

Evaluating Teaching Quality indicators in Saudi Faculties of Education: The road to planning for achieving teaching quality

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Abstract: *This study aims to evaluating the level of application of teaching quality indicators (TQIs) in Saudi Faculties of Education (SFEs) by the perspective of academics. To achieve the objectives of the study, data were collected through an online survey of 467 male and female academics in 21 SFEs. The online survey consisted of (20) items. Participants were asked to indicate the current application of teaching quality indicators in SFEs teaching practices. The findings indicate the overall mean scores of the level of application of TQIs was an 'Occasionally level'. The results also showed that there were statistically significant differences due to the nationality and participation in PD activities. Based on these findings, this paper provides recommendations to planning for achieving TQ in SFEs, taking into consideration the perspectives of academics, their involvement in the processes of planning and improving TQ, and the policies and procedures developed to guide the application of TQIs in Saudi higher education, particular in SFEs.*

Keywords: *teaching quality; indicators; planning, faculties of education; Saudi higher education*

I. Introduction

Over the past two decades, higher education systems and institutions worldwide have undergone extensive changes and reforms related to improving quality. A substantial feature of these changes has been the drive to produce systematic evidence of efficiency and effectiveness (e.g., Doyle, 2006; Guthrie & Neumann, 2007; Hayford, 2003). Teaching quality (TQ) is considered an important component in improving the overall quality of higher education institutions (Henard & Leprince-Ringuet, 2008). However, in many Arab countries, including Saudi Arabia, there has been a lack of critical discussion of this issue in higher education. In 2003, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report regarding Arab human development highlighted the poor quality of education in Arab higher education institutions, stating that many of these institutions failed to provide effective frameworks to improve the quality of academics, or the development of required teaching capabilities (UNDP, 2003). Factors cited as contributing to the poor quality of education included a lack of clear vision, and the absence of well-designed policies regulating the educational process. Since the publication of this report, a number of documents have reported changes in the field of higher education across the Gulf States (e.g., Al-Alawi, Al-Kaabi, Rashdan & Al-Khaleefa, 2009; Alharbi & Al-Atiqi, 2009; Burden-Leahy, 2009; Carroll, Razvi, Goodliffe & Al-Habsi, 2009). In Saudi Arabia, the Ministry of Higher Education has given priority to the introduction of a quality assurance process (Darandari et al., 2009; Onsmann, 2010). This shift in focus marks one of the most significant changes sparked by the UNDP (2003) report. In addition, many Saudi universities have recently sought to obtain accreditation from Saudi Arabia's National Commission for Assessment and Academic Accreditation (NCAAA) or from international organisations, such as the National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE). However, to date, a growing number of studies have reported the importance of achieving TQ as a powerful tool for enhancing student learning outcomes in higher education institutions (Al Hubaishi & Al Omari, 2009; Al Zaher, 2004; Badri, 2008; Ramsden, 1991). According to Henard and Leprince-Ringuet (2008), the importance of TQ is linked to various changes in higher education, such as growing international competition amongst institutions. TQ is also related to the importance of education for economic success, as well as the need to increase the status of teaching in relation to research (Skelton, 2005). However, some higher education institutions in Saudi universities, including the majority of SFEs, still face difficulties implementing improvements to TQ. An important step in this process is to gain an understanding the actual application of TQIs as a gateway to improving TQ in the future.

Fenstermacher and Richardson (2005) assert that, to achieve TQ, the criteria for both good teaching and successful teaching must be met. They suggest that TQ involves a combination of both good teaching (i.e., age-appropriate, morally defensible, adequate and complete teaching) and successful teaching (i.e., teaching in which the learner successfully acquires proficiency in what is being taught).

