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Academic staff promotion system and its influence on the quality of vocational and technical education - College of Technological Studies, as a case Kuwait

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Abstract. The need to enhance local capability is one of most Kuwaiti government priorities that is embodied in the overall governmental plan. In fact, the Kuwaiti government has exerted efforts to forge the College of Technological Studies, CTS, in order to equipped students with the knowledge, skills and attitudes that are required by essential sector in the country's economy (e.g., Oil and Electricity and Water). However, the success of the College of Technological Studies in achieving its objectives would rely on the competencies of the CTS management and academic staff in meeting industrial requirements. The shaping and enhancing of student's ability in managing, maintaining, and adapting the imported technology in industries would rely on the level of academic staff knowledge, skills, experience, and attitude in meeting industrial requirements. The efficiency of the promotion system for academic staff would indeed contribute significantly to shaping the standard of the CTS graduates. The need to absorb and evaluate the current status of the CTS academic staff promotion system must be one of highly management priority in order to achieve the CTS overall objectives. The aim of this paper is to identify and examine the efficiency of the academic staff promotion system. Several issues would be investigated and examined. Among which: the criteria's applied in selected and approving academic journals, the criteria's required for promoting academic staff, work ethics and its relation to the academic staff promotion system, and the obstacles that might face the CTS management in applying the academic staff promotion system. The paper would conclude that unless the management of the CTS realised and appreciate the significant role of the academic staff promotion system, industries would continue to rely on expatriate for years ahead.

Keywords. vocational and technical education, industrial training program, developing indigenous manpower, interaction between vocational and technical education and local industries and business, promotion system, Kuwait

1. Introduction

The rapid change in science and technology in industries and business call for an immediate respond from labour market to deal with various dramatic scientific and technological advancement. The constant changing of industrial strategies and techniques to diversify production techniques, respond to social changes, coping with climate change, spread of coronavirus, energy consumption and saving, and water shortage increasing the demand for skilled manpower.

The importance of technical and vocational education in enhancing student's knowledge, skills and attitudes is highly stressed in related literature (Florinda, S. 2021, CVER, 2020, Dinavence, A. 2021). The contribution of technical and vocational education in the country's economic and social status is exceptional. Technical and vocational education allow students to gain practical experiences in their selected career path before graduation (Jens H. 2021), an opportunity to learn a creative skill that can improve employment prospects (European Vocational Skills, 2018), empowering youth and reducing youth unemployment (UN, 2020), prepare youth not only for current jobs, but also for future employment and job establishment (European Commission, 2020).

In the early years, vocational and technical education was taught in classroom and moderate workshops and laboratories with the attention of providing students with general knowledge and skills. However, in recent years a new philosophy has been adapted and transferred into action where students not only gain knowledge, skills and attitude in their colleges premises but also spend certain time in industries and business. The term "vocationalism" has emerged to emphasize on the need of education to respond to industrial needs, particularly in the area of managing, adapting, and maintaining the imported technology applied in their activities.

The problem of youth unemployment is increasing as seen as one of the most crucial obstacles confronting societies in today's world. However, some of the problems facing preparing students for the world of work is the lack of proper skills and experience that enable staff at vocational and technical colleges to transfer specific skills and attitudes to students. As a result, many vocational and technical graduates are "ill-prepared" for the world of work. Approximately there are 497 million young people, or roughly 41 per cent of the global youth population, are in the labour market. Of these, 429 million are employed, while nearly 68 million are looking for a job, and are available for one, and considered as unemployed. More than half of young people – around 776 million – are outside the labour market. Around 55 million, or 13 per cent, are suffering extreme poverty (International Labour Organization, 2020).

Government attitudes towards vocational and technical education has been also changed to modify education in meeting industrial requirements. The World Bank's 2019, suggests that "*flexibility between general and vocational education particularly in higher education is imperative to enable workers to compete in changing labour markets where technology plays an increasingly important role*". Government is expected to play a vital role in the invite main stakeholders to implement a strong linkage with technical and vocational institutions. Indeed, the involvement of social entities as well as a stakeholder in the technical and vocational system would strengthen and facilitate the achievement of overall manpower policy (European Commission, 2018).

Interaction between technical and vocational institutions with industries is highly noted in related literature. (Putu S. 2019, Henrik B. et. al. 2019, Muchlas S. 2018). Vocational Technical and education focuses on apprentice-type learning and training to equip students for the world of work. In fact, "*On-the-job training help develop specific skills that can boost workers' productivity. Thus, while preparedness is important, the intensity and quality of the training received in the workplace is crucial. This is even more true in a fast-changing world, where updating skills is the key to workers' relevance and longevity*" (Inter-American Development Bank Report, 2017).

