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Higher education in Libya, system under stress

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Abstract

There have been few studies conducted on the problems facing higher education system in Libya. Recent research has shown that there is a significant gap in higher education levels. This means, there is an urgent need to address this by filling this gap, research focused the problem show that, the gap can be blamed on changes of systems and policies in the country. However much of the burden emanates from the rapid growth of learning institutions. University colleges have spread across Libya and a ban of foreign language in Libya has played a central role in stressing the higher education system. The paper aims to present a comprehensive insight with references to the higher education system in Libya and how policy and administration backed by political nuances have caused the current situation that has affected the quality of the education. The methods used in the paper include: literature review, policy document content analysis, quality assurance policies analysis. Research shows that there is a significant gap in higher education levels. This means, there is an urgent need to address this by filling this gap. The paper draws from a wide range research ideal recommendations and possible solutions for problems.

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1. Introduction

Libya is located in the centre of North Africa facing the Mediterranean to the North coastline of close to 2000 kilometres. Borders Egypt and Sudan on the East, Niger, Chad and Sudan on the South and Algeria and Tunisia to the West. Libya has an area of 1.8 Million square kilometres, (Ismae, Ismael, and Abu Jaber 1991), Almansory (1995), it is the fourth largest among the countries of Africa and seventeenth among the countries of the world, and seven times the size of the United Kingdom, (Ismae, Ismael, and Abu Jaber 1991). The population of Libya is approximately 6.4 million (The World Factbook 2011), and includes 1.7 million students, over 270,000 of whom study at higher education level (Hamdy 2007), most live in the North of the state. Arabic is the official language.

About 70% of men and 35% of women were literate in the early 1980's. This has improved in 2004 to make literacy for men above 90%, and more than 70% for women. The main reason for that improvement for women

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comes from good attendance of girls in first stage schools, (Libyan Times 2010). The Libyan higher education system is very modern if it is compared to other developing countries that there were almost no higher education system at all in last 6 decades ago, (Libyan Times 2010) while today education is free for all at all stages and the enrolments rate is extremely high at university level, (National report presented to UNESCO 2004). Any system growing rapidly faces pressures and challenges. Over the period of the 1980s and 1990s, the system faced many problems, particularly in the use of language of instruction and changes in the education system.



Figure 1: Map of Libya
Source: World Fact Book 2011

2. The education system

Libya was granted its independence by the United Nations on 24 December 1951. It was described as one of the poorest and most backward country of the world (Wallace and Wilkinson 2004). The constitutional declaration issued by the revolutionary Command Council (RCC) on 11 December 1969 (World Data On Education 2007), clarifies that “education is a right and a duty for all Libyan citizens, it is free and compulsory until the end of the preparatory level, and the State is responsible for building and establishing schools, institutes, universities and educational and cultural foundations”. The education system in the Libyan Arab Jamahiriya consists of five stages of education.

2.1. Pre-school

This lasts for two years and is for children aged four and five. This stage is an optional. Pre-schools do not have specific curricula or educational programs. The goal is developing children linguistically and to prepare them for schools.

2.2. Basic Education

Basic education is for nine years. It is compulsory and free. Children enrol at the age of 6. It includes six years of primary and three years of primary secondary. Each level at primary education has a number of subjects which

pupils have to learn and pass to move on high level, successful pupils at ninth year obtain the Basic Education Certificate.

2.3. Secondary Education

Students who have successfully finished primary education can enrol in secondary education which is divided into four years in specialized secondary schools (Basic Sciences, Engineering Sciences, Life Sciences, Social Sciences, Economic Sciences and Languages) or three years in vocational training centres.

2.4. University and Higher Vocational Education

Students who complete specialized secondary education may enrol in one of the university faculties suited to the specialized secondary certificate they hold. Higher education is free, only those who enrol in Open University or private higher education require a tuition fees.

Table 1: Enrolment in University Education after getting the specialized secondary education certificate

Source: Resolution of the General People's Committee for Education (2007)

Division	University Faculties the students enrol in
Basic Sciences	Sections of faculty of science: Math, Statistics, Physics, Earth Sciences, Computing, Meteorology, Faculty of Education, Higher Vocational Training Centres
Engineering Sciences	Various Sections of the Faculty of Engineering, and Faculty of Education, Higher Vocational Training Centres
Life Sciences	Medicine, Dentistry, Pharmacy, Veterinary, Medical Technology, Faculty of Education, Higher Institutes of Health, Faculty of Science Departments (Plant and Animal)
Economic Sciences	Economy, Accounting, Administrative Sciences, Faculty of Education, Higher Vocational Training Centres
Social Sciences	Literature, Law, Political Sciences, Physical Education, Arts and Media
Languages	Language Departments, Faculty of Arts, Faculty of Education

Students can enrol in higher technical and vocational institutions as well, which include polytechnics; higher teacher training institutes; higher institutes for trainers, higher institutes of technical, industrial and agricultural sciences.