Following an extensive review of the literature on teaching best practices, the following TQIs have been identified: encouraging contact between students and faculty, developing reciprocity and cooperation among students, encouraging active learning, giving prompt feedback, emphasizing time on task, communicating high expectations, respecting diverse talents and ways of learning, improving university professors' skills in creating intellectual excitement and interpersonal rapport with students (i.e., the kinds of

emotions and relationships that motivate students to do their best work), sparking students' attention and keeping it, help students learn outside of class, engaging students in disciplinary thinking, creating diverse learning experiences, receiving continuous feedback from students, and emphasizing a variety of learning activities (Bain, 2004; Chickering&Gamson, 1999; Ediger, 1998; Lowman, 1995). Moreover, McCarthy and Anderson (2000), in their examination of teaching styles used in history and political science classes, suggest that the use of student-centred, active learning techniques maximises participation, is highly motivational, and facilitates students' understanding and retention of information as effectively, if not better than, a traditional, teacher-centred approach. The importance of active learning, as opposed to passive learning, has pervaded many professional development sessions in higher education.

In addition to exploring TQ in higher education, studies have also identified possible barriers to effective learning. Michael (2007) reports findings from a faculty development workshop in which participants were asked to list perceived barriers to active learning. The barriers were categorised into student characteristics, issues directly impacting faculty, and pedagogical issues, and Michael (2007) urges the use of creative and flexible strategies to ameliorate existing concerns and help ensure student engagement, and improved learning. Carroll and O'Donnell (2010) identify four areas where faculty actions could improve students' learning environment. First, they find that improved student learning occurs when academics clearly explain course requirements and emphasise the most important points of a course. Academics' command of the subject matter and their organisation of class time are related to this area. Second, the authors find that when a faculty member's presentations clearly communicate the material and include examples, students exhibit more effective learning. The use of challenging questions and enthusiasm on the part of academics also contributes to effective communication and enhanced learning. Third, when academics are responsive to students, show respect, express concern, and are available and attentive, students are more engaged and learn more. Fourth, when course assignments and examinations are clarified and important concepts are reinforced with appropriate feedback, student learning increases.

Increasingly, academics in universities around the globe are being asked to show evidence of meeting standards, benchmarks, and indicators related to quality practice and improvement (Otis-Wilborn, Winn, Ford, & Keyes, 2000). According to Chalmers (2008), many indicators of university teaching and learning quality have been grouped into four dimensions of quality teaching practices: institutional climate and systems (e.g., the adoption of student-centred learning perspectives and the use of current research findings in informing teaching); diversity (e.g., commitment to formative assessment, valuing and accommodating student and staff diversity, and implementing multiple pathways for rewarding and recognizing staff); assessment (e.g., the commitment to formative assessment and provision of specific, continuous and timely feedback); and engagement and learning community (e.g., fostering and facilitating academic learning communities).

In sum, teaching in higher education is a contested issue, on which consensus is unlikely to be reached, especially in light of increasing demands for accountability. Specifically, all of the studies presented in this section have aimed to understand principles for good teaching practice, to identify characteristics of effective teaching, to determine success in university teaching, and to identify TQIs in higher education. However, the literature is critical of the importance of many TQIs.

The complicated roles of faculty member in light of the technological development and the explosion of knowledge, requires him to work hard, to make an effective teaching, to adopt the social features and to have teaching skills to gain his students the skills of self-learning, and this is cannot be achieved unless by improving practices of teaching faculty members at universities to get into the quality of education (Biggs & Tang, 2007).

Evaluating teaching came to be seen as the way to improve and develop the performance, to gauge the weak points and to address them, to develop and improve educational practices and master the scientific material, to have a commitment to the lectures, to have the personal characteristics, to use the methods and approaches of effective teaching, to interact with students and to have human relation (Lekena&Bayaga, 2012).

There are a number of previous research studies conducted in different universities in Saudi Arabia (Al-Mazrui,2010; Al-Asmar, 2005; Ghoneim and Alyahyawe, 2004; Jan, 2010), which they found the overall mean scores of level of teaching performance of faculty members was in 'average level'. For example, Al-Asmar (2005) showed that the performance of faculty members in the skills of teaching and classroom management at the University of Umm Al-Qura was 'average level'. In addition, Ghoneim and Alyahyawe (2004) indicated that the academic performance of a faculty member at the King AbdulAziz University was at an 'average level'. Alshehry (2014) study revealed that teachers had some difficulties in addressing practical problems with implementing the current curriculum, using sufficient supplementation for teaching methods, and understanding validation of the evaluation process presented by students on the teachers' achievements.

