



AN EVALUATION OF SPECIAL EDUCATION PROGRAM IN SAUDI UNIVERSITIES ACCORDING TO NATIONAL STANDARDS

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this study was to evaluate special education program in Saudi Universities according to national standards. The sample of study consisted of (17) Head of Special Education Department in Saudi Universities. A National Commission for Academic Accreditation & Assessment (NCAAA) standards was used to evaluate special education program. Results showed that there are four standards available in a high degree, namely: student affairs and support services, employment processes, learning and teaching, and vision and mission, while the other five standards had average degree which are: relationships with society, scientific research, administration of program, quality of program, and facilities and equipment, the other two standards had lower degrees which are: learning resources, and planning & financial administration.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The world has been witnessing many changes in all fields today. Therefore, it is necessary to keep pace with these changes, developments and reforms in the field of education, because education is the tool that builds human who is capable of dealing with the requirements of the third millennium. As a result, the issue of educational development and reforming school has occupied center stage at the thought of educators and among their priorities. The higher education comes at the forefront of institutions aiming to take the latest styles and trends in the field of development programs and that what surrounds these institutions of the conditions of accelerated represented in globalization and the information revolution .The largest responsibility is held on these institutions in the graduation of scientific ,skillful and qualified students to meet the needs of the market , all

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of which requires them to reconsider constantly in their university systems in order to achieve efficiency in their outputs to evaluate the higher education programs.

Developed countries give a special attention the adoption of the quality and standards of universities and institutions of higher education, because of the conviction that it is the primary responsibility of universities and institutions of higher education for preparing and qualifying generations to meet the challenges of the times, as they become men of this century, multi-skilled and able to maintain last learning and who accepts retraining and rehabilitation several times in their career (Sabri, 2009). Therefore, the process of evaluating programs at university has become essential in any communities, and almost a process of evaluating higher education programs which operates international educational institutions because of facing internal and external challenges require reconsider the offer of educational programs (Al Shariy, 2009). The quality of higher education institutions associated with academic accreditation programs, which possessed of extensive scientific prestige in developed countries, and what attributes of this study is a vital role in the development of educational institutions with according to the challenges faced by contemporary societies, particularly in the Arab world communities (El-Ghali, 2011).

In the context of global competition, which is increasing day after day about the accreditation mutual and joint institutions programs of higher education universally recognized, we find that it is incumbent on higher education in the Arab world, that the review of radical and profound policy and regulations, laws and legislation, plans and programs and curricula, in order to enable it to fulfill its obligations towards future generations (Tartory, 2006). To assess the outcomes of the universities, modern attitudes in the field of quality and academic accreditation represented in the availability of behavioral, cognitive, skill, and attitude characteristics within the graduates and evaluating the quality of the elements of providing the educational service within the level of the educational institutions, (Davis and Ringsted, 2006).

Due to the significance of quality and academic accreditation in the world today, efforts were exerted to ensure quality assurance and the importance of providing education quality that covers all the functions and the fields of higher education by establishing independent national institutions and setting standards for quality assurance, (National Quality Assurance and Accreditation, 2004). The quality systems had proved effective in improving special education programs. Thus, the application of international quality systems effectively by any educational institution and obtain a certificate from an accredited global destination leads to increased confidence in the quality of the performance of the educational institution, However, the continuation of any educational institution could be the responsibility of the extent of the institution's commitment to continuous improvement and development and meet the requirements of quality. (Al-Khatib and Al-Khatib, 2010). The quality of special education programs are measured by the achievement of objectives, and these programs measurement process in accordance with standards designed especially to evaluate these programs based on standards of service in those programs, which is known as quality assurance (Hallahan *et al.*, 2012).

The Council for Exceptional Children (CEC) prepared standards for the preparation of special education teachers in educational institutions, and through these standards proposed by the Council reliable in quality control in special education programs within the universities (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003). The standards of CEC have been adopted by the National council for

Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE), and the Interstate New Teacher Assessment and Support Consortium (INTASC). The standard of CEC is composed of 10 domains (i.e. Foundations, Development and Characteristics of Learners, Individual Learning Differences, Instructional Strategies, Learning Environments & Social Interactions, Communication, Instructional Planning, Assessment, Professional & Ethical Practice, and Collaboration) (Council for Exceptional Children, 2003; Lee *et al.*, 2008).

On the national level, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has been interested in adopting the comprehensive quality assurance and accreditation whether on the level of the educational programs provided in the universities, or establishing mechanisms for quality assurance instruction. The Kingdom was also keen on the universities acquiring the institutional accreditation along with the academic department seeking to acquire the accreditation program. In this frame, The National Commission for Quality and Academic Accreditation (NCAAA) which is an independent national commission that sets the national standards to improve the comprehensive quality assurance and developing the Saudi Universities, national and public, in order to develop the quality of the academic performance and the quality of the educational outcomes (Fadel, 2011).