2.5. Advanced Studies

These include studies after completing university and higher vocational level such as a postgraduate diploma, Masters Degree, and PhD Degree in various specializations and fields.

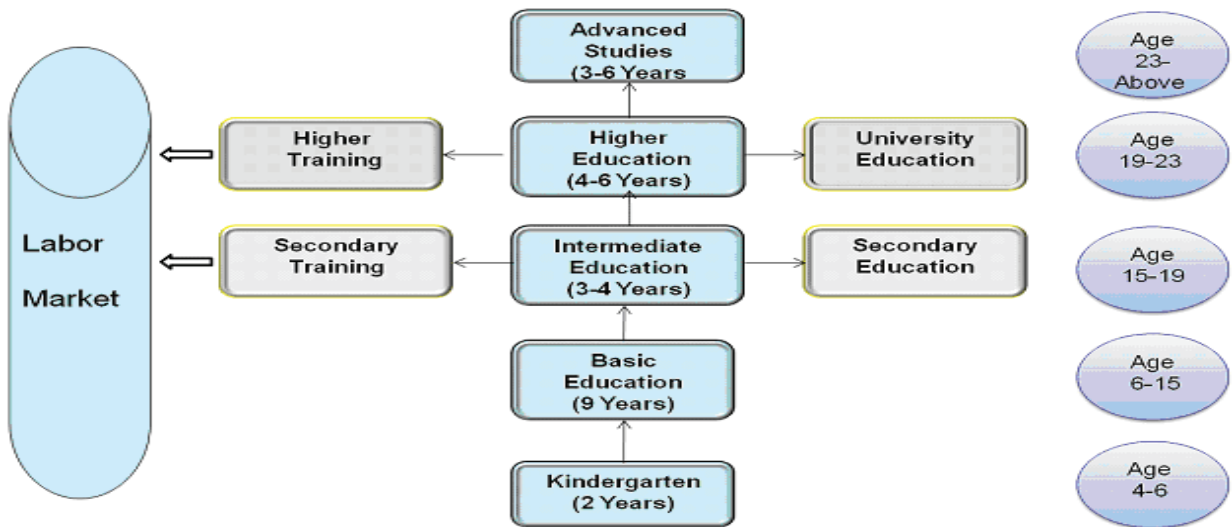


Figure 2: Structure of the Education System in Libya
 Source: Libyan Arab Jamahiriya. World Data on Education (2007)

3. Objectives of education system in Libya

The national reports of Libya, “The Development of Education”, which were presented to the International Conference on Education, sessions 48, in Geneva, (National report presented to UNESCO 2008) respectively, states that the general objectives of education system in Libya as following:

- Enable students to learn Islamic values and train them from the Quran and Sunnah perspective.
- Train students to use Arabic as their main language when learning and at the same time, train them to study foreign language to develop better global communications skills.
- Students should understand the Jamahiriya theory and use its values practically.
- Develop a sense of ‘Africanism’ among students to ensure they identify with Africa culture and traditions.
- Ensure students develop a positive attitude towards their cultural and social values and the civilization of objectives of the society.
- Enrich the learners spiritually and morally to develop both artistic and aesthetic taste.
- Provide educational opportunities for all and assist the students to make choices that meet their future career objectives and sustainable human development.
- Support students to discover their abilities and self-learning to improve the capacities.
- Develop scientific and critical thinking skills to stay in touch with advancements in technology and industrial research developments.
- The system should be able to provide and support incentive based education to develop student abilities and assist them acquire knowledge through self-education. It is important that the education system be apt enough to enable learners develop critical thinking skills and scientific analysis capacities.
- An education system should have incentives to assist the learners understand global developments from a social-economic perspective besides developing their social cognitive abilities such as developing feelings and understanding them.
- The system should provide students with a sense of belonging and feelings of vital importance to the Libyan society such as the Libyan society and the other spaces such the Mediterranean space and the Global importance of Libya to the rest of the world.
- The Education should implicitly provide students with knowledge about the values of the global society. In fact the learners should be trained and inspired to look at the world as a society unified by the same interests such as progress and evolution towards better standards of life and socio-economics.

