



Full Length Research Article

ADMISSION CRITERIA AT PALESTINIAN UNIVERSITIES "SOCIAL SCIENCES DEPARTMENTS"

*** Mahmoud A Abu Samra**

Faculty of Educational Sciences, AL-Quds University, Palestine

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ABSTRACT

The main purpose of this study was to ultimately attract more university students through the adaptation of admission policies that enable students to accept the demands for the benefit of the Palestinian society. In order to achieve the goals of the study, the researcher utilized three tools: literature review, an interview, and questionnaire distributed at Palestinian universities. The results of the study revealed that the admission criteria in the Palestinian universities, especially for the Social Sciences (SS) Programs, need a holistic review and development. It is no longer acceptable to the Palestinian universities themselves; this development should enhance improving teaching-learning inputs, and therefore the outputs of the graduated students so as to cope with the demands of community development. The study included a set of admission standards that Palestinian universities should adopt to achieve the educational goals and community aspiration. The study also points to the relative weights of each of the standard mentioned by the respondents

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INTRODUCTION

In the last two decades of the last century higher education received significant developments which formed challenged affected university programs and outputs. Investment in the education sector was increased for the best return. One of the biggest challenges was the increasing request of university education. It is obvious that university education cannot achieve its objectives in the economic and social development if the curriculum is not able to meet the needs of the labor market, and the graduated students do not have the minimum skills and knowledge which help them to engage in the labor market competently and effectively. This issues needs to review various aspects of higher education from time to time, for assessment and development purposes. One of these aspects is the criteria of university admission as the student is the focus of the teaching-learning process, and one of the most important pillars, and who is seen as tributary to the development process in the community; teacher or businessman or scientist, politician or soldier. There was a great need to review for accepting students in Palestinian universities, especially in the colleges of education, majoring social sciences in particular, through the identification of existing standards in these universities and other universities, views of stakeholders, heads of departments and academic departments, teachers, and registration managers, about the criteria applied in these universities, strengths, weakness,

positives and negatives, using appropriate research tools, in order to develop practical suggestions that will help to improve these standards.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study utilized different tools and activities in order to achieve the goals of the consultancy, these tools are:

Literature Review

This office work is divided into 2 main parts:

- Reviewing the actual admission standards used at the universities of consortium. This process will be carried out through site visits to the universities.
- Reviewing the criteria for admission and acceptance in many Arab universities who have good reputation in teaching social sciences, mainly history and geography, it will also review the criteria for admission in international leading universities in teaching social studies. This review will be carried out through universities websites and personal electronic emails to some heads of social science departments, such as Qatar University and Saudi universities.

Interviews

A (15) relative in-depth interview conducted with teachers in social science departments at the partner universities as well as the heads of these departments and directors of the Admission

and Registration in such universities. The protocol of the interview focused on the following key questions:

- What do you think the strengths, weaknesses, threats and opportunities (SWOT) in the policy of admission at your university?
- What suggestions you think, linked to the admission procedures can improve the process of attracting students to the departments of Social Sciences?
- What obstacles might face the implementation of your suggestions at your university, and how it can be overcome?

Probe questions used to clarify the views of people who will be interviewed for the purposes of a profound understanding of the different responses.

Questionnaires and Surveys

In concurrence with literature reviews and in-depth interviews the consultant built questionnaire to investigate perspectives of other social science university teachers, and educators from other educational organizations (such as the Ministry of Higher Education, the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Commission, the National Institute for Educational Training, the Commission for Developing the Teaching Profession. etc. A questionnaire was done consisting of (10) items and an open question, its validity was confirmed by being presented to a group of arbitrators of the guiding committee of the project, and members of teaching staff specialists in the Palestinian universities, many amendments to which they referred were adopted, Appendix (1). The main aim of the survey was to gain more knowledge about different standards and to guarantee the reliability and validity of the proposed standards by different educators. (100) questionnaires distributed at Palestinian universities. Descriptive analyses utilized for analyzing these questionnaires.