Teachers play an active role in the success of technical and vocational education. Teachers' competencies are considered essential in transferring the required knowledge, skills, and attitudes to students. Technical and vocational education required a special type of skills that is different from a formal academic education. An academic certification does not mean

that he/she is qualified to work as a teacher or a trainer in technical and vocational institutions nor to be appointed as a head of department or even a dean position. The misunderstanding of the core objectives of technical and vocational education seems to be one of the main reasons for not obtaining a satisfactory outcome. Teachers are required to have emotional intelligence (Fiftyana, 2018), high commitment (Gomendio, 2017), and to have a positive attitude towards teaching and students (Ali, 2020).

Academic staff on the other hand, needs to be well equipped with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes that are mostly needed by related industries and business. The academic staff promotion system would indeed play a vital role in ensuring the competency of academic staff as well as closing the gap between vocational and technical institutions and local industries and business. The management of vocational and technical institutions is responsible for setting and evaluation the criteria's adapted for academic staff promoting system to ensure its efficiency in preparing academic staff in transferring theories into practices. The insufficiency of the academic staff promotion system would contribute significantly in falling to achieve vocational and technical education objectives.

It is generally acknowledged that vocational technical and education in the Gulf States (e.g., Kuwait, United Arab Emirates), is the ultimate solution for filling the gap of lacking skilled and semi-skilled indigenous manpower, particularly in vital sectors of the economy (e.g., oil and electricity and water). In Kuwait, the college of Technological Studies, CTS, has been forged to respond to the need of skilled and semi-skilled-indigenous manpower in essential sectors of the country's economy (e.g., oil and electricity and water). The CTS is one of the colleges under the umbrella of the Public Authority for Applied Education and Training. The success of the CTS in achieving its objectives would depend on the management mentality and experience in promoting and monitoring a successful academic staff promotion system that enable academic staff to acquire the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes to successfully respond to industrial needs and requirements. The success of the CTS would depend on staff competencies in meeting the college objective in specific and overall governmental manpower plan in general. Otherwise, the country would continue to depend on expatriates for years ahead.

2. Research Objectives

- 1) To identify and examine the criteria's used at the CTS in evaluating and approving academic journals.
- 2) To identify and examine the methods applied at the CTS in approving academic journals.
- 3) To identify and examine the criteria's used at the CTS in promoting academic staff.
- 4) To identify and examine the criteria's used at the CTS in research ethics.
- 5) To identify and examine those obstacles (if any) that might hinder the process of academic staff promotion system.
- 6) Discussions and Recommendations.

The outcomes of the research would indeed guide the management of the College of Technological Studies, CTS, to improve the quality of academic staff promotion system. In addition to, reviewing and evaluating the current academic staff promotion system. This would contribute positively in providing related industry with indigenous skilled and semi- skilled manpower able to manage, maintain and adapt the imported technology, Thus, reducing dependence on expatriates.

3. Materials and Methods

3.1 Design

This research consists of a descriptive survey designed to identify and examine the current promotion system at the College of Technological Studies for the academic staff. The research would focus on the requirements as well as the obstacles that may hinder the implementation of an efficient the academic staff promotion system.

3.2 Sample

The research would encompass personal interviews with (5) heads of academic departments at the CTS. They are namely, Manufacturing Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Petroleum Engineering, Civil Engineering, and Electronics Engineering. An interview would be also conducted with the Dean of the College of Technological Studies.

The purpose is to identify and examine the views of the academic heads of departments towards the quality of the CTS academic staff promotional system and whether it achieve its objectives. Among the issued that would be discusses are: the criteria's applied in evaluating academic journals, the process of identifying and evaluating academic journals, the criteria's for nominating an academic staff to be promoted to a higher level, the obstacles that might hinder the optimal utilization of the current academic staff promotional system.

3.3 Instrumentation

The target population for this research consists of (5) heads of academic departments at the CTS. An interview would be also conducted with the Dean of the College of Technological Studies.

3.4 Statistics and Parameters

The statistics pertain to the sample. The parameters pertain to an entire population. The research parameters/sample are as follows

- 1) Selected (5) heads of academic departments at the CTS.
- 2) The Dean of the CTS.

