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*Student Voice in African Harmonization Process in Higher Education*

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## **Introduction:**

The concept of higher education management refers to how the institutions of higher education level are formally operated, organized and managed.

Different universities around the world are organized and operated under certain rules and guides which ensure smooth of daily operations, these rules and laws should be constantly renewed to fit on hand situations, this requires the preparation of annual plan and long term oriented strategic plan to flexibly respond to changes, this strategic plan must contain issues of all faculties that can smoothly move between all levels of hierarchy.

In this contribution, a details about probable strategies to be implemented are discussed and what is the result expected of applying these plans, also other topics are discussed that heavily contribute to create and maintain a high quality level of education in Africa.

The participation of students in enhancing the education process is a must. Therefore, the main rule desired of student affairs is also discussed, as they should be properly leaded and managed.

## **Strategic plan of education development:**

The existence of a strong strategic plan for each university individually can heavily contribute to the quality of education among all faculties, it requires the involvement of all academic leaders in all level starting from the president of the university to deans and vice-deans, also departments' heads should prepare a department specific plan to manage their department activities, funds, quality of teaching and all other related-department decisions.

To develop a strong and effective plan, numerous experiments of successful countries should be well studied from all aspects, with respect to cultures and traditions differences, available funding and factors of surrounding environment that can affect the applicability of such plans.

The specification of topics is dependent upon the situation and existed problems. However, there are some issues to be raised such as Finance and fund allocation among faculties then departments, Quality assurance of education process, Accountability and legal and ethical issues. Formed plan should be discussed with presence of all involved parties to provide the final approval for implementation step, in which requires commitment of employees at all levels.

A proper evaluation process of applied plan can provide information about the degree of fit of the plan with a given situation, the performance of the university is measured objectively and compared to an expected performance to allow any modifications to take place, this result in an organized institution that can carry out numerous activities successfully.

In a similar situation the authorities of decision making are passed to all academic staff in all managerial levels. The decentralization of decision making authority is required to maintain a healthy environment and it contribute to enhance the productivity levels assessed by deans, vice-deans and departments' heads. However, this contribution help to refine some essential skills of academic staff such as leadership skills in which they are considered as an academic leaders as well as negotiation skills to express their ideas clearly and directly and ability to coordinate and integrate departmental activities and to manage problems efficiently and effectively either critical or not.

Authority to make decisions practiced by academic leaders to ensure application of what is suitable to serve the best interest of employees, students, demonstrators and all involved parties with no reference to university president, also to be able to suggest ideas in the institution of higher education management.

## Finance and Proper Allocation of Fund:

Considering that higher education in Africa is heavily dependent upon the government funding, universities have to be adequately funded. However, universities in reality are not adequately funded by the government, this fund is a major concern of the Ministry of higher education for the public universities because they offer most if not all of their services for free or with few tuition fees, also

The sources of fund for public universities may vary among different sources to ensure adequate fund to sustain a desired level of quality of education process (these sources may be through tuition fees, government funding or investment and donation) but with the assumption that tuition fees are not adequate or that it is all dried up. In this case, universities would suffer severe consequences thus the educational system in the country that mainly affect the labor market and productivity of employed graduates in which:

- **The quality of higher education would be compromised:**  
The lack of adequate fund to bring tools which facilitate teaching process could be a problem that would lead universities to give up some valuable and necessary resources in order to maintain other necessary resources and tools, this tradeoff process reduces the quality of education system.
- **Unavoidable budget cuts could lead to retrenchments:**  
Some costs are necessarily spent, these costs may not be avoidable as that costs are paid on constructing the higher education system within the university and among all departments it includes some costs of administrative departments and other of materials and supplies. Therefore, inability of the university to cut off these costs may lead to retrenchment in both academic staff and number of enrolled students which also lead to mismanagement of current university's property
- **Research quality could affect the desire for investment:**  
Enhance the quality of conducted researches is a must, which it contribute to the development of the higher education system through building capacity with respect to expertise.
- **Universities could reduce their study offerings:**  
Reducing the study offerings is a major problem as the main reason for universities existence is the study programmes and offering lower level of study programmes reduces skills and knowledge required from post-graduate students in labor market.
- **Shortage of graduates skills for public and private sector:**  
Shortage of skills is a result of reducing study offerings and other factors that causes unskilled workers and employees and reduces the number of new projects and SME's (Small and Medium Enterprises) especially those which are based on new ideas and advanced technologies.

