

Higher Education in the Arab World & Challenges of Labor Market

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Abstract

The destiny of any nation begins in its classroom where young people are equipped with knowledge and skills to lead the nation. Higher education is the corner stone in development where work force is trained to lead the social, economic, political and cultural change. In such a competitive global economy the human capital is the most valuable asset. Higher education institutes are training units, where labor force is made. These institutes are also incubators of scientists and technologists where researchers are qualified to make the scientific and technological change. This role is absent in higher Arab Education Institutes; so this paper aims at specifying the internal and external challenges that are facing higher education institutions in the Arab world; in addition to searching the degree of responsiveness of these institutions to face these challenges, and how to integrate them with the requirements of development and labor market needs.

Key words: higher education, labor market, knowledge community, educational development

1: 0 Introduction

According to the Arabic thinker (Bishara;2010), "*The mission of any national university is to build the nation, by building a national elite, who is able to build an economy, capable of creating a culture, capable of producing literature & literary criticism. The national university has to produce elite who is able to teach the future generations.* International Universities and higher educational Institutes are benchmarks for the measure of growth of one nation or another. They are the head machine that pulls the train of development. These institutions are productive, academic centers, carriers of knowledge, as well as incubator of technology, ready to invest their potential service to the community to meet its requirements.

A lot of development experiences from many countries shows that the achievement of economic development is no longer depending on the natural resources and elements of production only, but it also depends on the practical level of knowledge and skills of the labor force, available to those countries, to enable them absorb and follow the successive and rapid developments of modern techniques of production.

According to statistical evidences from many developed countries, the major part of their national income is not only due to the provision of mainly natural resources, but it is primarily due to the quality of human resources that contribute to education and scientific research, in the preparing and training of these human resources to improve performance. These statistics confirm that, education in general and university education in particular, contribute to the preservation and continuity of development. It is no longer acceptable in this modern times, in many political, economic, social and even academic higher educational institutions, to practice their functions of teaching, research, and service of the local community, in that traditional style. But these educational institutions have become more demanding than ever to perform their functions within an integrated update system, which goes in line with contemporary trends and changes, to contribute a leading role to the sustainable development of knowledge society, and to achieve a true partnership with this knowledge society. The contribution of these institutions can be done through the formation of knowledge capital, human resources development and the integration of all of these with the requirements of development, with the growth of labor market and with the search & discovery for new knowledge.

These institutions can also contribute to the industry, investment, the deployment and diffusion of this new knowledge among the largest number of individuals at local and global levels. They can also contribute to the raising of positive intellectual orientations of students and society. (Fillet, 2003, p 384)

1:1 Future Expectations of Arab Universities

In order for Arab universities to contribute to the desired development, these universities must achieve the following:

1. Providing society with qualified manpower in various scientific disciplines and professions.
2. Striving for the development of society and the treatment of problems through the production of scientific research.
3. Providing the community with highly qualified personnel to lead and take responsibility for the construction and development in the community, as cultural source through conferences, seminars and scientific meetings, (Khudayr 1419, p 75-76).

This research aims to present the most internal and external challenges that are facing higher education institutions in the Arab world; in addition to searching in the responsiveness of these higher education to the surrounding variables, and how to integrate them with the requirements of the development and needs of the labor market.

1:2 the Situation of the Arab Higher Education

Higher Education in the Arab World began to emerge and spread after the mid-twentieth century. As the literature of higher education indicates, there were only three universities in the Arab world up to 1950. Those universities were: the Syrian University, founded in 1923, currently known as Damascus University, the Egyptian Governmental University- known as University of Cairo today, which was established in 1925 and then Farouk I University, which was established in 1942, then the current Alexandria University. (Althbyta, 2000, pp. 221-222). However, the eighties and nineties of the last century witnessed a remarkable development in higher education, represented in the high number of universities, and the high number of students' enrollment. There were about (200) new University in 2004 according (Aghbari, 2005, p 235), raised to (395) University in 2008, where private universities accounted for 48.4% as mentioned in (the first Arab Report on Cultural Development, 2008). The four years from 2004 to 2008 witnessed a boom in the number of new universities. This was a strong indicator of accelerating the pace of demand for universities and the multiplicity of opportunities, and the heat of competition; after the public universities had been dominant for a long time. This development can be regarded as a strength and a weakness at the same time.