- The teachers should impress values of sociability and insist on interaction between the students and those from other cultures. This means the students will develop global citizenry values and open up to the world. The learning environment backed by the lecturers and other active stakeholders should inspire living positively. It should develop a partnership that will support innovation and creativity to support learner's diverse knowledge besides enabling the students to use the diverse sources of knowledge available.
- Apart from supporting education, higher education learning should achieve a balance between information and its practical use. This will enable integration of the links between theoretical frameworks and platforms of their use, such as the job market, to help students find their future career roles. However, the need to address students with special needs has not been given emphasis. Hence the efforts to improve education should also address such issues. In fact the education system should open up to all those who have disabilities and provide them with the education and skills that can help them have sustainable businesses they can engage in.
- The environment serves as a major contributor to better economic development. The education system should be better equipped to address environmental issues by providing information and education about taking care of the environment and maintaining integrity. Learners should understand the importance of the ecosystem and remain steadfast in ensuring the environment is safe and always being improved.
- The education system should enlighten learners to the need for peace and security. Due to various social problems observed today, learners should be advised and taught about human rights and the importance of building a peaceful community of mutuality is a vital tenet in today's global affairs. Learners should learn the way of dialogue, peaceful means of conflict resolution, and develop capacities to address socio-politics in a way that shows a sense of civilization. This will enable them to realize their place in the society and the Libyan place in the international community.

4. Quality of education

The quality of education in Libya requires redress. This has made the government come up with various intervention strategies. Such strategies are in partnership with stakeholders in the education sector. The education sector in Libya so far has sought to provide a number of options through which students can access curricula programs that suit them better.

Despite issue of technology to support infrastructure for IT studies, more needs to be done to improve how information technology can be improved and develop better means of tapping into quality data and content relevant in academic development in higher learning institutions, (World bank Report 2006).

According to Tamtam et al. (2010), lifting language bans imposed and high unemployment rates due to a complex education system can be well addressed through providing a rationale of modern learning systems. Lack of diverse language skills in Libya has significantly degraded the capacity of students and ability to use available data due to language barriers (World Bank Report 2006). Learners, since learning foreign language was banned are unable to translate available data and learning material to their benefit.

5. Higher education

To understand Libyan education better, a brief overview on its past provides a comprehensive insight about its education system. Libya became independent on 24th December 1951. Then, the UN clustered Libya as a backward and very poor country with only 15 students graduating in university all with degrees in humanities. A constitutional decree in 11th December 1969 made education free for all. After independence, Libya got its first university based in Benghazi in 1957, El-Hawat (2000).

Independence brought rapid changes in the education system and during the 1975-76 academic years, about 13,418 students were studying in university. In 2004, an estimated 200,000 students were studying in Libyan universities with another 70,000 studying in higher technical and vocational training colleges, Clark (2004). To accommodate the rising interest in learning, more institutions of higher learning have been established throughout Libya. The main factor contributing to this high uptake of higher education programs is due to the increased participation of the Libyan government and the free aspect of the education. The government under a public budget program funds most of the universities. A number of private universities have been accredited to give the Libyan Education system new impetus.

The education system in Libya has seen rapid development shape its future. It has significantly improved and advanced compared to other developing countries, (Libyan Times 2010). The free aspect of it has made more students enrol and take up studies. However, this rapid structural advancement has come with framework pressures that seem to be weighing heavily on it. Socio-cultural issues have also weighed on the system and in the past saw the ban of foreign being imposed barring universities to teach foreign language.

6. Objective of higher education system in Libya

To get a more comprehensive overview of the Libyan Education system policy, the researcher has extracted the policy in principal to provide an insight into what the policy hopes to administrate. The policy observes the various inroads made during the various stages of developing the education system in the past decades (The General People's Committee Act. No 18, 2010).

It observes that the state has made inroads with regard to developing frameworks for bettering the education system in principal. The objective of the policy and actions taken by the stakeholders are aimed at ensuring the country achieves its national education goals. In addition to national development and human civilization development, the policy hopes to administrate in areas of increasing human knowledge development. Expanding such horizons and facilitating the achievement of economic and social development in Libya is important and addressed in the education system policy.

There is an urgent need for specials in science and technology in order to address the poorly staffed branches of the latter. The education system needs to develop capacity in these branches of the education system to help provide learners with high-level knowledge and skills. This will help the education standards in such branches to keep pace with international standards, the progress made in science, and technology globally besides ensuring Libyan community becomes fully civilized and admissible in the global community.

Promotion of scientific research and related studies is vital. Various studies that contribute to scientific research and technology will help speed the rate at which scientific and technological progress aimed at addressing various social-political and socio-economic problems of Libya can be faster achieved.