Furthermore, there are also growing body of research studies in others context which has demonstrated that many faculty members are not applying TQIs effectively in their classrooms (Saeed, 2007; Ghazioat, 2005; Al-Shuaili and Khataybeh, 2002; Al-kubaisi, 2011, Al-Janabi,2009). For instance, Saeed (2007) pointed that a 'low level' in the educational performance of faculty members at Egypt universities with respect to their

handling of students, their ability to link the theoretical to the practical aspects of courses, their ability to use information and communication technology, their ability to encourage students to learn, and their ability to use time effectively. However, Ghazioat (2005) indicated the dissatisfaction of students regarding the methods of assessment that are used by faculty members at the United Arab Emirates University and their use of traditional methods of teaching. Al-Shuaili and Khataybeh (2002) emphasized the 'low levels' of some teaching skills of faculty members at Sultan Qaboos University, especially in the fields of evaluation and the planning of instruction. This may be interpreted as a lack of interest of faculty members in attending training programs and workshops which focus on developing teaching skills to the enough level or may be these programs, workshops and attempts offered by the university for this purpose are not sufficient. Study of Al-kubaisi (2011) aimed to assess the reality of the quality of teaching and ways to improve it from the perspective of faculty members at the Anbar University. The study indicated there exist a decline in the quality of university teaching, and the reason for this decline attributed to some faculty members in disciplines not received adequate educational preparation in the light of a culture of quality. Al-Janabi (2009) concluded that most universities approved evaluation of teaching performance of the faculty member and considers it a key goal. But some methods adopted by universities in the assessing teaching performance of the faculty member are not enhancing the development of performance.

However, the aim of this study is to explore the extent to which academics apply TQIs in their teaching practices in SFEs, and to examine the significant differences in the level of application of TQIs among academics attributed to the gender, nationality, and participation in PD.

This will be achieved by addressing the following research questions:

1. What is the level of application of TQIs among academics at SFEs?
2. Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the gender?
3. Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the nationality?
4. Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the participation in PD?

This study will address this research gap, and its findings will contribute to research on TQs. Finally, a set of recommendations will provide insights that will help educational policy decision makers and planners for future research improve the quality of teaching in Saudi Arabian universities.

II. Method

2.1 Population and Sample

The target population included full-time academics in SFEs. All 21 SFEs provided individual e-mail addresses for their academics. The staff members were subsequently e-mailed an online survey. The population of the study composed of all academics at the Saudi Faculties of Education in the university academic year 2014. However, the sample of the study consisted of (467) male and female academics from 21 Saudi Faculties of Education.

2.2 The online survey instrument

A list of 20 teaching quality indicators (TQIs) were the common TQIs used in higher education. These TQIs statements were generated from a range of materials developed by Bain (2004), Chalmers (2007;2008), Chickering and Gamson (1999), Hess et al. (1999), and Lumpkin and Multon (2013). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they applied TQIs in their institutions. This level of application was rated on a continuum consisting of Five points Likert scale: all the time (5); frequently (4); occasionally (3); rarely (2); and never (1). The criteria for data analysis is presented in Table1.

| Level of application of TQIs | all the time | frequently | occasionally | rarely | never |
|------------------------------|--------------|------------|--------------|-----------|--------|
| Criteria | 4.50-5 | 3.50-4.49 | 2.50-3.49 | 1.50-2.49 | 1-1.49 |

However, the survey items were refined by the research team for contextual relevance. Next, the survey was field-tested using a three-step process. First, it was pilot-tested with 30 academics from different SFEs to ensure its validity and reliability in the context of TQ. Second, a group of five experienced teaching academics reviewed the practices item-by-item and provided further editorial revisions. Third, the survey instrument was tested for reliability and found to demonstrate high reliability, with a Cronbach's alpha of $R=0.94$ among the 20 items. SurveyMonkey.com was used as the means for collecting data. A link was sent to all academics in Saudi Arabia, along with an introductory letter, a consent form, and institutional review board approval.