But in spite of the quantitative expansion witnessed by the Arab world by the opening of more universities and higher education institutions - the general situation of higher education in the Arab world, according to (the Arab Human Development Report 2008) is still modest compared to the achievements of other countries in the developing world (UNDP, 2009). The Arab Human Development Report of 2008 concluded the poor production and dissemination of knowledge in Arab countries (UNDP, 2009).

In the light of these and other negative phenomena, we can identify some of the internal and external challenges facing higher education institutions in the Arab countries, which are almost common to most of Arab Universities (Sultan, 1427). These challenges are as follows:

There is a poor level of harmony between the institutions of higher education and development needs and the labor market, at the quantitative and qualitative level. This can be witnessed in the poor level of knowledge, skills and work values and behaviors of most graduates. It can also be seen in the imbalance between disciplines, where the graduates of the humanities, in some Arab countries, are higher in proportion to the graduates of scientific and applied disciplines. The latest are more required by the economic and social development and the labor market. In Jordan, for example the number of registered engineers in the union was 172,000 in 2008, and the number of students who were studying engineering at universities at that time was 32,000, while practical need of the Jordanian labor market was not more than 37,000. This is a large surplus in the labor market that applies to a lot of countries in the Arab world except the Gulf States. From the chart below, we can see the limited capacity of the institutions of higher education compared to the size of the growing social demand for higher education. The statistics indicate that the enrollment in higher education in Arab countries continues to grow. According to a survey conducted by (Okal, 2011), we can see the following numbers:

year	Number of students Per million
1975	1.0
1996	3.1
1998	3.6
2008	7.164

The Global Monitoring Report of Education for All, issued by UNESCO in 2005 pointed that the percentage of enrollment in higher education in Arab countries was (16.2%) in 1998, rose to (22%) in (2001); but this ratio was still low if compared with students' enrollment in the developed countries, (UNESCO, 2005, pp. 324-325)

It is expected at the present time that, there will be an increasing demand for higher education as a result of demographic factors and economic variables witnessed in the high growth rates among the segments of young people, who are expected to be involved in higher education. The economic factor can be seen in the presence of a direct correlation between the level of educational attainment and employment opportunities, especially with the increasing knowledge intensity in economic activity or the so-called knowledge economy.

2:0 Education funding???

It is evident that there is a lack of financial allocations to institutions of higher education and lack of increasing spending on self-financing alternatives on education. Although public spending on higher education in many universities and institutions of higher education is increasing and continues to grow, but it needs more support and search for other sources of funding to be spent on development projects to improve the development of academic environment. Okal:(2011) points that spending on education in the Arab world in 1970, amounted to \$307 million, and in 1980 reached one billion and \$204 million, and in 2000 reached \$7 billion while in 2008 it raised to 10 billion dollars. In addition, Arab universities suffer from low level of marketing their services for the community in terms of consultancy and applied research the thing that make universities lose important source of self-financing. In the United States, for example: 40 federal institutions offer almost \$4 billion to support research activities in more than 350 universities.

As a result of this huge investment, these universities were able to achieve progress in research in various fields. The Americans were able to harvest many Nobel prizes in science and technology. The American researchers accomplished between the years 1953-1973 two thirds of basic technological innovations, (Hammoud, 1998, p 18). The emergence of private universities in the Arab world has significantly contributed to the lack of funding for education, where the percentage of funding from private education to research and development, is not commensurate with its size. In fact, even the reserves to be spent on research and scholarship and development do not go to the targets since the goal of private education in most cases is quick profit.

2:1 Challenges face the Arab Higher Education

The poor quality of higher education programs in the Arab world and the level of scientific research are of the most important challenges that face higher education in the Arab world. The Arab Human Development Report of 2003 pointed out that the most important challenge in the field of education lies in the deterioration of the quality of education, where education lacks development to improve the quality of life and the development of required capabilities. The report also noted that higher education in Arab countries lacks a clear vision and policies that govern the whole educational processes, (UNDP, 2003, p 52).