The NCAAA has been established by the Higher Council of Education in Saudi Arabia with responsibility to establish standards and accredit institutions and programs. The system for quality assurance and accreditation is designed to support continuing quality improvement and to widely recognize programs and institutions that meet required quality standards. The objective is to ensure good international standards in all institutions and in all programs offered in Saudi Arabia. The NCAAA has developed a set of standards for quality assurance and accreditation of higher education institutions in eleven domains (i.e. Vision and Mission, administration of Program, Quality of Program, Learning and Teaching, Student Affairs and Support Services, Learning Resources, Facilities and Equipment, Planning and Financial administration, Employment Processes, Scientific Research, and Relationships with society (NCAAA, 2009).

Fadel (2011) aimed at exploring the extent of applying the comprehensive quality and accreditation standards in the Saudi universities. The results revealed that the level of applying the comprehensive quality and academic accreditation was medium in the administrative, organizational, students' services, and the instructional staff. The level was low in the field of scientific research and community service. Al Babteen (1997) also aimed at evaluating the academic programs in the higher educational institutions. The researcher recommended conducting more evaluation to the academic programs the higher education institutions provide in accordance with specific standards and the necessity of periodically evaluating these programs. On the other hand, Al Zahrany (1997) aimed at follow the American experiment in evaluating the higher education institutions and what can be used in the Saudi universities. The results revealed the importance of establishing a mechanism for self evaluation in every university. Ameen *et al* (2005) and Abdel Azziz and Hussein (2005) agree with Al Zahrany (1997) and Al Babteen (1997) at investigating the experience of the other countries in the field of quality assurance and academic accreditation and setting a proposal for applying the quality assurance and accreditation model in higher education institutions.

Al Holy and Abudagga (2006) recommended forming specialized committees that include experts from the Arab countries and international experts to set guidelines for the process of

evaluating the academic programs, focusing on the educational outcomes in the Arab higher education institutions, and proper standards for the Arab Community. In addition, the results of Dill *et al.* (1996) indicated the necessity of bringing about some change in the laws of accreditations and quality assurance in the higher education institutions to include accountability and the comprehensive review.

In the terms of evaluating academic programs at universities according to national or intentional standards, several studies have indicated that the standards in academic programs of universities was moderately or low degree in the areas of quality academic programs, practicum, professional development for faculty members, the vision and mission, community service, and research (Al Badri, 2008; Abudagga, 2009; Al Shariy, 2009; Aoun, 2010; Al-Hajri, 2012; Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2012; Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2013; Al-Otaibi, and Alrabea, 2012). On the other hand some studies have indicated the role of universities in the academic and professional of graduates, these universities in the preparation of the student adopts international standards (Lee *et al.*, 2008; Hussain, 2009). Furthermore, Stanley and Patrick (1998) aimed at comparing between quality assurance in higher education in USA and England. The results indicated that the English model depends on the external quality review, and evaluating the research and instruction quality. However, in the USA, it depends on the indicators of the performance and the evaluation of the outcomes and the special results of the students in addition to evaluate the programs.

This study aims to evaluate the special education programs in the Saudi universities according to NCAAA in order to explore the reality of the special education programs and the stages it passes through to achieve quality and academic accreditation on the national and the international level.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Population & Sample

The study population consisted of all heads of departments of special education in Saudi universities (N=21), however, the sample consisted of (17) Head who answered on the questionnaire.

2.2. Research Instrument

Questionnaire was constructed which covered (11) standards developed by the NCAAA in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. In order to verify the reliability of questionnaire, it was presented to a group of faculty members at Najran University, and based on their suggestions the instrument consisted (200) items, Three-Point Likert Scale was used. In order to verify of the validity of questionnaire, Cornbach-Alpha used to calculate the coefficient of internal consistency of (11) standards, where the coefficient of internal consistency of the questionnaire was (0.83).

3. RESULTS

The main question of this study was as follows: “What is the level of availability of (NCAAA) standards in special education program at Saudi universities?” For this question means and standard deviations were calculated as shown in Table 1.

Table-1. Means and standard deviation of (NCAAA) standards in special education programs

N	Standards	M	SD	Level
1	Student Affairs & Support Services	2.81	.157	High
2	Employment Processes	2.76	.095	High
3	Learning & Teaching	2.67	.080	High
4	Vision and Mission	2.38	.169	High
5	Relationships with Society	2.01	.135	Average
6	Scientific Research	1.98	.136	Average
7	Administration of Program	1.91	.210	Average
8	Quality of Program	1.90	.217	Average
9	Facilities and Equipment	1.69	.159	Average
10	Learning Resources	1.58	.154	Low
11	Planning & Financial Administration	1.39	.245	Low

Table 1 show that the means of NCAAA standards ranged between (2.81-1.39). However, there are four standards receive a high level in a special education program in Saudi universities, which are: Student affairs and support services (M=2.81), employment processes (M=2.76), learning and teaching (M=2.67), and vision and mission (M=2.38). Whereas the following standards receive an average level: Relationships with society (M=2.01), scientific research (M=1.98), administration of program (M=1.91), quality of program (M=1.90), and facilities and equipment (M=1.69). In addition, the table indicates that there are two standers receive low levels, which are: learning resources (M=1.58), and planning & financial administration (M=1.39).