An examination of the validity and reliability of the main scales used in the current study was conducted. The main purpose of conducting construct validity is to evaluate the structure of the study's scales and the degree to which these scales measure the hypothetical constructs. This was performed by using exploratory factor analysis (EFA) after it was determined that the assumptions of an EFA were met. In addition,

the results were used to assess the reliability of the scales used in this study. A Principal Component Analysis (PCA) was completed with 20 measured variables (TQI related items from the online survey). The researcher inspected the correlation matrix to check the factorability of the data. The correlation matrix revealed a substantial number of correlation coefficients that were greater than 0.3. All other factor analysis criteria were upheld: the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy exceeded 0.6 (KMO = 0.919), and the Bartlett's test of sphericity was statistically significant ($\chi^2(190) 3945.732, p < .05$), consistent with the factorability of the data. A total of 20 variables were entered into the analysis. Based on Kaiser's criterion, the principal components analysis indicated that five factors were extracted based on a rotation that converged in five iterations, and accounted for 63.219 % of variance. All items had acceptable loadings (> 0.5). TQIs were clustered according to five practice areas: interpersonal dimensions, teaching strategies and resources, assessment, expectations, and professional development.

III. Results

3.1 Results related to the first question:

The first research question of this study asked: What is the level of application of TQIs among academics at SFEs?

Table 2 shows the mean scores of the level of application of each of the five factors and the overall of the level of application of TQIs. Means and standard deviations are computed.

| Factor | M | SD | Level |
|--------------------------|------|------|--------------|
| Interpersonal dimensions | 3.31 | 0.91 | Occasionally |
| Teaching strategies | 3.49 | 0.78 | Occasionally |
| Assessment | 3.03 | 0.99 | Occasionally |
| Expectations | 3.80 | 0.69 | Frequently |
| Professional development | 2.73 | 1.02 | Occasionally |
| Overall of all 5 factors | 3.26 | 0.76 | Occasionally |

The results indicated that the mean scores of the level of application ranged from (M = 2.73) to (M = 3.80). However, the results also confirmed that the Expectations factor showed the highest mean scores of the level of application with (M = 3.80, SD = 0.69). While, the professional development factor showed the lowest mean scores of the levels application with (M = 2.73, SD = 1.02). In overall the result revealed that the level of application of TQIs in SFEs was 'Occasionally level' with (M = 3.26, SD = 0.76).

3.2 Results related to the second question:

The second research question of this study asked: Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the gender?

However, to compare differences in the responses of the male and female academics regarding the levels of application of TQIs, the t-test for independent means was used to determine whether gender was a significant factor that might be associated with the academics' responses of the level of application of TQIs. As indicated in Table 3, the t-test results revealed that there was no significant difference between the two groups; (male and female academics) responses as to the levels of application of TQIs ($p > .05$). This finding means that two groups held similar levels of application of TQIs.

| Factor | Male | | Female | | T-test | | |
|--------------------------|------|------|--------|------|--------|-----|---------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | t | df | p-value |
| Interpersonal dimensions | 3.33 | 0.88 | 3.30 | 0.94 | .295 | 465 | .768 |
| Teaching strategies | 3.49 | 0.72 | 3.48 | 0.86 | .046 | 465 | .964 |
| Assessment | 3.01 | 0.99 | 3.04 | 1.01 | .325 | 465 | .745 |
| Expectations | 3.81 | 0.64 | 3.79 | 0.75 | .158 | 465 | .875 |
| Professional development | 2.85 | 1.02 | 2.79 | 1.00 | .359 | 465 | .783 |

3.3 Results related to the third question:

The third research question of this study asked: Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the nationality?