4. Research Findings

4.1 The Characteristic of the Research Sample

An interview was also made with (5) heads of academic departments at the CTS. They are namely, Manufacturing Engineering, Electrical Engineering, Petroleum Engineering, Civil Engineering, and Electronics Engineering. An interview was also made possible with the Dean of the College of Technological Studies. The aim was to seek an in-depth information regarding the quality of the promotion system for academic staff and present suggestions that would improve the standard of the academic staff promotion system.

4.2 The Criteria's for Evaluating and Approving Academic Journals

In examining the promotion system for academic staff at the CTS, it revealed that it was established in 2005 and no efforts have been exerted to review, evaluate, and update the rules and regulations embodied in the promotion system. The promotion system rules and regulations have specified and noted the requirements for an academic staff to be promoted to a higher academic status (e.g., Lecturers, Associate Professor, Professor). However, the current academic staff promotion system dismissed significant criteria and requirements that are crucial for ensuring the availability of the right experiences and competencies that are mostly needed by industries. Among which are:

- The academic journal has to be refereed. It is essential that the academic journal is refereed as stated in the academic staff promotion system booklet. However, no information is mentioned regarding whether the author can provide two names of referee that he/she knows to review the submitted paper for possible publication in a certain academic journal. It is understandable that some journals need to create a database for reviewer's names and specialisations, however, the possibility of conflict of interest is considered most crucial in the credibility of the journals as well as the authors. It is preferable that the names of reviewers are kept anonymous. The interviews with heads of departments, revealed that the heads of the academic departments at the CTS have no objections on those academic journals that asked for names of reviewers. When asked if providing the names of reviewers would be considered as a conflict of interest, they reply no, since the academic staff promotion system booklet did not either mention or discuss such issue.

- The academic journal has to be specialised. It is important that academic staff published their research papers in a specialised journal. Since many academic journals are interested in diversifying their specialisation for different reasons and aims, the academic staff promotion system booklet did not highlight the necessity to elect or reject those journals which published papers in various fields and disciplines. In fact, the heads of the academic departments at the CTS did not object on such issue, since the academic staff promotion system booklet has not discussed or waved those journals which they diversify their field of specialisations.

4.3 Methods of Approving Academic Journals

It was thought that the academic departments at the CTS have a unified process for evaluating and approving academic journals that corresponds with their field of specialisations. However, only 50% of the academic departments have formed a special committee for identifying, evaluating and approving academic journals. Others, rely on voting procedures for approving academic journals that most academic staff may not have the chance to assess the quality and credibility of the academic journals.

4.4 Criteria's for Promoting Academic Staff

- The candidate for an academic promotion must be first author of at least five academic papers. Indeed, this would ensure, to some extent, that the candidate for an academic promotion is significantly contributing in the published academic paper. However, the promotion system booklet did not mention the number of authors in a certain published academic paper. The findings of this research indicated that the majority (65%) of the academic papers published in the CTS have more than five authors.

- The candidate for an academic promotion must achieve a minimum rating of a "good" in teaching/training skills. Students at the CTS would be allowed to complete a questionnaire regarding lecturer's/trainer's ability in meeting course objectives in either classrooms or laboratories or workshops. Lecturers and trainers would be evaluated by students and rated either weak, acceptable, good, very good and excellent. It was revealed that students who were suspended from the course either for their continuing absent or negative behaviours can, unfortunately, have access to filling the assigned questionnaire. This would have a biased impact on the final evaluation outcomes.

- The candidate for an academic promotion must spend four years before applying for the next higher academic status. This would permit academic staff to conduct research projects, teaching and evaluate student's performance, interacting with society, linking with related

industry for joint research and development, and participated in departmental and college activities.

- The candidate for an academic promotion must submit ten published papers in a refereed academic journal to be promoted to an associate professor for instance. The candidate must be a first author in a minimum five papers at least.

- The candidate for an academic promotion must contribute positively in society. This means that the candidate for an academic promotion must participate in training courses, conduct lecturers either within the CTS boundaries or to related industries, and conduct joint research with external institutions and organisations.

- The candidate for an academic promotion must participate in the department or college committees. The academic candidate must play an active role in the department or the college committees. Several committees were established to allow academic staff to select and meet their interest in those committees (e.g., schedule committee, examination committee, research committee).

