

## Quality assurance in the Lebanese educational system

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The effectiveness of an education system usually relies on quality and quantity. With the rise of globalization and technology, more and more countries are focusing on the quality of education as a means in nation-building and the creation of a knowledge-based society that builds on creativity and ingenuity. Its aim is thus to equip children for the world they will live in. In this sense, quality assurance involves the appropriateness of the curriculum and also the skills of teachers, students and administration, the teaching approaches, the infrastructure and the environment of the school as a whole.

Technically, quality assurance consists of providing a “systematic review” of educational curricula and processes with the aim of maintaining and enhancing their quality and efficiency. The design and tools may differ from country to country, but the purpose is the same. This review can be internal and/or external. While internal review includes school self-assessment, teachers and students evaluations, external mechanism involves national, regional and international school evaluations. It can also be used to develop and test innovative approaches that support proper education in terms of quality, efficiency and equity.

Quality assurance is a complex process that needs to be continuously adapted to face the many challenges of the education system. And for that, countries around the world have become more interested in developing policy mechanisms for quality and accountability assurance. Many of them have created accreditation systems.

Others have established external “review commissions” that hold periodic external reviews and monitor the quality of service provided by educational institutions. There are also various quality assurance agencies in the world that provide assessment and accreditation of schools on national and international levels, depending on the subject matters and educational level.

Schools are thus accredited by a specific body to acknowledge that they are able to provide appropriate educational programs in specific areas, by complying with certain set of criteria. Examples include the CHEA International Quality Group at the international level and the Arab Network for Quality Assurance in Higher Education at the regional level.

These agencies also provide support for the schools to achieve quality assurance. There are programs too that give recognition to schools meeting established quality standards, such as the Accreditation Service for International Schools, Colleges and Universities. In Lebanon, the situation is uniquely complex, and the COVID-19 pandemic is only intensifying the many challenges. The efforts made to provide an adequate quality education with the prevailing teaching methods come in conflict with the measures needed to minimize health risks due to the pandemic.

Even prior to this health crisis, Lebanon education system has faced a downward overall trajectory. The ranking of the country that has once been a regional hub in education and higher education is now declining in different international assessment platforms. For instance, after being the first among the ten Arab countries participating in Trends in Math and Sciences Study in 2003, it is now the seventh, ranking 34th out of 39 in sciences and 27 in Math.

Yet the Lebanese government has to date no proper mechanism for accreditation and quality assurance for its educational body, despite the fact that the number of institutions of education and higher education has tripled during the past decade.

In higher education though, a draft law “to establish a national agency for quality assurance in higher education that would assess private and public institutions and hold them accountable for the services they provide” was created by the Education Ministry and a group of universities in partnership with the European Union. However, the draft is kept on hold due to many factors, mainly the turmoil of the state, the interrupted activity of the parliament and of course the political and personal interests of various owners of private universities.

This problem of absence of a proper system for quality assurance and accountability in Lebanon is coupled with other issues lumbering the country’s education system. One of which is its systematic deficiency whereby the system offers unemployable

graduates specialized in saturated specialties whereas there is still shortage of skills in other sectors. Other problems include the inflexible structure, the misallocation of funding resources, the slow integration of information technology in education and the widening gap between public and private education.

Accreditation is very crucial for the Lebanese education system. A large portion of the public funding on education must go to setting up an accreditation and quality assurance system because the government has an obligation to protect and prevent pupils from being tricked by commercial educational institutions that impose expensive fees while offering an inadequate inefficient education incompatible with the requirements needed to find a decent job. There is an urgent need in Lebanon for such a monitoring system, at the school and university levels, to be able to regain its regional leading position in education.

Because with every challenge comes an opportunity, the pandemic has urged all countries to review their education sector and come up with models (such as the online and hybrid learning) that match the needs of the new era. Likewise, it is a golden opportunity for the Lebanese government to rethink its educational system with more flexibility, adaptability and openness to criticism in setting its accreditation standards, towards assuring quality education for all.

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