RESULTS

Results of Literature Review

The researcher reviewed some previous studies related to students' admission standards, some of registration departments' brochures at some local and regional universities, some Ministries of Education and Higher Education instructions regarding the admission of students in different disciplines, as well as the consultant accessed to some educational books and Websites related to this matter. Alrushdan (2002), Ammar (1996), Alfageeh (2008) and many universities' sites (Qatar University, Yemen Universities and Saudi Universities at Riyadh) asserted that Arab Universities, as a whole, based on the basis of one standard, which is the average of high school, only few universities deviate from the adoption of this standard and in rare specialties, such as medicine and law. This consultancy presents the admission standards implemented in some Arab Universities, such as Qatar University, Universities of Saudi Arabia in Riyadh, and Public Jordanian Universities, Yemeni Universities, and the College of Education at the University of Al Fateh / Libya, through their websites.

Arab Universities

Public Universities in Riyadh

These 4 universities choose students through the high school averages and through the result of admission exam, (60%) for the high school average, and (40%) for the admission exam.

Qatar University

Adopts a single standard, the high school average which should exceed 70%.

Al-Fateh University

Accepts the secondary school certificate average, in addition to a personal test to ensure the validity of the applicant to carry burdens of the teaching profession, and a medical exam proves the fitness to perform his educational duties.

Official Jordanian Universities

In accordance with decision of the Higher Education Council No. (141) dated 5/5/2011, the minimum admission rates at the Jordanian public Universities to humanities departments (65%), and the acceptance depends on the sequence of averages in the General Certificate of Secondary Education.

Yemeni universities

The acceptance of the new students depends on the average of high school marks, with the exception of some disciplines.

International Universities

The acceptance criteria in both British and American universities depend on additional criteria in addition to the high school average. Fatlawi (2008) stated that the admission of students in British universities, for example, depends on student's record and reports during high school, and observations and reports prepared by the schools, as well as the personality tests conducted by some universities to identify students' interests and preferences. The criteria for admission in American Universities vary depending on the university and specialization, and perhaps the most prominent of these criteria is high school records, and records of the student in high school, and the results of psychological tests in order to diagnose the student's mental ability and the degree of intelligence and readiness.

Palestinian Universities Finally the acceptance criteria in Palestinian Universities, and colleges of education, majoring social sciences specifically, through admission and registration brochures at these universities and through contacts with some Deans Admission and Registration and heads of departments, it was found that the standards of admission at Palestinian Universities and colleges of education, including the social sciences, is the average of the student in the general secondary exam, and competitiveness, according to the capacity of the department in the university, taking into account the fact that the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Palestinian identified the minimum average for admission to colleges Education, which is (65%). In the sense, each student has passed the general secondary exam with average of (65%) or higher is eligible to compete for admission to degree in social sciences in Palestinian Universities through this criterion only. It means that the Palestinian Universities, without exception, adopt a single standard for the admission of students majoring in social sciences, namely the average of student in high school (Tawjihi), provided that at least the level set by the Ministry of Education and Higher Education Palestinian, namely (65%). It seems that Arab universities, including the Palestinian, despite of many educational studies advocated the need to adopt other criteria for admission of students at the

university. Student high school average is statistically correlated with the cumulative GPA at the university, but it is not necessarily that the variation in the university achievement can be predicted by high school average. This claim was asserted by Rashdan (2002) who found that there is a correlation between cumulative averages in Jordanian Universities and averages in high school, but the ratio of prediction did not exceed (4.5%). Ibraheem and his colleagues (2011), Al-Mogbel (1426), Badri (2007, 1993), Faqih (2008), and the study Rashdan (2002) found that the admission policies and standards in Arab universities in general, and colleges of education in particular, suffers from a lack of linking between what these universities outputs and the needs of the labor market, as well as ignoring the desires and preference of students. These studies recommended that there is a need to reconsider the admission policies and standards, especially in the colleges of education in the Arab world. In 1987, the Jordanian Conference of Educational Development recommended that the average of high school way is not suitable enough to select students for university study, and set the specialization, because the general secondary exam is summative assessment and it is not a standardized test, and it is not designed to be valid for predicting success in colleges.

