STRATEGICAL EDUCATIONAL REFORMS IN LIBYA

STRATEGIJSKE OBRAZOVNE REFORME U LIBIJI

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Abstract: *Scientific research is one of the key driving factors for a diversified, strong economy in any country. Under the former regime in Libya, scientific research and higher education suffered from negligence, corruption and lack of political commitment and reform.*

Key words: *strategy, education, reforms, Libya*

Sadržaj: *Naučno istraživanje je jedan od ključnih faktora za raznovrsnu, jaku ekonomiju u bilo kojoj zemlji. Pod bivšim režimom u Libiji, naučna istraživanja i visoko obrazovanje patilo je zbog nemara, korupcije i nedostatka političke posvećenosti i reformi.*

Ključne reči: *strategija, edukacija, reforme, Libija*

1. INTRODUCTION

Higher education in Libya faces some major challenges. These include increasing demands for improvements, raising the quality of graduates and their career prospects. There are also problems about accreditation and the quality of educational institutions and programs, not to mention the financing and governance of the institutions. Another major challenge to Libya's education sector is the lack of any real and effective IT infrastructure, and the lack of scholarly activities and scientific research throughout the sector. [1]

Libya's ability to build a strong and diversified economy will depend on its commitment to innovation, creativity and commercialization within the higher education and scientific research sector. Furthermore, there is no real commitment to scientific research in Libyan universities and the country does not benefit from generous international grants in the fields of scientific and social research because of the absence of any cohesive vision for the sector. Elsewhere, the private sector usually plays an integral role in the higher education and scientific research sector through partnerships, funding and collaborative projects. However, Libya has no effective, responsible private sector, able and willing to do this. [2]

Human resources in the field of scientific research and development are insufficient and mismanaged. Also education, higher education and scientific research sectors in Libya have traditionally negative learning environments where creativity and innovation are almost non-existent among staff and students. The education sector in Libya lost its purpose when the focus on the end-product of the educational process was lost. That led to lack of fully qualified and skillfully equipped university graduate population. There is a lack of skilled graduates who possess the knowledge and skills required by the labor market, and this had impacted negatively both on Libya's scientific research base and its industrial competitiveness.

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Another negative factor is the lack of commitment to scientific research by qualified researchers despite studying at universities abroad. Academic staff at Libyan universities should be offered incentives and have recognition for their research. Also, the teaching load for academics needs to be dramatically reduced. Furthermore, the contractual duties of academics at Libyan universities should emphasis on research and scholarly activities as part of their job description. According to government data, research and other scholarly activities account for less than 5 % of academics' duties at Libyan universities. In developed economies they account for at least 33 %.

Most of all Libya's higher education and scientific research sector suffers from organizational problems. The sector lacks co-operation and communication between its various institutions. In addition, there is a lack of networking mechanisms such as forums and conferences which could link the community. Sector lacks the necessary IT infrastructure and resources to produce substantial output. There are no marketing and scientific publication strategies for sharing findings and good practices with the rest of the research community, either regionally or internationally. Primary and secondary education is compulsory in Libya, which has led to increased interest in attending universities and higher education institutes. The sector requires innovative mechanisms to encourage entrepreneurs to enable graduates and researchers to start their own businesses based on their creative ideas and research.

2. CHALLENGES OF HIGHER EDUCATION

There are some challenges facing Libyan higher education institutions. These challenges play an important role in implementing education program in Libyan universities. Moreover, Libyan universities are not able to achieve the higher education system goals because of these challenges. These challenges are as follows:

1. There is a problem in having material source for universities' programs and services.
2. There is a problem in putting strategic plans that are and sufficient for the short-term objectives.
3. There is a problem in selecting sufficient academic leaders who are able to achieve the goals of the higher education system in future.
4. There is a problem in defining the vision and the mission of the universities or colleges or departments.
5. There is a problem in developing and training programs of faculty members that have an impact on the quality of higher education system.
6. There is a problem in understanding the meaning of quality that plays an important role in the education process.
7. There is a problem in making decision within universities regarding the duties of faculty members of the higher learning institutions.
8. There are no enough practices for faculty members and stuff that play an important role in creation and activation during the education process of the higher learning institutions.
9. There is a problem in clearing the organizational structure of universities.
10. There is a problem in developing plans for improving the education process.
11. There is a problem in developing and improving the academic programs in the higher learning institutions due to difficulties in the process.
12. There is a problem in linking undergraduate and graduate programs with the labor market.
13. There is a problem in identifying the areas of research.
14. There is a problem in providing developing and equipping laboratories and libraries.
15. There is a problem in developing the methods of learning, teaching, and studying.