The policy provides an insight into the need to develop a means of promoting scientific research through the development of undergraduate educational literature, translation and the provision laboratories to support research and clinical training. This will go long way to nature local talent and expertise in such areas such as medicine and engineering.

Promote cultural studies and propagate interest in Arabic language and culture to make the literature knowledge and capacity is upped. Developing Arabic language capacity will help develop all branches of science and other studies more effectively.

Educating the learners about Libyan values such as the Revolution Culture, and entrench the peoples command principals in the public thought to increase patriotism to Libya.

Establishing collaboration between good cultural and scientific relationships and scientific institutions locally and internationally will be very good at developing more skills and capacity.

Providing work experience, communicate and advice to organizations, agencies, and companies will be promoted through education. At the same time, the institutions of higher learning should be a platform through which values, morals, and development of science and arts should onset from.

7. Challenges of higher education

A Report released to the Centre of Quality Assurance and Accreditation of Educational Institutions in Libya expounded on Exploration Visits to Some Higher Education Institutions by Ibrahim et al. (2010) tables findings, which shows that there are some challenges facing Libyan higher education institutions. These challenges inhibit proper implementation of these institutions programs. Besides the challenges stop or prevent the institution from achieving the higher education system goals, these challenges are tabled below:

- Most programs launched by the institutions of higher learning lack material resources to support them. This hinders maintenance of such educational programs and services leading to subsequent severance of their running.
- Lack of strategic planning and sufficiency to plan for the short-term objectives has continued to barrage these institutions seriously compromising short-term educational objectives.

Most institutions lack a criterion of selecting leaders, especially academic leaders who can steer and shape the future of the education system.

- There is a problem in defining the vision observed in scenarios such as the pillars of strategic planning which defines the institution's mission and objectives and efforts in the community and excellence.

- There is a dire lack of development and training programs for faculty members leading to poor participation in such areas further deteriorating the quality of the system.

- Lack of a concept of quality assurance is nascent in the system. Its impact on the creation and activation of good practices in the educational process is very negative. This has led to poor management of the system and important aspects of the education system in principal.

It has been observed that there is a typical centralization of decisions within universities and non-activation of the duties enshrined in the organizational structure of universities. This has dire effect on policy and administration.

- There are notable failures in accountability whereby personal interest overrides those of the institution and state coffers. This is culpable to stifling development of the institutions.

Unstable administration and constant change in the regulations and systems of the study programs in the institutions of higher learning make it difficult to develop strategic plans for the same further deteriorating the system capacity and quality.

- It is important to narrow the powers of leaders in academia at all levels of the higher learning institutions. However, due to lack of a clear policy to administrate on the same, this has undermined efforts to develop programs that can improve the quality of education. This has caused structural changes in the institutions and further decline in capacity to address administrative and academic development efforts.

- Though there are efforts to develop and improve better academic programs, it is becoming difficult to do so owing to the fact that there are difficulties in the process. These difficulties include variable such as quantitative dimensions of education quality and the spread of the institutions in a wide geographical area without consolidating a central decision-making area let alone adoption of a strategic communicable headquarters for these institutions.

- The problems that have accumulated for many years need to be addressed. However, they cannot be addressed, let alone be solved in one day rather gradually but within stipulated periods.

- The senior university management should have access to various educational development plans and immediate results of the activities and programs of quality to help them make decisions that are good enough.

- Universities and their administration have failed to establish a relationship with the labour market making learners to be without favour from the job market. Through linking undergraduate and graduate programs with the labour market, the education system can greatly shape the future of the students and the industry as well.

- Identify areas of research and development to allow the development and proper prioritizing of key areas of studies. Developing and equipping laboratories and libraries to ensure that the education system is fully equipped and backed with relevant information sources rather than subscribing to periodicals and academic journals.

- Use of traditional methods of learning, such as a focus on the conservation and indoctrination by many universities, which were established long time ago and the lack of use of technology, has continued to affect the quality of education offered. Problems observed in the same area include lack of well developed learning strategies and modern employment in teaching, and the omission of the use of self-learning skills such as: analytical thinking, problem solving, creativity, innovation, and research skills.

8. Recommendations and possible solutions

Previous sections reviewed the findings from exploration visits to some of the country's higher education institutions. It is also reviewed the quality assurance and accreditation of educational reports. These reports suggest various approaches to improving and rectifying the emerging problems in the education system Ibrahim et al. (2010). Appropriate recommendations to strengthen the education system and the overall development and improvement of the universities are very important. We have outlined key points inform of appropriate intervention approaches and solutions to the education systems problems:

- Continue to promote a culture of quality in both administrative and academic leadership. Encouraging leaders in such areas of administration will inspire a sense of importance and help these leaders feel part of the performance improvement process.