4. DISCUSSION

Firstly, the results of this study indicated that there are four standards are available in a high level of special education program in Saudi universities, and these standards are as follows:

- Standard of Student affairs and support services: This can be explained by the existence of the conditions for admission and enrollment in the program. As well as, there are academic advisors helping students before starting to register. Furthermore, the information of the program and courses available to students and their families before submitting applications. The departments of special education are providing orientation programs at the beginning of each semester for new students to familiarize them with the university system, the duties and responsibilities. In addition, there is academic guidance, in order to identify students who are suffering from problems in their studies, financial, family, psychological, or health. This result is consistent with the results of (Aoun, 2010; Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2012; Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2013; Al-Otaibi, and Alrabea, 2012).
- Standard of employment processes: This can be attributed to the regulations and instructions for employment within the Departments of Special Education, which are responsible for reviewing qualifications, teaching experience, and educational competencies. Furthermore, the Departments have been providing candidates for employment of job descriptions, conditions of employment, information about the university programs. This result is conform with (Lee *et al.*, 2008; Hussain, 2009; Al-Otaibi, and Alrabea, 2012).
- Standard of learning and teaching: The departments of Special Education in Saudi universities are entering the appropriate adjustments to the programs and courses based on the

results of student assessment for these courses. The departments also benefit from the view of graduates students and labor market when reviewing the quality of the program. However, there are plans to evaluate the special education program by the Unit of Development and Quality, Faculty of Education. This result is conform with (Lee *et al.*, 2008; Hussain, 2009; Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2012; Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2013; Al-Otaibi, and Alrabea, 2012).

- Standard of Vision and Mission: One of the priorities for colleges and academic departments in KSA to have the vision and mission. The mission of Special Education Departments in Saudi universities reflects the vision and mission of colleges of education and universities. The mission of Special Education Departments consistent with the Islamic beliefs and values. In addition, the mission is updated through distribution it to the beneficiaries of the program and reviewed on a continuously basis. The results conformed with (Al-Otaibi, and Alrabea, 2012).

Secondly, the results of this study indicated that there are five standards are available in average level of special education program in Saudi universities, and these standards were as follows:

- Standard of Relationships with Society: Most of the universities in Saudi Arabia are newly established. They still contribute to community service moderately and there is no encouragement for faculty members to participate in seminars and conferences that discuss special education issues. Besides, there are no consultancy councils composed of community institutions. Special Education Departments have weakness in the relations with the labor market, and communication with alumni to update them with developments in the program, and invited them to participate in the activities of the departments. The results are conformed with (Fadel, 2011).

- Standard of scientific Research: The financial support for faculty members in the field of scientific research is still small, and there are no clear policies in universities or colleges of education about the contributions of faculty research activities or standards consistent with international standards in this area. As well as, there are no agreements for joint research between faculty members and their colleagues in the local or international universities, laboratories, equipment, libraries and systems. The results are conformed with (Fadel, 2011).

- Standard of administration of program: The Departments of Special Education suffer from weakness of job descriptions, there are no foundations assess the performance of faculty members, there are no representation of department's male and female staff equally in the membership of Committees & Councils, and the head of the departments don't have adequate powers to ensure compliance with the faculty and staff of the policies and procedures agreed upon at the university. The results are conformed with (Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2012; Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2013).

- Standard of quality of program: The special education programs lack information about key performance indicators for commendable improvement of performance and assess the achievements, as well as, there are no available benchmarks for the programs. This result is consistent with (Al Babteen, 1997; Abudagga, 2009; Hussain, 2009; Aoun, 2010).

- Standard of quality of facilities and equipment: Most universities and departments of special education in Saudi universities are in the process of growing up and most of the universities buildings are rented. Therefore, the departments of special education suffer from problems in the field of facilities and equipment including: faculty members are not consulted before the purchase of equipment to ensure their appropriateness to the current and future needs, lack of availability of facilities to people with special needs, and the weakness of training courses for faculty and students

to achieve effective use of computers. This result is consistent with the (Fadel, 2011; Al-Hajri, 2012; Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2012; Al-Khateeb *et al.*, 2013).

Thirdly, the results of the study indicated that there are two standards are available in low level of special education program in Saudi universities, and these standards are as follows:

- Standard of learning resources: Students and faculty members have difficulty in access to electronic databases and journals. In addition, libraries do not provide new students the counseling and training on library services, as well as, they don't inform faculty members and students about the new developments, finally, there are no sufficient books, journals, and electronic resources to meet the needs of the special education program in both Arabic and English. This result is consistent with (Fadel, 2011; Al-Hajri, 2012).
- Standard of planning and financial administration: Special Education departments suffer from lack of financial resources, annual budget, financial spending powers, and the non-participation of the Head of Department in the budget planning process of the college or university. This result is consistent with (Al Badri, 2008; Al-Hajri, 2012).

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