Analysis of the interview protocols

(15) Faculty members in the Palestinian universities were interviewed: Admission and registration managers, deans of colleges of education, and heads of departments in social sciences and methods of teaching SS departments. Due to the consistency of answers of respondents in each university, responses were categorized with reference to university at which the interviewees belong to.

The first question

How do you view students' turnout to study in social sciences programs at your university this year? In the past three years?
Hebron University, An-Najah National University, and the Al

Quds University

The turnout average of students was in a moderate level, in the sense that the university could accept more students in these programs, and so was the case during the last three years.

Bethlehem University

The turnout was high, and exceeds the capacity of the university in this program over the past years.

The second question

What are the reasons of turnout, or lack of it, in your view?

Hebron University, An-Najah National University, and University of Jerusalem:

The moderate level of turnout is due to several reasons, including: the huge numbers of unemployed graduates, limiting graduates jobs of these programs to teaching jobs mainly at schools, and social attitude of these specializations as lower levels than other specializations.

Bethlehem University

The turnout is high because of the number of students who are accepted each year in this program, which is (15) students only, and the reputation of the University of Bethlehem at the local level in the field of education and social sciences attracts students to these disciplines.

The third question

What is the academic level of the students admitted to these programs, compared to levels of students in other disciplines?

Hebron University, An-Najah National University, and Al-Quds University:

Levels of students in these disciplines are often lower than students in other disciplines, and a lot of students resort to these disciplines when other programs are closed in front of them.

Bethlehem University

The high averages of students, which are similar to the averages of students in other disciplines, and sometimes might be higher.

The fourth question

What criteria applied in your university in accepting students for this specialty?

Hebron University, An-Najah National University, and Al-Quds University:

The only criterion applied for admission of students is the rate of high school (Tawjihi), and if the number of applicants was high and more than the capacity of the university, students are competing for selected seats. After the admitted students complete the first year at the university, those who finish the major requirements with at least 70%, are accepted in the program. These major requirements are determined by the college and department, such as: Foundations of Education, Introduction to History, Introduction to Geography, and Introduction to Psychology.

Bethlehem University

Students are admitted in these disciplines by 2 indicators: the Tawjihi average of grades and the results of the entrance exam in the areas of Arabic, English and Mathematics, and students are competing for seats through the average of grades. Notice Appendix (3).

The Fifth question

What criterion that you recommend for the acceptance of students majoring in social sciences and methods of teaching social science in Palestinian universities?

All of the interviewed addressed the need to adopt other criteria, in addition to the Tawjihi average of grades, to accept students in these majors, and that is should not limited to the results of the General Certificate (Tawjihi) as the sole criterion for students admission, the proposed standards include:

Hebron University and University of Jerusalem:

- The need to adopt the averages school marks of students in secondary level.
- The adoption of social material marks particularly in the secondary.
- Interview of students
- There should be admission standards at the Ministry level (national standards) for universities.

An-Najah National University

- The need to adopt the interview, to identify student’s future eligibility for teaching profession.
- The availability of a certain level of general culture and personality traits.
- Adoption of social science marks at the secondary level.

The sixth question

Did the university/ section carry out any stimulus procedures to attract distinguished students of these majors? What are they?

Hebron University and Al-Quds University

Admission is open to all students according to GPA competitively, and acceptance is ruled by specific instructions without stimulus measures.

An-Najah National University

An-Najah National University offers 50% exemptions for students admitted with Tawjihi grades of 90% or higher, and this for all students, not special for students in the social science programs.

Bethlehem University

The university does not provide any incentives to attract distinguished students, the fact that the students of these disciplines are already outstanding and severe competition for these disciplines.

The seventh question

What incentives policies you recommend to attract distinguished students for these programs?