However, as shown in Table 4, when comparing differences in the responses of the Saudi and non-Saudi academics, the t-test results revealed that there were significant differences between the two groups' responses about the levels of application of TQIs in all the five factors ($p < .05$). This result indicated that the non-Saudi academics rated the levels of application of TQIs higher than did Saudi academics.

Table4.Means, standard deviations and *t*-test of application TQIs according to the nationality

| Factor | Saudi | | Non Saudi | | T-test | | |
|--------------------------|-------|------|-----------|------|--------|-----|---------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | t | df | p-value |
| Interpersonal dimensions | 3.21 | 0.90 | 3.51 | 0.89 | 3.424 | 465 | .001* |
| Teaching strategies | 3.36 | 0.78 | 3.72 | 0.75 | 4.736 | 465 | .001* |
| Assessment | 2.92 | 0.96 | 3.23 | 1.04 | 3.175 | 465 | .01* |
| Expectations | 3.73 | 0.71 | 3.94 | 0.65 | 3.269 | 465 | .001* |
| Professional development | 2.62 | 0.95 | 2.94 | 1.11 | 3.028 | 465 | .01* |

* p < .05

3.4 Results related to the fourth question:

The fourth research question of this study asked: Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the participation in PD?

However, Table 4 compares differences in the responses of the academics that participated or did not participate in PD activities regarding levels of application of TQIs. The *t*-test results revealed that there were significant differences between the two groups' responses about the levels of application of TQIs in all the five factors ($p < .05$). This result indicated that the high levels responses of level of application of TQIs trended to the academics who participated in PD activities more than to their colleagues who did not participate on PD.

Table4.Means, standard deviations and *t*-test of application TQIs according to the participation in PD

| Factor | Yes | | No | | T-test | | |
|--------------------------|------|------|------|------|--------|-----|---------|
| | M | SD | M | SD | t | df | p-value |
| Interpersonal dimensions | 3.37 | 0.89 | 2.86 | 0.83 | 3.986 | 465 | .001* |
| Teaching strategies | 3.55 | 0.78 | 3.03 | 0.64 | 5.448 | 465 | .001* |
| Assessment | 3.08 | 1.01 | 2.61 | 0.77 | 4.163 | 465 | .001* |
| Expectations | 3.85 | 0.67 | 3.44 | 0.74 | 4.221 | 465 | .001* |
| Professional development | 2.78 | 1.01 | 2.38 | 0.93 | 2.728 | 465 | .01* |

* p < .05

IV. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to explore the extent to which academics apply TQIs in their teaching practices in SFEs by the perspective of them. The following parts include the discussion of the results which are emerged from this study.

4.1 The level of application of TQIs

The finding of the study indicated that academics demonstrated 'occasionally level' of application of TQIs at SFEs. This finding is consistent with the findings of a number of previous research studies conducted in different universities in Saudi Arabia (Al-Mazrui, 2010; Al-Asmar, 2005; Ghoneim and Alyahyawe, 2004; Jan, 2010), which they found the overall mean scores of level of teaching performance of academics was in 'average level'. For example, Al-Asmar (2005) showed that the performance of academics in the skills of teaching and classroom management at the University of Umm Al-Qura was 'average level'. In addition, Ghoneim and Alyahyawe (2004) indicated that the academic performance of a faculty member at the King AbdulAziz University was at an average level.

Furthermore, the finding of the current study is supported by the growing body of research studies which has demonstrated that many faculty members are not applying TQIs effectively in their classrooms (Saeed, 2007 ;Ghazioat, 2005; Al-Shuaili and Khataybeh , 2002). For instance, Saeed (2007) pointed that a 'low level' in the educational performance of faculty members at universities with respect to their handling of students, their ability to link the theoretical to the practical aspects of courses, their ability to use information and communication technology, their ability to encourage students to learn, and their ability to use time effectively. However, Ghazioat (2005) indicated the dissatisfaction of students regarding the methods of assessment that are used by faculty members at the United Arab Emirates University and their use of traditional methods of teaching. Al-Shuaili and Khataybeh (2002) emphasized the low levels of some teaching skills of faculty members at Sultan Qaboos University, especially in the fields of evaluation and the planning of instruction. This may be interpreted as a lack of interest of faculty members in attending training programs and workshops which focus on developing teaching skills to the enough level or may be these programs, workshops and attempts offered by the university for this purpose are not sufficient.