-Provide positive attention and motivations to faculty members and equity in distributing opportunities in the institutions. This will develop loyalty to the universities and a commitment to improve and properly administrate.

- Review the regulations and administrative procedures to catapult newer efficient procedures in the universities in line with the functions and activities of the offices of quality. It should also address the issue of roles in the education system where roles should be well defined to exert pressure on delivery and task accomplishment. This will improve strategy execution ensure quality in university programs.

- The need to work on the empowerment of academic leaders (faculties and departments) to perform its functions is important. This can be achieved through expanding the size of the powers granted to it especially in relation to spending on programs and academic activities with the provision of mechanisms for accountability at all levels of administration and management structure with the activation of internal rules and regulations for all colleges and departments.

- Activate quality assurance departments in universities and colleges to intensify awareness and training. This will ensure quality education and culture is entrenched in the institutional values.

- Establish a relationship between learners and their lecturers to ease the burden of teaching as in the case of the law graduate departments to meet faculty members' specialist fields with the of course content.

- Ensure transparency and accountability is in the methods, procedures and mechanisms used to assess the students and faculty and staff

- Develop mechanisms to expedite the evaluation of efficiency and effectiveness of studies and ensure self-studies in colleges and universities are improved.

Higher learning institutions should adopt strategic planning as a key ingredient of stimulating the development. This will ensure they achieve specific objectives within set time (goal setting).

- Develop plans for improvement and development of graduate programs giving attention to the libraries through update, develop references, and link to the World Wide Web. Ensure subscriptions to periodicals and scientific journals and to assign specialists to manage them is achieved to keep learners informed about emerging researches and research findings.

- Universities management should provide an environment that can support sustainable innovation through the implementation of the rights of faculty members. Besides these should be guaranteed by regulation in terms of scientific leave - upgrade - Attending scientific conferences.

- Development of curricula and learning programs outlines/descriptors to ensure learners and teachers are well informed about the details of what they want to study in new and existing undergraduate and postgraduate programs

- Develop plans to manage risks and provide the potential for each different universities and colleges.

- Establish programs to motivate and reward departments and colleges of excellence for implementing the quality to ensure they remain motivated and objective in accomplishing tasks and achieving more in through strategic plans.

Provide opportunities and learning facilities to people with special needs.

- The education system should accommodate more support to the participatory process in decision-making by key players in the education system. This will help reduce central administrative leadership to enable the Academy leaders to meet the challenges and take appropriate action on time.

- Mobilize resources or increase funding of education programs to ensure appropriate financial resources are made available to the level of universities, colleges and branches. This will ensure maintenance of quality programs and associated activities. Besides it will improve the effectiveness of the academic level of students and Faculty members through excellence in teaching activities and scientific research and community service, environment and develop a culture of ethics of the career of university professor.

- Increase the partnership of all parties to the educational process in universities such as faculty members, students, staff, as partners in the implementation and success of quality education.

- Increasing academic advisory services with emphasis on undergraduate studies for most university colleges

- Increase efficiency by speeding up time saving to ensure the initial and final accreditation of the universities as institutions or programs. This will ensure the status of institutions in terms of stability in educational activity is achieved faster.

- Put emphasis on improving learning conditions especially in the institutions.

- Ensure there is thorough check before the establishment of private universities, in fact, before granting licenses, it is vital to ensure the availability of quality to the educational programs they offer.

- Link the education system through academic programs to the outside world. This can be achieved through staying informed about global trends in research and education development and the demand and rising needs in the job/labour market.

- Involve the state private universities to the National Committee of private education meetings and involve them in the process of developing specific policies for admission to universities. Also, involve them in establishing a framework for addressing community needs and development plans.

- Provide private faculty members at private universities facilities, and even access to libraries and laboratories.

- Establish mechanisms to support these institutions through linking them with external support such the private sector/labour market. This will ensure these institutions play a key role in developing level of education also ensure their contribution to the national economy more effectively.

- The education system should establish a ward for quality and excellence at the departmental level, colleges, public and private universities to inspire more good work and quality in education and the system itself.

9. Conclusion

Higher education is the most important sector. To achieve a high standard of education system in Libya, challenges and problems must be addressed, some studies and reports on education system in Libya suggest that new technologies, updated syllabus and quality assurance in education must be implemented.

Based on such, the possibility of achieving a very apt education system will be easy and an achievable goal. The weaknesses identified in the higher learning institutions and their system can be addressed effectively through these select modalities. The government role in increasing funding to university programs will be a great improve.

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