All interviewees from all universities suggested the following:

- Exemption of high-graders students from university fees.
- Recommendation for the Ministry of Education and Higher Education to offer high achievers graduates priority in employment.
- Assisting in the provision of scholarships for Master's and Doctoral for excellent graduates.
- Reviewed the academic plans for these programs at Palestinian universities, providing it with practical courses which attract students to enroll in these disciplines.
- Reconsider the General Secondary Examination, and include it analytical, practical and evaluative aspects and to release it from conservation and absorption.

Analysis of Questionnaire Results

(100) questionnaires were distributed to the study sample from the Palestinian universities, two weeks later (80) questionnaires were received and valid for the purposes of analysis, with a rate of (80%) of the distributed ones, all are

valid for the statistical analysis. Table number (1) shows answers of individuals of study samples in accordance with the degree of their response to and preparedness for each paragraph. Whereas table number (2) shows the percentage of these answers. Through answers of participants of teaching staff members on the questionnaire items and its open question on the development of admission criteria of students in the specialization of social sciences and its education methods, the following results can be noted:

Table 1. Number of individuals and their responses on the items and degree of the questionnaire

No.	Very high	High	Medium	low	Very low	Missed values
1	25	49	4	2	0	0
2	7	30	33	7	0	3
3	5	24	20	24	4	3
4	21	45	3	6	3	2
5	13	41	22	3	1	0
6	12	39	19	7	3	0
7	40	24	12	2	2	0
8	25	35	12	3	5	0
9	16	48	14	1	1	0
10	23	40	13	2	2	0

Table 2. Percentage of the numbers according to degree of their responding

No.	(%) of very high and high degree	(%) of medium degree	(%) of very low and low degree
1	92.5	5.0	2.5
2	48.1	42.9	9.0
3	37.7	26.0	36.3
4	84.6	3.9	11.5
5	67.5	27.5	5.0
6	63.4	23.8	12.5
7	80.0	15.0	5.0
8	75.0	15.0	10.0
9	67.5	17.5	2.5
10	78.8	16.2	5.0

First

There is a high rate, of those who answered on the questionnaire sections, sees that it is indispensable to develop the existing standards to accept students specializing in social sciences and its teaching methods in the Palestinian universities, since their answers on some parts of the questionnaire were with a (very high and high) degree as follows:

- (84.6%) pointed to the necessity of adopting other criteria (in addition to Tawjihi average), in order to accept students in the specialization of social sciences.
- (80.0%) indicated that student should pass a personal interview to make sure of his ability to do tasks of teaching profession in future.
- (75.0%) referred to the necessity that aptitude test should be taken into account within admission criteria.
- (67.5%) showed that measures of trends towards social sciences must be applied when accepting students.
- (67.5%) mentioned that it’s essential that marks of social subjects in Tawjihi be given more importance than marks of other subjects upon adopting the admission mark in the university.
- (63.4%) pointed that it is important that student's marks at the secondary stage be given a particular significance as an additional criteria for admission.

Second

Concerning the adaptation students numbers accepted in the social sciences specialization with the development plans in community, (92.5%) pointed that university should do that, with a very high and high degree.

Third

The appropriateness extent of academic levels of students accepted to this specialization and teaching profession:

(37.7%) of the participants answered that the academic levels of students who are admitted are suitable for teaching profession with a very high and high degree, while (36.3%) answered that levels of students are suitable with a very low and low degree, the remaining value related to medium degree.

Fourth

Participants opinions in making and introducing incentives by university to attract distinct students for this specialization: (78.9%) of them agreed with a very high and high degree.

Fifthly

The open question

Only (7) of the participants answered the open question on the subject of suggesting additional criteria as seen by them, their answers focused on: market needs, student's general culture and his ability to discuss general issues and real practical problems, student's willingness in specialization, university is to provide with applicable courses capable of attracting students, those of similar specializations (Arabic language methods, Social Sciences, Islamic Education and others) are to be merged in a preparatory year in university, then, students are to be sorted for the different specializations.