But in spite of these challenges, the recent years have witnessed a considerable interest of some of higher education institutions in raising the level of performance through the application of comprehensive quality standards. In the project, which was adopted by the Regional Bureau for Arab States to improve the quality of higher education in the Arab countries showed that the level of quality in eight universities in the Arab, out of fifteen University was acceptable, and that four of them in the middle level, and three were close to the good level, (Hareb, 2005, p 39). The main external challenges facing higher education institutions in the Arab World are :

1. With the beginning of the third millennium, communities and institutions at different levels face many challenges imposed by the changes and developments in many areas that can be summarized in globalization, high-tech, and openness to the media, the explosion of knowledge and information and economic blocs. It can be noticed in the crystallization of a new world order that raises concepts of free market and free economy, democracy and individual freedom. (Secretariat, 2004, p 17); (Fillet, 2003, p 145).
2. We can understand the new world economic order, in three systems: the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, the Organization of International Trade and what is imposed by these three organization of requirements on the economies of the other countries and the impact of these requirements on the various sectors of development in these countries, (Rashid, 1423, p 9-10); (Juagiuah , 2001, pp. 200-212).
3. The growing importance of science and technology, as a necessary means is crucial for economic gain in the growing competition, at the local and international level.
4. The decline in the importance of raw materials in the formation of competitive advantages of products and the increasing importance of knowledge and technical component.

Based on the above and in light of these challenges, where trends of economic globalization are growing and where the technological developments rates are accelerating; it has become important to give new dimension to the concept of competitive advantage, the process of improving and developing the quality of outputs of higher education institutions. It has also become important to raise efficiency and ability to creativity and innovation in the areas of modern technology, to absorb the benefits of the current stage and to deal effectively with future developments & changes so as to enhance the ability of Arab countries to integrate into the global economy.

3:0 Graduates Vs. labor market

The domestic market as well as the regional market need a graduate with specifications and specific skills, but the most important question is: is the graduate ready for the labor market? In an opinion poll specially carried out for this research, a sample of students majoring in computer including computer science, information systems and software engineering have been interrogated from some Jordanian public and private universities showed that 65% of those who got jobs have studied extra courses in the areas in specific skills during the last year or after the completion of their study at the university so to be able to find a suitable job. This example is taken from Jordan as Jordan is one of the Arab countries that has made tangible development in the field of higher education, and this also clearly indicates the graduates' lack of readiness for the labor market.

4:0 Opportunities for institutions of higher Arabic Education

In light of the challenges that have been displayed it may be appropriate to provide some suggestions to promote the level of higher education and work to improve opportunities as follows:

First: We need to take in consideration the information that came in the global reports on higher education, including the Arab report submitted by the International Commission on Education in the twenty-century entitled (Learning: The Treasure Within), which noted that the institutions of higher education as independent centers can contribute to sustainable development through the following four functions:

1. Preparing students for education and scientific research.
2. Providing settings in highly specialized areas in line with the needs of economic and social life.
3. Openness to all multiple aspects in response to the so-called continuing education in its broadest sense.
4. International cooperation.

The report emphasized that in order for education to fulfill all its functions, it should be organized around four key areas of learning which are considered foundations of knowledge for each individual, that is: the learning of knowledge, and learning to work, and learning to live with others and learning to be, (UNESCO, 1996, pp. 77-121).

And as stated in the Universal Declaration on Higher Education of the Century (vision and work) in the first article, which was entitled (the Mission to educate, to train, and to undertake research) emphasized the need to preserve the functions and values of higher education, especially the task of contributing to sustainable development of communities by:

1. Preparation of qualified highly skilled personnel able to meet the needs of all sectors of human activity.

2. Open access to higher learning for a lifetime, to allow students the most options with flexibility to enter into the system and get out of it.
3. Development & modernization and dissemination of knowledge through research, as part of higher education mission in the service of society, and the encouragement & development of scientific and technological research in various fields.
4. Help to understand the national, regional, international and historical culture and the interpretation, preservation, promotion, development and the dissemination of these cultures.
5. Help to protect and enhance societal values by ensuring the teaching of young man and woman the core values and opening of areas of their independent critical thinking.
6. Contribute to the development and improvement of all levels of learning, especially through the preparation of teachers (Unesco, 1998, p21).
7. Review of the programs and courses offered by these institutes and focusing on what will be not on the labels.