- **Low demand on public universities and institutions:**  
The level of demand on education offered by public universities and government institutions will be reduced as a result of powerful education systems provided by other private sector universities and institutions that are heavily competing against their parallel in public sector, this would lead wealthy families to head to private universities.
- **Distortion of size and shape of university or institution:**  
The distortion of tuition fees among different level of studies (postgraduates and undergraduates) as a proportion of costs which is applied by a fee-free system could result in distortion of size and shape of university.

## Quality Assurance of Higher Education:

To enhance the quality of education process, there should be a harmonization between education system in Africa that allow each student individually from any African country to persuade specific vacancy and develop his own career in any other country beside his own country with no additional education requirement, this has a strong positive effect on student productivity during years of education and leads to internationalization of higher education system in Africa.

Some African universities are forced to admit students beyond university real capacity in spite of decreased government funding. Thus, some universities are forced to seek to admit as many clients as possible, if only to meet running cost while others work like business enterprises, seek maximization of profit, in which large number resulting of lower quality

Reasons of low quality level of education can be summarized as following:

- Large number that is beyond the capacity is a major reason of low education quality in which:
  - It is a source of a huge distraction among students within the same class and the lecturer.
  - Due to large number and limited time during the semester, there might be a lack of practical projects application prepared by students which is the most effective way of teaching as it provide a first-hand experience to them.
  - Loss of communication between the students and their professors or instructors.
  - Availability of seats and resources for each student may not be adequate. As a result of this, the attendance of lectures might decrease.

- Lack of adequacy in the academic staff. With increasing the number of students while maintaining the same academic staff. As a result of this, teachers-to-students ratio will decrease and it leads to less departments of specialization due to shortage in academic staff members.

Previously mentioned reasons will lead to huge number of graduates with low or average qualifications which will raise the issue of unemployment and increase unemployment rates due to disequilibrium in labor market in which supply of work is greater than demand on work. This will give more control and power to business owners and managers.

Strategic plan of higher education may determine a minimum level of quality in teaching process but such a level might be subjective and difficult to measure. Therefore, the level of quality can be determined by the quality of teaching facilities (rooms, technologies as projectors and data show, air conditioning, sound systems and tools needed.), maintaining a minimum and standard level of teaching facilities ensure the quality of teaching as a process.

Developing the quality of higher education requires full understanding of labor market needs and requirements to offer the opportunity for students to lead successful positions, also requires a heavy participation of students who are represented by the students' affairs, in which students' affairs have a great rule in enhancing quality of educational process. Therefore, more participation of students' affairs in management process through direct communication within the university with president of university and with other students' affairs in Africa who should have a representative in Africa, This can generate aware, responsible, innovative and productive generation completely aware about their rights and duties toward others.

## **Management of Students' Affairs:**

The rule of students' affairs is considered a strategic rule that represent a linkage between students and higher education management but it doesn't get to that extend only, The rule of students' affairs can have a huge impact on the development of teaching process, these affairs ensure the rights of students among all university's faculties.

The election process of the president of students' affair is dependent upon votes of students, those who voted are expecting to have direct communication with the elected president. If not, then the rule of students' affair is fading away. The president must ensure that students and researchers must be supported by their universities to go international without giving up traditions that set us up unique and different from each other, he also needs to exploit every opportunity to communicate with management that

are responsible for training courses to help students acquiring skills and experiences needed through trainings to refine their knowledge and to ensure introducing unique calibers able to communicate with others and persuade their experiences.

Academics in all levels of hierarchy and members of students' affairs are considered leaders of change, they must be able to offer life changing experiences, and assessments to students and an honored representation in all national and international conferences which will primarily help students to have a true example of a leader.

### **Accountability and Legal and Ethical Issues:**

Education system and universities can be corrupted as any other public institution, and that the widely known concept of fairness and equality among all universities can be demolished by favoring interests of specific parties or institutions (individual interest or even a group interest). Such problem is a result of the abuse of authority and power for personal gains this can create a huge problem in the system in which it leads to unorganized and mismanaged system which give higher authorities to corrupted individuals, the effect of such corruption can be seen through:

- Illegal procurement of goods and services
- Cheating in the provision of its normal functions
- Professional misconduct (favoring of family members, sexual exploitation, bias in grading)
- Cheating in paying of taxes and use of university property

Education corruption is universal. However, the level of corruption differs among different regions, also the corruption is not only associated with academic or managerial staff, some of partially authorized employees may practice a corrupted activity which may abuse the fairness among students and students also may get involved in the corruption by cheating in exams and so on.

Education corruption problem raise the need for more monitoring and regulations that hold corrupted parties accountable according to specified laws which will work as a stimulus disciplines and commitment toward others.

