



Gulf Research Centre Cambridge
Knowledge for All

Workshop 8

Quality of Higher Education in the Gulf: Quo Vadis?

Workshop Directors:

Dr. Reynaldo Gacho Segumpan
Head of the Department of Business
Administration
Rustaq College of Education
Ministry of Higher Education
Sultanate of Oman
Email: reynaldo.rus@cas.edu.om

Associate Professor John McAlaney
Associate Professor
Department of Psychology
Faculty of Science and Technology
Bournemouth University
United Kingdom
Email: jmcalaney@bournemouth.ac.uk

Abstract

Quality is a relative term. It connotes a spectrum of meanings, ranging from “quality” of students admitted into the program to the caliber of academic staff and the availability of resources to support teaching and learning activities, among others. This relative nature of “quality” deserves attention in order to concretize parameters and standards that will define quality in a more objective and encompassing lens, especially in the context of higher education in the Gulf.

The main objective of this workshop is to explore the quality of higher education in the Gulf Cooperation Council (alternatively referred to as “Gulf” or “GCC” in this paper) countries, namely the Kingdom of Bahrain, Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, State of Kuwait, State of Qatar, Sultanate of Oman, and the United Arab Emirates. In particular, the workshop will address the following theoretical pursuits:

- 1) What is “quality” from the eyes of key policy and decision-makers, academics, and students in higher education institutions (HEIs) as well as the industry (i.e., employers) in the Gulf?
- 2) How does the international community view the quality of HE in the Gulf? What are their bases for such assessment?
- 3) What is the impact of global outlook on the quality of HE in the Gulf?
- 4) What management models can explain quality HE in the Gulf? Is there an ideal model that will fit across the Gulf HEIs?
- 5) How is quality education in higher education (HE) promoted and nurtured in the Gulf?
- 6) How can quality HE be tailored in the light of endogenous and exogenous circumstances and expectations from the “insiders” and the “outsiders”?
- 7) Are the Gulf HEIs ready for globalization of HE?
- 8) Is HE in the Gulf at par with the global standards of HE?
- 9) How should quality of HE in the Gulf be managed and driven towards sustainability?
- 10) What is the future of HE in the Gulf – *quo vadis*?

Description and Rationale

Quo vadis is a term that heralds the future. In particular, it stimulates critical and reflective thinking as contextualized in HE in the GCC. This workshop leaps into the future as the participants examine the dialectical tension between the current scenario and the ideal prospects for HE in the Gulf region. Answers to the preceding questions are uncertain, and more questions could be deciphered at the horizon that necessitate this workshop:

- Can the public and the stakeholders be assured of quality in HE in the Gulf?
- What lies ahead in HE in GCC?
- What factors can rationalize the quality of HE in the Gulf?
- What are the metrics and key performance indicators (KPIs) that can improve the quality of HE in the GCC?

Quality is an embedded element of HE worldwide. It is a requirement that every HEI endeavors to achieve sustainable development. As conceived by UNESO (2017);

Education is a public good, a fundamental human right and a basis for guaranteeing the realization of other rights. It is essential for peace, tolerance, human fulfilment and sustainable development. We recognize education as key to achieving full employment and poverty eradication. We commit to quality education and to

improving learning outcomes, which requires strengthening inputs, processes and evaluation of outcomes and mechanisms to measure progress. Quality education fosters creativity and knowledge, and ensures the acquisition of the foundational skills of literacy and numeracy as well as analytical, problem-solving and other high-level cognitive, interpersonal and social skills (pp. 6-7).

Over the years, HEIs in the Gulf have embraced quality in the delivery of programs and services. One evidence to support this claim is the substantial improvement of the Gulf-based HEIs in global rankings. For instance, in the World University Rankings 2018, 12 HEIs from the Gulf have achieved the top 1000 positions while 18 of them were included in the QS World University Rankings 2018. Despite this performance, however, a closer scrutiny of each GCC country in the said surveys shows that more work is needed in order to fortify the performance of the said HEIs. Of the six GCC countries, Saudi and United Arab Emirates posted the highest number of “global universities” in both rankings while the rest had one HEI in the top spots. Although these rankings are not absolute measures of “quality”, it is imperative that key players in HE and HEIs have to engage more actively in their efforts for continuous improvement and quality assurance initiatives.