Summary of results

According to the results of the study, which came out through three tools, review of the existing admission criteria in the Palestinian universities and some Arab and foreign ones, interview and questionnaire, the following matters are shown:

- The Palestinian universities in their entirety adopt one criterion to accept students in the specialization of social sciences and its teaching methods, which is the average of student in the general secondary certificate, except to Bethlehem University.
- This standard is like of what the majority of Arab universities do in this connection.
- In addition to general secondary certificate marks, many American and British universities adopt other criteria to accept students.
- All of those interviewed of teaching staff members, directors of admission and registration and deans of colleges expressed their dissatisfaction with the limited admission of students to this criterion.
- They suggested a group of various criteria to accept students to specialize in social sciences in the Palestinian universities, such criteria respond to the enlarged numbers of students getting general secondary certificate, as well as to the significance of this specialization in building of the Palestinian student's personality.
- Thoughts that the researcher obtained through the interviews helped in making a list of criteria conjoined in

the questionnaire, which came to illustrate the relative importance of those criteria as seen by teaching staff members in the Palestinian universities.

- The study sample Individuals' answers on the items of the questionnaire could determine the relative significance for many criteria of students' admission in Social sciences specialization in the Palestinian universities, since it's shown that most of them do not support that the student's mark in Tawjihi is the only criterion to accept him, the interview criterion is considered the first degree in its relative worth, the results of aptitude test in the second, and the marks of social subjects in school and the measure of students' trends towards social sciences are the third. Finally the criterion of students' marks at the secondary stage.
- The majority of participants in the study of teaching staff members support that it is of the essence for university to adopt a specific policy to attract distinct students for this specialization in universities.

Suggestion and Recommendation

In the light of the findings of the study, through its three tools, so that its outcomes would be employed on the ground, as well as its desired objectives would be achieved, the study recommends the following:

- The Ministry of Education and Ministry High Education are to see that the topic of this study and its results are of a significance, deal with it as a national and international effort, educational purpose, that is not to be tolerated, and it should be amongst its educational strategic.
- In order to fulfill the wished aims of the outcomes of this project, efforts of Ministry of High education, Ministry of Education and the Palestinian universities are to be coordinately and integrative exerted.
- It is essential that the Palestinian universities give the specialization of social sciences and its teaching methods due importance that commensurate with the significance of such specialization in the Palestinian community development, and its necessity in building personality of the Palestinian, as it's related to the past and present of this human.
- It is imperative that the Palestinian universities be persuaded with reviewing the admission criteria that are being adopted to accept students in social sciences specialization and its teaching methods, since the existing and being adopted criteria are no longer acceptable at the Palestinian universities themselves.
- It is necessary that the Palestinian universities form specialized committees in evaluating admission criteria therein, as well as consider the proposed criteria in this study as the starting point to constitute a list of new ones. So that, on one hand, this list should respond to the wished goals of teaching the specialization of social sciences and its teaching methods, and on the other hand, it must rely on what the study has reached to as it is a specialized professional field study.
- It is crucial that the Palestinian universities adopt the criteria which got high relative weights in this study, because they express the points of views of specialists in the domain, and of those with related qualifications in the specialization of social sciences and its teaching methods.

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Appendix 1. Questionnaire

No	Paragraph	Degree				
		Very high	high	medium	low	Very low
1	It's necessary that the University harmonize a number of students admitted in specialization of Social Sciences with development plans in community.					
2	I think that the number of students joined in the specialization of Social Sciences in the university commensurate with its absorptive capacity.					
3	I see the level of students accepted in this specialization is compatible with teaching profession for which they are prepared.					
4	It's important that other criteria be adopted (in addition to Tawjih Average), in order to accept students in specialization of social sciences.					
5	It's essential that marks of social subjects in Tawjih be given more importance than marks of other subjects upon adopting the university admission mark in Social Sciences Specialization.					
6	The University must give a particular weightiness for student's marks at the secondary stage as additional criteria for admission.					
7	It's sine qua non that student pass a personal interview to make sure of his ability to do tasks of teaching profession in future.					
8	Aptitude test should be taken into account within admission criteria (ability to understand and analysis...).					
9	Measures of trends towards social sciences must be applied when accepting students.					
10	The university has to adopt encouraging incentives to attract distinct students to specialize in social science					