Evaluation process constitutes a crucial part of quality assurance and accountability assurance, the evaluation process in most of African universities such as Alexandria University is only a one side of evaluation process which is typical evaluation conducted by professors to evaluate the performance of students during the semester whether through exams or other evaluation methods. But there is a lack of a reliable and proper student evaluation of teachers in which reduces the emphasis on education quality according to some previously conducted studies, also some studies introduced by Charles

and other professors revealed that teachers are not too enthusiastic about the practice of student evaluation of teachers (SET).

## **Competence: Ability to translate knowledge into practice:**

This competence is very important that it is the major connection between the university and the labor market and it mainly define the level of productivity of employees among different positions, developing such competence require a proper planning of education system within universities that focus on all previously mentioned issues and apply them effectively.

After responding to questions and interviewing two of my colleagues about their abilities to transfer knowledge into practice and to confirm the causes and factors that have direct effect on developing this competence, I have answered and obtained the following answers which are summarized later from my point of view.

### **Answers Which Reflect My Point of View:**

**1. Which course was the most effective in helping you to develop this competence? Explain why.**

The most effective course in helping me develop this competence was “Commercial Banks”, because this course was mainly dependent upon reality and preparing projects during the whole semester and the practical part of financial analysis of specific commercial bank helped me to understand the nature of tasks done not only theoretical steps and hypothesis.

**2. List the course-related activities which have helped you to develop this competence outside the class, either working on your own or with other students. Which of these activities were the most effective in helping your to develop the competence? Explain why.**

Course-related activities which included reading published articles and summarize them, also the weekly assignments that are core-related to the syllabus but the most effective activity was the field trip to visit the headquarter of Egyptian Real Estate Bank contributed heavily to my knowledge of banks’ activities.

**3. Which aspects of the competence have you developed through being a member of a club/ an association / a social group? Give some details.**

Being a part of a club which is the investment club in our college allowed me to attend more field trips as the office of Stock Market in Egypt and made me opened to more

experiences and eager to learn more and more about the financial markets, this membership offered me a lot of opportunities as a student in the faculty of commerce.

**4. In the course guide or in class presentations was there any reference to this competence – if so give further information. Was the competence assessed in any of your units or modules – if so give further information. Will you be able to present evidence of achievement in this competence to an employer?**

Yes, there was many references by my professor to this competency and he focused heavily on the ways of developing it to become a real effective member in the community, the teaching method was fully interactive as we were able to discuss many different points may not be related to the syllabus provided but he is understandable person that he answers most of our thoughts and ideas

No, the competence have not been assessed in any modules.

Yes, I am able to understand and analyze commercial banks financially in a basic form and I have a certificate approved from the Central Bank of Egypt which states that I have successfully completed modules related to financial analysis.

**5. Outside the university which aspects of the competence have you developed? Give some details. Have you done anything else in your life which has helped you to develop this competence? If so, give an example.**

Yes, I have participated in different activities in different companies that provide me with first hand experiences which refine my knowledge in a best way.

An internship of sales trainee is the most effective activity that allowed me to practice different courses I have studied in a real company that I was able to develop different aspects as marketing and how to conduct a feasibility study and a market research, also the presentation skills and negotiation skills that sales position is heavily dependent upon. Some other aspects of time management, financial analysis, communication skills, marketing and innovation are all important and I had the opportunity to practice these skills as a participant in The Quest conducted by Unilever.

**6. After reflecting on the different contexts in which you have developed this competence (in class, working on course-related activities outside the class, in clubs and associations, in real life, and any other contexts you have added in your response to question 5), write a short statement on how each of these contexts has contributed to your development of the competence and on their relative strengths.**

In class, ability to acquire important knowledge and contribute to my experience and my general knowledge allowed me to have analytical way of thinking and to provide fast and effective solutions for presented problems.

Course-related activities has given me strength to handle more responsibilities and to become more productive to myself and my community.

Membership of Fekra team and Investment club has given me huge opportunity to learn more about my field and my department.

On personal level, I am willing to conduct a discussion with people and to persuade my ideas more easily and effectively.

**7. Do you think that you have fully developed this competence? What else can you do to improve your level of competence while you are a student? How do you think you will go on developing this competence when you are working?**

No, I am sure that I am able to develop this competence more by participating in further internships that provide actual practical experiences and through participating in different student interactive programmes and courses.

When I am working, I think moving through different tasks and acquiring a non-specialized job that including different tasks and empowered role will help the most to develop this competence.

