The need for Quality Management Systems in Libyan universities

To manage any university a comprehensive system for all strategies aiming to achieve the institution core functions, namely teaching, research and community services should be implemented. Quality management in education is a comprehensive tenet for quality control, quality assurance and quality enhancement, with human resources at the centre. Political interventions in Libyan universities in the early 1980s tried to introduce new concepts of freedom of learning and student-centred education without preparing them in addition to increasing demands on higher education strikingly on medical education (1).

However, that unfortunately led to the problems that the Libyan universities are currently facing such as student overcrowding, continually changing of bylaws, leadership and organisations (merging and re-merging of the universities), reduced autonomy, dissociation from societal needs, stagnation and compromised student performances. The need to reform the Libyan universities is of a paramount and vital importance (1). The change for the better necessitates establishing quality management as well as adopting investigative-based learning and self-controlled active learning strategy. The usual resistance to change must be overcome as quality can only be achieved when all the staff members in the university continually focus on enhancing and expanding their collective awareness and capabilities for enforcing and adopting new teaching methodologies and developing new curricula, based on the institutional mission and sound clear outcome objectives.

Models have been adapted for university quality management such as Total Quality Management (TQM) model (2) and Quality Management System (QMS) in reference to ISO 9000 Standards. TQM used constant improvement, top management commitment, customer-driven definitions of quality and teamwork. Statistical techniques were used to monitor the process (3–5). However, TQM model is difficult to fit with the educational process, because of lack of a specific process focus (e.g. on the students, employers, society or government), and also lacks a specific amendable measurement outcome on the education, knowledge or research (6–9).

My institution 'The Libyan International Medical University' which is implementing problem-based learning strategy has adopted the QMS ISO 9000 Standards. The International Standard of ISO 9001:2008 uses the guidelines of Performance Improvement in QMS (ISO 9004) and the guidelines for the application of ISO 9001 in Education (10). The ISO 9000 is an external standard which specifies a set of practices followed by the people involved in the delivery of the course(s) and programmes, to maintain the quality of the various activities related to the course and to be effective and efficient. The educational programmes should be designed to meet the needs of the stakeholders and 'customers' (students and community), the curriculum development, the education delivery and assessment of learning (10).

In summary, there is a legacy of overcrowding and under funding in traditional public Libyan learning universities with declining standards, which is putting more pressure on these universities to achieve a better system of management and choosing an appropriate model for quality. All efforts should be directed to modernise our higher education institutions, through evaluations and revisions to compete with other similar institutions around the world and to end the exclusion of the Libyan universities from the annual publications of international university rankings, and to deliver better quality of university services that our students and society deserve to have.

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