

The Application of Teaching Quality indicators in Saudi Higher Education by the perspective of academics

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Abstract

This paper investigated the level of application of teaching quality indicators (TQIs) in Saudi higher education by the perspective of academics. Data were collected through an online survey of 467 academics in 21 Faculties of Education (SFEs). The online survey consisted of (20) items. Participants were asked to indicate the level of application of TQIs in SFEs. The study is important as it deals with the sensitive issue of teaching quality in higher education and its indicator, which is reflected upon in a positive way to enhance the teaching and learning quality in Saudi universities, and particular SFEs. Findings reveal 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 attribute to the age, level of education and years of teaching experience in higher education. Based on these findings, this paper provides recommendations to planning for achieving TQ in Saudi higher education, 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

1. Introduction

During the last two decades, higher education systems and institutions worldwide have undergone extensive changes and reforms related to improving quality (Chalmers, 2008). 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. For example, Chickering & Gamson, 1999 identified seven principles for good practice in

undergraduate education, which that 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. In addition some previous study (Bain, 2004; Ediger, 1998; Lowman, 1995) indicated other TQIs as improving university professors' skills in creating intellectual excitement and interpersonal rapport with students, 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.

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).

2. Previous study

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-Shuaaili 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-Shuaaili 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.

3. Aim of this study

The aim of this study is to explore the extent to which academics apply TQIs in SFEs, and to examine the significant differences in the level of application of TQIs among academics attributed to the age, level of education and years of teaching experience in higher education.

This will be achieved by addressing the following research questions:

- Q1. What is the level of application of TQIs among academics at SFEs?
- Q2. Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the age?
- Q3. Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the level of education?
- Q4. Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the years of experience?

This study will address this research gap, and its findings will contribute to research on TQ in higher education. In addition, 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 higher education.

4. Method

4.1 Population and Sample

This study target population involved 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.

4.2 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 level of application TQIs in SFEs. This level of application was rated on a continuum consisting of five points Likert scale. The criteria for data analysis are presented in Table 2.

Table 1. Characteristics of the Sample Completing the Online Survey (N = 467)

Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
<i>Age (in years)</i>		
<30	49	10.5
30–39	163	34.9
40–49	162	34.7
50+	93	19.9
<i>Level of Education</i>		
Bachelor’s degree	39	8.4
Master’s degree	109	23.3
Ph.D.	319	68.3
<i>Years of Experience</i>		
5 or Less	133	28.5
6-10	103	22.1
11-15	67	14.3
16-20	71	15.2
21 -25	52	11.1
26+	41	8.8

Table 2. Criteria for data analysis

	5	4	3	2	1
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 SFEs, along with an introductory letter, a consent form, and institutional review board approval.

5. Result

5.1 Results of the first research question:

The first research question of this study asked: What is the level of application of TQIs among academics at SFEs? Table 3 presents the mean scores of each of the 20 TQIs in terms of their mean scores (M) and standard deviation (SD).

Table 3. Means and standard deviations of the level of application TQIs (N = 467)

TQI	M	SD	Level
11. Aligning teaching content with curriculum	4.16	0.88	frequently
15. Having high expectations of teaching as an academic staff member	4.10	0.85	frequently
6. Planning for teaching activities	3.90	0.96	frequently
1. Effective communication between academic staff and students	3.55	1.04	frequently
16. Having high expectations of students	3.50	0.93	frequently
7. Incorporating diversified teaching strategies	3.49	1.01	occasionally
2. Developing students' teamwork	3.39	1.06	occasionally
13. Incorporating diverse assessment methods in classes.	3.39	1.12	occasionally
5. Incorporating active learning in classes	3.36	1.07	occasionally
12. Providing prompt feedback to students about their progress.	3.36	1.16	occasionally
4. Catering for different student capabilities in classes	3.21	1.18	occasionally
8. Incorporating a variety of content resources	3.20	1.26	occasionally
9. Integrating educational technology into teaching	3.18	1.37	occasionally
17. Receiving students' feedback on teaching	3.12	1.42	occasionally
3. Encouraging diverse student talents in classes	3.10	1.25	occasionally
10. Linking teaching content with students' future careers	3.10	1.25	occasionally
19. Engaging in research-informed teaching	3.03	1.27	occasionally
20. Teaching a suitable class size	2.56	1.39	occasionally
14. Engaging students in peer assessment processes in classes	2.33	1.32	rarely
18. Receiving fellow academics' feedback on teaching	2.21	1.29	rarely
Overall	3.26	0.76	occasionally

Note. Items are ranked according to mean scores of level of application.

The overall mean scores of the level of application for all the 20 TQIs was 'occasionally level' With (M = 3.26, SD = 0.76). Additionally, the TQIs that had the lowest mean scores of the level of application, which had 'rarely level' were Item, 'receiving fellow academics' feedback on teaching' with (M = 2.21, SD = 1.29), followed by Item, 'engaging students in peer assessment processes in classes' with (M = 2.33, SD = 1.32).

5.2 Results of 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 age?

As shown in Table 4, the ANOVA and the Scheffe test were used to determine the extent to which the age groups might have a significant impact on the academics ideas about level of application of TQIs. A significant difference was found between the four age groups' responses about the level of application ($F(3,463) = 13.616$, $p < .05$). The Post Hoc test results indicated that the significant difference was in favor of the oldest age.

