

Chapter 1

Quality Management System for HEIs: An Overview

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ABSTRACT

The development of quality management systems (QMS) in higher education institutions (HEIs) was driven on the one hand by the competitive pressure and, on the other hand, by growing concerns from stakeholders demanding assurance of institutional program quality and their graduates. Adopting QMS is currently mandatory, and quality accreditation, both institutional and program, becomes a plausible strategy to engage and continue offering programs by national and international bodies. This chapter offers an introductory understanding of the quality concept and quality management systems within higher education and sheds some light on the quality management system in Oman.

INTRODUCTION

In today's highly competitive market and knowledge economy, higher education sector is expanding dynamically, rapidly on a global level and is recognized for its economic and developmental value in any nation development and economic growth and sustainability, and is becoming highly competitive and complex (Wilkins, 2020). It has been witnessed across the globe the rise of higher education institutions numbers as a developmental and growth strategy to boost the economy, competitiveness and improve the quality of life. Higher education products and services provide the infrastructure and the platform to build nations capacity through knowledge acquisition, competencies, and skills, develop the required human capital, technical and soft skills that would transform and develop the economy (Sunder, 2016; Al Tarawneh and Mubaslat, 2011). Higher education contributes to nation's development through knowledge

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acquisition and dissemination in building human capital and this is supported by Saibaba (2008) who concluded that education is for life, and it is a continuous process. In support of this further, Sunder (2016:1093) stated that *the purpose of higher education is beyond private and public good, leading to self-actualisation through human values.*

The growth of higher education is witnessed to cater and meet the demands of high school graduates (Ismail and Al Shanfari, 2014; Goodliffe and Razvi, 2011; Chapman et al., 2009). However, in recent times, higher education has been facing extreme pressure and challenges from globalization, competitors, and increased mobility of students and staff (Ismail and Al Shanfari, 2014; Losse et al., 2014). Higher education institution's role has been changing rapidly in today's competitive environment where close interaction, communication, link, engagement, and responsibility to stakeholders and the community is required more than ever in this crucial time (Al Amri et al., 2020), and more focus on education excellence and accreditation is becoming a key pillar area for the sustainability of higher education and meeting and exceeding customer requirements and expectations. In other words, higher education institutions are facing extreme pressures to improve their process, procedures, policies, operational performance than ever before on a local, regional, and global level (Tasopoulou and Tsiostras, 2017), and offer quality products that satisfy customer requirements.

Higher education sector is becoming extremely competitive where the sector is required to focus and becomes a customer oriented (Duzevic et al., 2015) and have a continuous improvement strategy embedded in their daily operations to delight the customer, and their survival depends on the satisfaction and sustainability of their customers by implementing a systematic Quality Management System (QMS). In support of this, Jongbloed et al. (2008: 306) stated that *HEIs have an obligation to demonstrate quality, efficiency, and effectiveness.* It is fair to say that in today's highly competitive business environment the purpose of higher education systems is to offer quality education to its customers, and stakeholders at the highest level possible (Africano et al., 2019; Sanchez et al., 2017). This has led to the popularity of the quality concept and the adoption and implementation of QMS as a long-term strategy for survival, sustainability, and achieving the expected results in higher education sector.

QMS implementation can be used as a differentiation strategy in higher education to differentiate between competitors in the market and ensuring quality of higher education and sustainability (Govender et al., 2014). Therefore, in today's increasingly competitive world, QMS is becoming an approach for implementation in all higher education institutions to serve the needs of all the internal and external stakeholders (Nadim and Al Hinai, 2016), and the implementation can take place either at formal or informal level (Bernik et al., 2017; Gaspersz, 2008). Informal quality management system refers to the fact that any institution can build its own system to achieve the desired outcome with following any prescribed set of criteria. The system is designed based on the understanding of the requirements and the desired results by the management team. Formal quality management system is not based on individual understanding, but it is based on well recognized criteria predetermined by global institutions/agencies, and these formal systems tend to be well tested and have a proven track of accomplishments if implemented correctly (Bernik et al., 2017), and an example of formal quality management system would be ISO 9001 or MBNQA. Martin and Thawabieh (2018) concluded that the implementation of such formal quality management system such as ISO 9001 has yielded positive operational performance benefits in Buraimi University College, in Oman.

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