Apparently, without quality, HEIs may be said to have failed in their *raison d’etre*. This creates a huge gap in research and in HE management and as such, it is imperative that a global forum be conducted in order to thresh out macro and micro factors that interweave with quality HE in the context of GCC. There are several potential factors that may be relevant. These include, for instance the embeddedness of approaches to ensure quality HE, which could be defined as the degree to which the whole institution works to implement and evaluate approaches that promote excellence. Questions can be asked as to whether the approach itself articulates a clear vision that can be translated into action; and if it draws upon evidence-based strategies that are proven to achieve the best possible student outcomes. It can be considered whether any approach identified is outward facing and highlights the importance of engagement between HE and industry. There is a need to identify how teaching excellence is best recognized and rewarded through institutional cultures within the GCC. Finally, it should be considered how quality HE in the GCC should encourage students to be active participants within their own education; and to work to not only obtain their qualification but also contribute to the culture of teaching and learning excellence within an institution.

Scholarly Contribution

One of the concrete outputs from the workshop will be an edited book on the abovementioned topic. There are several materials that deal with quality higher education but there is a dearth of reference that is very specific to the Gulf region.

The workshop will also reconstruct the body of knowledge on HE in the GCC countries as well as reframe the academic and the research communities’ conceptualization of the quality of teaching and learning in the Gulf, and in doing so create fusion between education, research and professional practice.

Moreover, the workshop will be an ideal platform to converge top authorities and key players on higher education in the Gulf and work out on mechanisms, policies, standards, programs, and related initiatives that will transform HE and HEI management vis-à-vis local and regional conditions in the light of globally accepted standards.

Anticipated Participants

The workshop welcomes academics, policy makers, key decision-makers, curriculum development experts, administrative heads and other leaders and managers in HE in the Gulf, the UK, and elsewhere. The industry and other NGOs involved in various shades of collaborations with the HEIs are also encouraged to participate and share their voices in transforming the quality of HE in the Gulf.

Workshop Director Profiles

Dr. Reynaldo Gacho Segumpan is the current Head of the Department of Business Administration at Rustaq College of Education, Ministry of Higher Education, Sultanate of Oman. He has been with the Ministry for 12 years now. Prior to this, he was an Associate Professor at the Graduate School of Universiti Utara Malaysia (2000-2007) where he also served as Deputy Director of the Executive Development Center, MBA Coordinator, and Deputy Director of the University Teaching and Learning Center. His recent publications appeared in journals such as *Australian Academy of Business and Economics Review*, *European Journal of Social and Human Sciences*, and *Asian Journal of University Education*.

Dr. Segumpan is a Fellow of the Australian Academy of Business Leadership, a Lifetime Member of the Asian Qualitative Research Association, and a Regular Member of the International Sociological Association. He has received conference grants from the National Safety Council, USA, Knowledge Management Society, South Korea, UK Department for Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy, the British Council, and World Society Foundation based in Zurich, Switzerland. He was a Paper Presenter in the 9th Gulf Research Meeting at the University of Cambridge, UK on July 30-August 3, 2018 and a Delegate to the Harvard Project for Asian and International Relations held at Harvard University, USA on February 16-19, 2018. He holds a Ph.D. and a Doctor of Communication (D.Comm.).

Dr. John McAlaney is an Associate Fellow of the British Psychological Society (BPS) and Associate Professor and Head of Education for the Department of Psychology at Bournemouth University in the UK. Within this role he is responsible for the development of new courses at undergraduate and postgraduate level. He has held previous posts the University of Bradford, the University of the West of Scotland and London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine. As part of his current research and education practice he is exploring the development of cybersecurity higher education in the UK. He led the BPS

response to the UK Government consultation on the development of the cybersecurity profession, including how to improve the engagement between HE and industry.

Selected Readings

Al-Ubaydli, Omar and Andrea Plebani, ed. (2014), *GCC Relations with Post-War Iraq: A Strategic Perspective*, (Gulf Research Centre Cambridge, Cambridge)

Cordesman, Anthony H. (2017), “After ISIS: Creating Strategic Stability in Iraq,” Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington D.C.

Gresh, Geoffrey F. (2015). *Gulf Security and the U.S Military: Regime Survival and the Politics of Basing* (Stanford Security Studies, California)

Haddad, Fanar (2011). *Sectarianism in Iraq: Antagonistic Visions of Unity* (Hurst, London)

Legrenzi, Matteo (2011). *The GCC and the International Relations of the Gulf: Diplomacy, Security and Economic Coordination in a Changing Middle East* (I.B. Tauris, London)

Miller, Rory (2016). *Desert Kingdoms to Global Powers: The Rise of the Arab Gulf* (Yale University Press, New Haven)

Sky, Emma (2015). *The Unraveling: High Hopes and Missed Opportunities in Iraq* (PublicAffairs, New York)

Stansfield, Gareth and Mohammed Shareef (2017), *The Kurdish Question Revisited* (Hurst, London)

Weiss, Michael and Hassan Hassan (2016) *ISIS: Inside the Army of Terror* (Regan Arts, New York)

Yergin, Daniel (2011) *The Quest: Energy, Security and the Remaking of the Modern World* (Penguin, New York)