## Number 1: Menna-Allah Essam

**1. Which course was the most effective in helping you to develop this competence? Explain why.**

The most effective course in helping me develop this competence was “Advanced Corporate Finance”, because it is dealing with important and sensitive issues regard of corporations.

**2. List the course-related activities which have helped you to develop this competence outside the class, either working on your own or with other students. Which of these activities were the most effective in helping your to develop the competence? Explain why.**

The application of a project that include analyzing real data of corporation and expressing our own thoughts among a team grouped together was the most effective activity.

Other activities are the frequent visits to the office of Stock Exchange Market in Egypt.

**3. Which aspects of the competence have you developed through being a member of a club/ an association / a social group? Give some details.**

I am a member in Investment Club in Faculty of Commerce, it gave me the opportunity to attend their seminars and to participate in an interactive project of Stock Market Simulation (SMS).

SMS contributed to my skills because it simulate the real stock market and made me familiar and aware with specific terminologies and specific activities related to stock markets around the world.

**4. In the course guide or in class presentations was there any reference to this competence – if so give further information. Was the competence assessed in any of your units or modules – if so give further information. Will you be able to present evidence of achievement in this competence to an employer?**

Yes, we were able to discuss further information about the corporation which we were analyzing financially.

No, the competence has not been assessed in any units or modules.

Yes, membership of investment club, certificate from SMS and certificate from Egyptian Banking Institution provide an evidence also my experience practicing some financial activities are an evidence.

**5. Outside the university which aspects of the competence have you developed? Give some details. Have you done anything else in your life which has helped you to develop this competence? If so, give an example.**

Yes, I have worked in sales in a company and this job taught me to develop my communication skills with people and to please customers professionally.

**7. Do you think that you have fully developed this competence? What else can you do to improve your level of competence while you are a student? How do you think you will go on developing this competence when you are working?**

Yes, I am now able to practice my knowledge acquired in my department of specialization.

I can develop my work skills when I work in a job that I love.

## **Number 2: Ahmed Mohamed Ahmed**

**1. Which course was the most effective in helping you to develop this competence? Explain why.**

E-Commerce, because it helped work of a programmer and web developer linked with trading online.

**2. List the course-related activities which have helped you to develop this competence outside the class, either working on your own or with other students. Which of these activities were the most effective in helping your to develop the competence? Explain why.**

Applying work that are related to programming with different languages such as PHP, JavaScript, HTML, CSS and CMS, but the most effective was the web designing since it is my main job because I have been always passionate about coding and programming and web designing is linking it with artistic part which is designing.

**3. Which aspects of the competence have you developed through being a member of a club/ an association / a social group? Give some details.**

Being a member of AYB association (non-profit organization) helped me to gain more experiences in designing and graphics since it is now my job to create designs as a web designer.

**4. In the course guide or in class presentations was there any reference to this competence – if so give further information. Was the competence assessed in any of your units or modules – if so give further information. Will you be able to present evidence of achievement in this competence to an employer?**

No, there was no reference to this competence.

No, it was not assessed or mentioned previously in any module or unit.

Yes, I have developed many websites and designs that are now introduced over the internet and I have also conducted a mobile application with help of my senior project team.

**5. Outside the university which aspects of the competence have you developed? Give some details. Have you done anything else in your life which has helped you to develop this competence? If so, give an example.**

Yes, working first as a freelancer then now having a full time job helped me to gain further experience in my field and in communicating with other people.

**7. Do you think that you have fully developed this competence? How do you think you will go on developing this competence now.**

I think I have developed large part of it and I am able to practice my knowledge in my current job. However, moving to different jobs may allow me to fully develop this competence.

### Summary of Ideas:

Due to differences in age, gender and fields of study, each one has responded to questions in a way that reflects his own vision.

Personally, I don't believe that anyone could possibly be able to say that they have fully accomplished something that is actually subjective in measure and not objective. Thus, different perspectives are reflected in the previous interviews, obviously that there is lack of proper emphasis on such important and crucial competence in any module or unit during all years of study, this creates confusion among students on how to develop their abilities to translate knowledge into practice and to become a productive employees in different positions to receive promotions based on their skills and abilities

Another point is that each one of us have stated that there is actually at least one or more courses during the semester that includes actual applications of course's modules which is a successful initial step toward wider and more effective practical applications on what students learn.

Also the situation that students are willing to take responsibilities similar to job responsibilities required to be practiced by employees in different position is a strong initiative that reflects the abilities of students and willingness to learn more and hold superior authorities and responsibilities in a young age which raise their self-esteem and satisfaction, which is a positive point.