That has an impact on the quality of education process, and on the omission of the use of self-learning skills such as: analytical thinking, problem solving, and creativity, innovation, and research skills. [3] Developments need to include facilities development in parallel with human resource development. The infrastructure for E-learning and ICT education will require significant investments in order to develop and help enhance the performance of the sector. There is also an urgent need for robust measures to tackle corruption and financial waste in the sector. Academic freedom was non-existent in Libya for decades. Censorship had a disastrous impact on the country's higher education and scientific research sector. Academic freedom for staff and students within the sector should be encouraged and protected, along with the sharing of good practices. [4]

3. E-LEARNING IN LIBYAN HIGHER EDUCATION

Like in most developing countries, the use of ICTs and the implementation of e-learning in Libya are still in an early stage. While some Libyan universities, such as Alfateh University, Garyounis University, and Academy of Postgraduate Studies and Economic Research, have the basic ICT infrastructure (such as computers, Internet access, and a local area network), they still use the "traditional" model of education; this model is based on face-to-face interactions in, and outside of, classroom between students and teachers, and learning activities that are only available on campus. Libyan Open Universities (LOPs) offer students the opportunity to study at home; how-ever, the learning experiences are traditional too, as the universities rely largely on printed learning materials. This is beginning to change, as recently several institutions have introduced electronic resource repositories, e-libraries. These universities provide an opportunity to acquire higher education to students with work and family commitments, and to students from the regional areas of the country. LOP students study at home and come to the university only at the end of semester to take exams. [5]

National policy for ICT in education was established in 2005. The policy is managed by the Ministry of Education and the Ministry of Vocational Training with the support of other parties such as the country's major telecommunication providers the General Postal and Telecommunication Company (GPTC) and Libya Telecom and Technology. In a drive towards modernity, this policy aims to enable ICT access, provide ICT infrastructure and tools, and help develop ICT skills on a large scale in all sectors of the community. However, its main purpose is to use ICT and e-learning as instrumentalities of modernity to improve and enhance the quality of Libyan education through:

1. Adopting modern, technology-assisted educational techniques and methods;
2. Supporting the scientific community to get involved in research within the general Libyan population;
3. Encouraging the private sector to engage in funding higher and specialist education;
4. Developing open and distance learning; and,
5. Boosting the profile of higher education.

One major project, sponsored by UNESCO and the Libyan government, involves the establishment of the Libyan Higher Education and Research Network (LHERN); to this end, Local Area Networks (LANs) will be built within all 149 faculties from various university campuses and institutes and, in addition, a Wide Area Network (WAN) will join the various higher education institutions. Thus, the project will involve the creation of digital libraries and portals of educational resources, and the development of ICT enhanced learning solutions

such as e-learning, tele-education, and telemedicine. In another major development, the Department of Computers and Networks oversees the implementation of the National Computer project, which aims to supply and install more than 150,000 computers in nearly 5,000 computer laboratories at educational institutions, including higher education institutions. The Department also supervises the implementation of a national project to link all educational institutions with an advanced telecommunications network using telephone lines, satellite, and wireless communications (The General People's Committee of Education, 2008). This project will particularly assist in expanding and improving Libya's current e-examination system. This computerized system is used to manage the results of final examinations of secondary school students and, based on the results, determine their subsequent university destination. [6]

4. CONCLUSION

Libyan higher institutions still face many challenges in terms of the implementation of ICT and e-learning in teaching and learning. These challenges are associated with:

1. Cultural and linguistic background of students and instructors, and their awareness of and attitudes towards e-learning;
2. Underdeveloped technological infrastructure and the often prohibitive cost of educational technologies;
3. Lack of local expertise in curriculum development for e-learning; and,
4. Lack of educational management mechanisms to support e-learning initiatives.

The development and adoption of e-learning in Libya is also likely to be helped by: educational technology transfer from, and collaboration with, developed countries; growing awareness of e-learning and expectations of students; successful deployment of e-learning initiatives by similar developing countries; the development of e-learning expertise in Libyan educators; and, an ongoing research to inform the development process. [7]

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