles and authoritative decision making. The administration should strive to diminish these obstacles.

- Implementing good academic governance needs the collaboration of all members involved in higher education: policy makers, administrators, instructors, faculty members, students…

- Adequate financial budgets are vital to conduct research which would support academic governance in the educational sector.

- Evaluation is not the end of the process; it reappears as a first step to ameliorate performance in the educational system.

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