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# Managerial Challenges of Curriculum Implementation in Higher Education

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## Abstract

The objective of this study was to investigate the managerial challenges of curriculum implementation in higher education. 184 managers and educational department chiefs in the universities of West-Azərbayjan, Iran were selected randomly by stratified sampling method and Cochran's formula during academic year of 2008- 2009 and completed a research-made questionnaire named "managerial challenges". Findings showed that the assignment of managers was not based on managerial competencies and specifications ( $t = -0.37, p > 0.05$ ) and the existing problems of the universities did not stem from managerial regulations ( $t = -0.15, p > 0.05$ ). Also, the subjects agreed the centralization organization ( $t = 0.43, p < 0.01$ ). It can be concluded that disregard of competences and qualifications in assigning managers can be a main obstacles to curriculum implementation.

*Keywords:* curriculum-curriculum implementation-higher education-managerial challenges

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## 1. Introduction

Management has a vital and deterministic role in each organization, especially in higher education. It is clear that managers are responsible for the development and enrichment of their organizational capacities. In literature about higher education, managers have been conceived as a main factor for making changes and reforms in universities of all kinds (Clark, 1997; Julius, Baldrige & Pfeffer, 1999; Leslie & Fretwell, 1996). In the one hand, the quality of management in universities does considerably determine the success and the investment procedures in higher education and in the other hand, incorrect and non-scientific management, together with the lack of experiences and the weakness of scientific competences in higher education managers does result in some problems in higher education (Haddad, 1999). Alma (1997) believes that an effective management involves attention to scientific management skills, correct resource management, effective control and evaluation system, needs-based curricula and awareness of changing environment.

Suarez & Oin(2004:230) and Allagheband (1985:85) argue that in today's modern world where increasing changes are usual, acquiring human and technical-related skills is of necessities for educational managers. Unfortunately, in recent years, despite tremendous changes in all aspects of human society, the efficacy and adequacy of management in higher education have not increased and also the growth of educational managers has not been made based on their competences and skills and professional abilities and capacities (Fayol, 1949; Griffin, 1987). Appropriate laws and regulations and obeying them are of main effective and common factors in every organizational management activities. Organizational regulations in an organization result in intensifying procedure continuation in behaviors and give procedure continuation to behaviors and predict affairs (Safi,

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2004). Organizational structure is another management indicator. An organization can be centralized or decentralized. In the former, decisions are made in higher levels of an organization and in the latter, decision-making gives over to lower organizational levels. Centralization is generally discussed in debates on participation in decision-making. In decentralized organizations, lower level staff can participate in decision-making (White, 1985).

Curriculum design is of main and important elements for higher education quality enhancement. It is notable that curriculum design as an independent scientific discipline is divided into two large families: curriculum design and curriculum development. In the former, a forming elements of a curriculum are identified and described and in the latter, the quality of applying and implementing these elements is explained (Ghourchian, 1993). Regarding missions, goals and role of higher education in our current age, the revision to curricula appears to be needed. This necessitates a correct and logical management. As Stark (1997) says, the management of changes in university curricula should be made according to current changes and evolution. Such changes assist higher education in fulfilling society's needs. In other words, changes in curricula should be served university curriculum development and result in their effectiveness (Tavakkol, 1999). and aim at arising critical self-awareness, innovation and inquiry skills (The British National Association of Education, 1979; cf. Parsa et. al., 2005). When curricula are prepared and approved by country's decision-makers and policy-makers, their implementation starts. The implementation of a curriculum is more important and valuable than its preparation and design. In educational organizations, especially universities, there are many problems and obstacles to curriculum implementation (Mo'yyeri, 2004). However, the ways of curriculum implementation are different in various educational systems. In many systems, curriculum developing group implements the curriculum and in others, this duty is done by administrators or other units of the systems (Lewy, 2004). Curriculum distribution aspects include among others, designing an entire transmission and dissemination network which needs a correct management. Disordered dissemination of university curriculum items and resources may negatively affects the implementation process (Bicas, 1998).