Table 4. Perceived Level of Application of TQIs by Age Group

Source	One-Way Anova Test					Post Hoc Tests (Scheffe)					
	SS	df	MS	F	p	Age	M	SD	MD		
									30–	40–	50+
									39	49	
Between	21.687	3	7.229	13.61	.001*	<30	2.865	.764	.257	.472*	.723*
Groups	245.82	463	.531	6		30–	3.123	.710		.215	.466*
Within Groups	6	466				39	3.337	.772			.251
Total	267.51					40–	3.588	.661			
	3					49					
						50+					

SS = Sum of Squares MS = Mean Squares df = degree of freedom MD= Mean difference * $p < .05$ (2-tailed).

5.3 Results of the third research question:

The third research question of this study asked: Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the level of educational? As shown in Table 4, the ANOVA and the Scheffe test were used to determine the extent to which education level might have a significant impact on the academics regarding of level of application of TQIs. The results indicated that there were significant differences between the three educational level group responses about the level of application of TQIs ($F(2,464) = 16.934, p < .05$). Scheffe's post hoc test indicated that the academics who had a high educational level reported the level of application of TQIs to a greater extent than did the academics that had lower educational levels.

Table 4. Perceived Level of Application of TQIs by Level of Education Group

One Way Anova Test						Post Hoc Tests (Scheffe)				
Source	SS	df	MS	F	P	Educationa l level	M	SD	MD	
									Maste r	Ph.D.
Between Groups	18.198	2	9.099	16.93	.001*	Bachelor	2.758	.723	.327*	.628*
Within Groups	249.31	464	.537	4		Masters	3.085	.708		.301*
Total	5	466				Ph.D.	3.385	.743		
	267.51									
	3									

SS = Sum of Squares MS = Mean Squares df = degree of freedom MD= Mean difference * p < .05 (2-tailed).

5.4 Results of the fourth research question:

The fourth research question of this study asked: Are there significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to the years of teaching experience in higher education?

As shown in Table 5, the ANOVA and the Scheffe test were used to determine the extent to which the teaching experience groups might have a significant impact on the academics regarding the level of application of TQIs. A significant difference was found between the six groups' responses ($F(5,461) = 4.316, p < .05$). The results of the statistical tests indicated that the academics who had longest years of teaching experience in higher education reported the level of application of TQIs to a greater extent than did the academics that had less teaching experience in higher education.

Table 5. Perceived Level of Application of TQIs by Experience Group

One way Anova Test						Post Hoc Tests (Scheffe)							
Source	SS	df	MS	F	P	Years	M	SD	MD				
									6- 10	11-15	16-20	21 - 25	26+
Between Groups	11.96	5	2.39	4.31	.001	5 or Less	3.05	.730	.210	.209	.283	.386*	.526
Within Groups	3	46	3	6	*	6-10	4	.765		.001	.073	.176	*
Within Groups	255.5	1	.554			11-15	5	.753			.074	.177	.316
Total	49	46				16-20	3.26	.789					.317
	267.5	6				21 -25	3	.658					.243
	13					26+	3.33						.140
							7						
							3.44						
							0						
							3.58						
							0						

SS = Sum of Squares MS = Mean Squares df = degree of freedom MD= Mean difference * p < .05 (2-tailed).

6. 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.

6.1 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 in Arab higher education institutions (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.

6.2 The association between level of application of TQIs and academics age

The results indicated that the oldest academics reported the level of application of TQIs more than other. This may be interpreted as the diversity of experience and the diversity of opportunities of the oldest academics of participated in PD activities more than the youngest academics, which make the chances of a trade-off of the application of TQIs, is less. One of the possible factors that could affect youngest academics of application TQIs is that usually many courses taught in SFEs taught by demonstrator and lecturer faculty members who have a heavy teaching load. Thus, this teaching load reduces the level of application TQIs which negatively affects the level of the students learning outcomes. This finding is confirmed as well by the finding of the years of teaching experience in higher education variable that discussed in subsection 6.4.

6.3 The association between level of application TQIs and academics level of education

The results of this study revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the level of application of TQIs attributed to differences in level of education. However, the results of the statistical tests indicated that the academics who had a high educational level reported the level of TQIs to a greater extent than did the academics that had less educational level. This result is not surprising, and it may be interpreted as the academics that had a high level of education had more high knowledge and teaching skills than academics that 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.

6.4 The association between level of application TQIs and academics years of teaching experience

The results revealed that there were statistically significant differences in the levels of application of TQIs attributed to years of teaching experience in higher education. The results of the statistical tests indicated that the academics who had more years of teaching experience in higher education reported the level of application of TQIs to a greater extent than did the academics that had less teaching experience. This means that, as the number of years of teaching experience in higher education increased, the application of the TQIs in SFEs increased as well. This is attributed to the fact that the academics members with more experiences have more teaching capabilities and skills more than academics members with less teaching experience. This finding is consistent with Al-Smadi (2013) and Touama (2014), who showed that level of experience significantly affected the application of TQ in favour of high levels of teaching experience.

7. Conclusion

This study investigated the level of application of teaching quality indicators at SFEs. Based on the study findings, this study provides recommendations to planning for achieving TQ in Saudi higher education, 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. 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. Saudi higher education need to assess the issue of teaching quality regularly. Also, SFEs need to allow academics to more fully understand the TQIs by providing and sharing necessary information, students' academic achievement, personnel need. Additionally, 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. Also, spread the culture of quality among academics and make them aware of the importance of training courses in the field of teaching skills. Lastly, 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.

8. Future research directions

The current study raises several issues that could be investigated in future research. This study was limited to the perspective of academic staff at SFEs. Interested future researchers are therefore encouraged to conduct a replication of the study with other faculties at Saudi Universities. Future research is needed to further explore the challenges of implementing TQ in Saudi universities contexts.

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