4.2 The relationship between level of application TQIs and gender

The results revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the mean scores of the two groups male and female responses of the levels of application of TQIs which means that the two groups

held similar levels. This may be interpreted as the educational system in Saudi Arabia being mainly controlled by the Ministry of Higher Education. Thus, and teaching systems and models in the male campuses are extremely similar to the female campuses in SFEs. These results are confirmed by Al Zaher (2004) and urRahman and Alhaisoni(2013) who showed teaching systems and models in the male sections are largely the same as in the female sections in higher educational colleges.

4.3 The relationship between level of application TQIs and nationality

The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the levels of application of TQIs in each five factors attributed to differences in nationality. The result indicated that the non-Saudi academics rated the level of application of TQIs higher than did Saudi faculty members. This result is unexpected, especially according to Alamri's (2011) study. There is a high percentage of expatriate faculty members and they did not have any motivational system; in fact, there is discrimination in salaries and incentives. For instance, Saudi Arabian academics receive salaries higher than non- Saudi academics. Saudi academics members receive incentives which are mostly not provided to their colleagues, such as incentives for publications. Moreover, non-Saudi academics encounter obstacles when they apply for promotions. A possible interpretation of this result is that, the Saudi academics often have good feeling to catch his/her job, but non-Saudi academics were seeking to preserve own job because their job were by contract. Other possible explanation of this finding attributed to the fact that often, SFEs contract with non-Saudi academics that have a Ph.D. degree, and it may be interpreted as the academics that had a high level of education had more high knowledge and teaching skills than academics who had less educational level as well. This result is consistent with some previous studies such as that by Al - Smadi (2013) who showed that staff with a Ph.D. were higher in their communication skills, than those with masters degrees. Also, the Al-uraimi (2005) study found that there are statistically significant differences between the mean estimates of the study sample attributed to qualification, in favour of the Ph.D. degree as well.

4.4 The relationship between level of application TQIs and participation in PD activities

The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the levels of application of TQIs in each five factors attributed to differences in participation in PD activities. The results indicated that the academics who participated in PD activities reported the levels of application of TQIs largely than did the academics who non-participated in PD activities. This may be interpreted as participation in PD activities gives participants more knowledge and improves their skills in teaching. This finding aligns with previous researchers (Austin, 1992; Coffey & Gibbs, 2001; Gibbs & Coffey, 2004), who have demonstrated that professional development can improve faculty members' teaching. Thus, in sum, this finding suggests that more emphasis should be placed on PD to progress academics in SFEs to achieve TQ.

V. Conclusion and recommendations

This study focused on evaluating the application of teaching quality indicators to successful teaching and learning at SFEs. Therefore, in light of the study findings as well as those of the literature review, the researcher submits some of recommendations in order to develop the teaching quality at SFEs as follows:

1. SFEs need to allow academics to more fully understand the TQIs by providing and sharing necessary information.
2. Assess the issue of teaching quality (i.e., the processes involved, needs assessment, students' satisfaction, students' academic achievement, personnel need).
3. The policies and procedures that are developed to guide the use of TQIs should be made obvious by the institution, to raise and deepen the awareness of all employees in the SFEs, of the teaching quality indicators and the importance of the development of the concepts of quality in higher education.
4. Spread the culture of quality among academics and make them aware of the importance of training courses in the field of teaching skills.
5. Performing training courses and workshops to enhance the performance of academics.
6. Establishment of centres specializing in the professional development for academics in Saudi universities particular SFEs, and holding seminars and specialized workshops on a regular basis, is of which illustrate the importance of the teaching quality indicators and its role in enhancing the academic performance quality.

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