4.5 Ethics for Research Publication

Academic staff awareness of research ethics is very essential to maintain a high standard in vocational and technical education. A common definition of “ethics”, is “*norms for conduct that distinguish between acceptable and unacceptable behaviour*”. (David B. Resnik, 2020). In other word, “*research ethics focus on the moral principles that researchers must follow in their respective fields of research*”. Regrettably, the academic staff promotion system booklet has not revealed nor discussed research ethics and the consequence that would inflect on the researchers in the case of not complying with research norms and ethics.

4.6 Encouraging Personal Publication

It highly stress in related literature that research publications would enhance lecturer’s and trainer’s knowledge, skills, and positive attitudes (Mayurakshi Basu 2020, Sthitaprajnya Panigrahi 2021, SAGE Publications 202). The process of research itself would indeed enable researchers to apply new methods and techniques in gathering, analysing, and forming a recommendation that would enrich researcher’s knowledge and solve an existing problem. It is also believed that research would encourage team work approach and freely allow the flow and exchange of information, skills and positive attitudes among lecturers and trainers. The result of this research showed that 90% of the selected published research papers at the CTS was conducted by four to six authors. Surprisingly enough, from 90% who published research papers with more than four other authors have spent between 15 to 20 years at the CTS without publishing a single paper by themselves only.

4.7 Research Budget

The Public Authority for applied Education and Training have allocated a sufficient budget every semester year for financing research projects at the CTS as one of the colleges under its umbrella. However, despite the allocation of research budget, no tangible outcomes have been noted except increasing the number of research publications for obtaining an academic promotion. The author has conducted several research projects regarding the quality of the CTS graduates, the college linkage with industries, the suitability of curriculum taught at the CTS with industrial requirements, the standard of workshops and laboratories, the standard of health and safety, and work ethics. The published research projects included a realistic solutions and recommendations to improve the image and standard of the CTS, which regrettably have not been considered by the CTS management.

4.8 Obstacles of Academic Staff Promotion System

The findings of this research revealed there are many obstacles in implementing the academic staff promotion system. The process of promotion system is applied manually at the CTS and thus the loss of essential documents related to an academic candidate is possible. In addition, there are a notable delay in the procedures of promotion system that cause a frustration and discomfort to many academic staff. It worth stressing that the promotion committee in each academic department would examine all documents related to an academic candidate and transfer the documents to the college central promotion committee. The promotion department committee would intentionally or unintentionally create and encourage “enemies” among academic staff. In other word, information’s, comments and discussions regarding a certain academic candidate in a promotion departmental committee may lead to the candidate and create a frustration and anger among academic staff. A rational comment made in a departmental promotional committee can be mis-interpreted as a direct personal criticism and can have a negative impact of academic staff relationships for years ahead.

5. Discussions and Recommendations

It well understandable that vocational and technical education is a unique type of education. It is differing from a formal academic education as taught in schools, colleges and universities. It is simply defined as an education that prepare students for the world of work. In other work, providing students with the type of knowledge, skills and attitudes that are mostly needed by industries and business. The success of vocational and technical education would rely on the mentality of those running such unique type of education. The believe and trust that a PhD holder can successfully managed a vocational and technical institutions is far from being realistic. It is a type of education which require a thoroughly understanding of what industries and business need to manage, maintain, and properly adapt the imported technology to suit their work environments and objectives. The Kuwaiti government has realized the need for semi and skilled- indigenous manpower in order to reduce dependance on expatriates particularly in vital sectors of the country’s economy (e.g., oil and electricity and water).

As a result, the College of Technological Studies has been forged to equipped students (male/female) with the necessary knowledge, skills and attitudes that of urgent need of the economy. Academic staff at the College of Technological Studies would form as a mediator between the College and related industries. Therefore, academic staff must understand and absorb the needs of industries in order to prepare students for the world of work. In respect to the academic staff promotion system, it seems that there is an ambiguous attitude towards the promotion system. Academic staff eager to publish their academic papers to be prompted to a higher academic status. At the same time, very slim action is noted in improving the standards of the college graduates. In fact, the college lack proper workshops and laboratories, low safety and health regulations and applications especially by students, poor library facilities, neglecting constant reviewing and evaluating of curriculums, weak lineage with industries, and unacceptable outcomes from industrial training programs. As a result, industries would rely on expatriate for years ahead if no serious action is implemented by the CTS management. It is imperative for the CTS management to review the college overall objectives from one side and the academic departmental objectives from the other. Academic staff promotional system must respond and coincided with the college and departmental objectives. The race for an academic status must have the same spirit to improve the standard of the College of Technological Studies in preparing students to manage, maintain, and probably adapt the imported technology used in industries to suit local requirements.

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