In summary, the success of an organization in achieving its goals, implementing its programs and fulfilling its missions greatly depends on its managers and as a result, it is needed that the conditions of management assignment have been determined previously or are determined according to current circumstances and are considered in assignment process (AbbasZadeh, 2008). Considering all above-mentioned views, this study aimed to investigate the managerial challenges of curriculum implementation in universities in West-Azərbayjan State, Iran and tended to study managers and educational department chiefs' viewpoints about whether or not the assignment of managers in these universities is based on defined managerial competences and qualifications, whether or not the present problems higher education encounters stem from managerial laws and regulations, and whether or not they agree centralization in educational organization structure for curriculum network.

## 2. Method

The study population included all managers and educational department chiefs of universities under supervision of The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology in West Azarbayjan State, Iran in the academic year of 2008-2009. The sample size was estimated by Cochran 's formula and amounted to 184. The subjects completed a researcher-made questionnaire entitled "managerial challenges" incorporating 15 items in Likert-type scale. 5 items were assigned to each component (competences and qualifications component, managerial regulations component and centralization component). The minimum and maximum scores of each component were 5 and 25, respectively. The middle score for each component was 15. The validity of the questionnaire was confirmed by some academic specialists in the field and its reliability equaled 0.87 by Cronbach's alpha coefficient. The descriptive statistics and one-sample t-test were used for data analysis.

## 3. Results

The research questions are directly related to these three components separately. Then, the findings for each research question regarding each component are presented below. Table 1 shows the one-sample t-test results for each component (i.e. each research question).

Regarding the first research question (i.e. is the assignment of managers in universities based on defined managerial competences and qualifications?), the result showed that the subjects agreed that the assignment of managers in their universities has not been based on related competences and qualifications ( $t = -0.37$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

In response to second research question (i.e. Do problems and obstacles in the universities stem from managerial laws and regulations?), the respondents did not believe that these regulations are the origins of such problems ( $t = -0.15$ ,  $p > 0.05$ ).

In response to the third questions (i.e. Are managers and educational department chiefs agree with the centralization of curriculum network in higher education?), results showed that they agree the centralization in this respect ( $t = 0.43$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Table 1. One sample t-test results for three components held in "Managerial Challenges" questionnaire

Component	n	Mean	Std. Error Mean	t	df	p-value
Competences and Qualifications	184	14.49	-0.5	-0.37	183	0.73
Managerial Regulations	184	11.89	-0.1	-0.15	183	0.88
Centralisation	184	15.29	0.29	0.43	183	0.006**

Sig < 0.01\*\*

#### 4. Discussion and conclusion

The objective of this study was to investigate the managerial challenges of curriculum implementation from managers and educational department chiefs' viewpoints in the universities located in West-Azerbaijan State, Iran. Three managerial indicators/components named competences and qualifications, managerial regulations and organizational centralization in curriculum network were estimated by the subjects. Based on the study results, the assignment of managers in higher education was not based on defined managerial competences and qualifications. Gooya and Izadi (2002) found the similar result. It can be said that when the managers of higher levels in an organization are assigned, they select their deputies and subordinates based on their own preferences and personal views. This results in some personally preferred and non-qualified assignments which are the origin of some serious problems, especially frequent unexpected changes of managers. While the assigned managers may have expected competences, but their assignment for a position which requires other competences than the current managers have worsens the status. Previous researches showed that incorrect and personally preferred managements (Haddad, 1999) together with unexpectedly and tremendous changes of managers (Araste, 2001). have caused inefficacy of management in Iran's higher education. Dehghani (1387) found that correct management background and previous experience have main roles in selecting and assigning competent managers.

Other finding of this study showed that the respondents did not agree that current problems in higher education systems result from managerial regulations.

One finding of the study was that the participants agreed the centralization of curriculum network organization process. This is not in accord with Vaziri's (1999) findings, indicating that the studied students and faculty members believed that the related curricula of their study fields did not match scientific developments, economical, social and cultural development goals and the optimal quality of higher education outputs and stated that decentralization is a remedy for this problems and the participation of students and faculty members with The Higher Council of Curriculum Development will response to many challenges of Iran's developing society.

Considering the importance of this subject and the results of this study, it is proposed that managerial infrastructures in higher education are based on managerial competences and qualifications and authority assignments, together with diagnostic, developmental and ultimate observation and evaluation. In addition, enhancing the professional abilities and competences needed for managers should be taken into account as a strategic goal and a way of innovation and creativity as well as an approach to absorbing their participation for curriculum design and implementation processes.

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