(The Arab Human Development Report 2003) also concluded by providing a strategic vision towards a knowledge society on five pillars:

1. The freedom of opinion and expression.
2. The full deployment of sophisticated quality education.
3. Dissemination of research and technical development.
4. Adequate funding.
5. A relentless shift towards a pattern of knowledge production, to establish an authentic Arab knowledge model, (UNDP, 2004, p 3).

Second: the application of standards of accreditation for institutions of higher Arabic Institutes of Education, at the programmatic and institutional framework. This will raise the level of academic programs, reputation and academic standing of these institutions. Then it will make them more competitive, acceptable to go in line with the requirements of development and the labor market. They will be more in line with the developments and global changes, especially in scientific and technical areas, when these institutes apply t

1. Preparation of qualified highly skilled work force able to meet the needs of all sectors of human activity.
2. Open access to higher learning for a lifetime allows the students the most options with the flexibility to enter into the system and get out of it. These standards, not only for getting credit, but for continuous local and global improvement and competitiveness.

Third: Arab Administrations should adopt the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the management of institutions of higher education, as one of the most important methods of effective management that should be adopted as a strategic option, in order to reach a high degree of satisfaction with services and operations, offered by educational institutions in various aspects, in the application of standards to ensure quality performance.

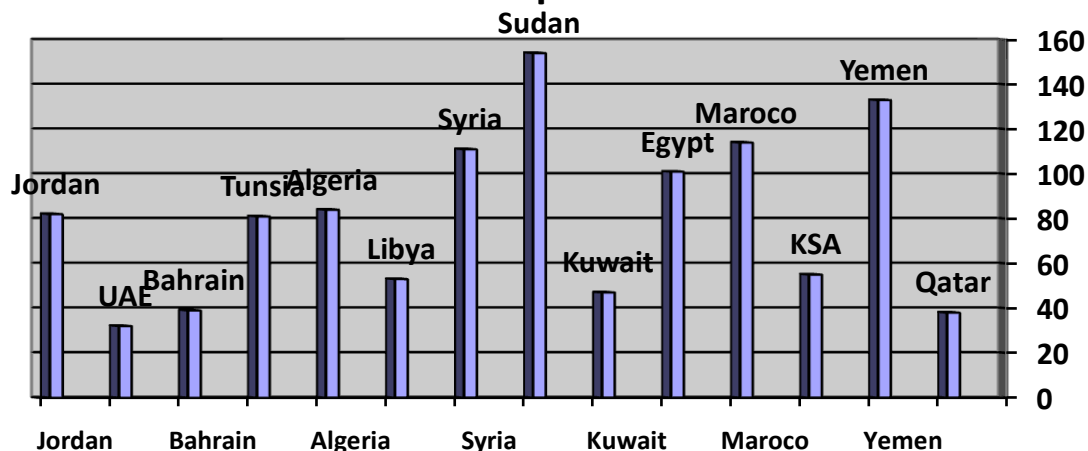
Fourth: The activation of partnership with civil society organizations, where the partnership is imposed by the public interests and common interest between educational and other governmental and private sectors. Also, this can represent a real joints of desired development. Therefore, it requires opportunities for these sectors to participate in the councils of institutions of higher education and participate in decision-making related to planning their academic programs, in addition to providing opportunities and overcome all obstacles to increase investment in higher education and encourage these sectors to do so.

We can see that some universities in the Arab World are moving with concrete steps in this area. Of course, this is a good omen of the future fierce competition in the provision of services and the adhering to the labor market more and more by all Arab universities. Although the issue is not without critics of these experiments, but at least it began to move the stagnant water in the right way.

5: 0 Conclusion

The human development reports, clearly indicate some progress in the field of development in some countries in the Arab world. This is inevitably will have some impact on the future of education. According to the Human Development Index 2010, the classification of some Arab countries global rankings in the development can be shown by the following chart:

Scale of Development in Arab World



The higher scale is the lower in development

This clearly points to the rate of high development in some countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Bahrain, Saudi Arabia and Libya, and we expect that the improvement in the future, and the lead in the quality of higher education, will be for the benefit of these countries, followed by other countries of medium-development despite the lack of recourses, such as Jordan and Tunisia. But this would not be wishful thinking, but with continued hard work, high development would, inevitably have an impact on the educational process in the Arab world, because education and development go hand in hand, each drives the other forward.

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