# SELF-ASSESSMENT SKILLS AMONG ACADEMIC LEADERS A CASE STUDY: JERASH UNIVERSITY, JORDAN

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**Abstract:**

The study aims at identifying the level of self-assessment skills among the academic leaders at Jerash University – Jordan. In order to achieve the objective of the study, a questionnaire was handed out to 30 respondents (deans and departments heads) at Jerash University. Following the data collection and processing, findings revealed that the level of self-assessment skills among the sample population was intermediate in general while planning, implementation and evaluation skills ranked at a higher level. The study makes numerous recommendations, including running training workshops on the procedures of self-assessment studies.

**Keywords:** Skills, self-assessment, academic leaders, University

**Introduction:**

Jordan has undergone a quantitative progress in higher education as a result of the increasing social demand; nowadays, there are over 30 state-owned and private universities in the county. In light of this quantitative expansion, higher education had to undergo a qualitative review. As a result, agencies like the Independent Higher Education Accreditation Commission in Jordan (HAEC) was established and mandated with the task of monitoring and verifying that universities apply and honor general and special (at department level) accreditation requirements. These requirements are viewed to be the minimum standards universities should adhere to; license to commence classes is not granted save after fulfilling such requirements. As of the early 1990s, these standards were exclusively applied to private universities but not to their official or state-owned counterparts.

Recently, there have been calls to apply total quality measures to higher education institutions in Jordan. The Jordanian Accreditation Commission launched the quality

assurance certificate program – that requires the application of 12 standards covering the institution's vision, mission, objectives, planning, nature and effectiveness of academic programs, students services and performance, faculty members, scholarships innovation and research, library and information resources, governance and administration, financial and material resources, institutional integrity, interaction with the community, and quality assurance management. (HAEC, 2010). Each standard involves a group of indicators; the achievement of which should be duly documented. Given that the goal of applying these standards is to achieve the ongoing improvement, self-assessment studies had to be conducted across higher education institutions in Jordan. Such studies need specific skills that should be acquired by the senior or academic leadership at universities so that they can deliver on their tasks as should be.

Self-assessment of an educational facility can be defined as the number of procedural steps to be taken by the members of the community of practice so as to conduct an in-house assessment or evaluation. The process needs to take heed of the accreditation and quality criteria by collecting data about the current performance of the institution (Rowley, 2010). El-Haj, Majid and Jreisat (2009) defined it as the process through which the Performance of the subjects (be they individuals or institutions) undergoes a qualitative and quantitative judgment and appraisal – based on the concept the evaluator adopts in understanding or weighing performance and in light of the objectives at hand such as the use of certain benchmarks to understand the inter-relation among the various components of the assessment or evaluation process.

Institutions should conduct an internal institution-wide assessment by developing evaluation programs, preparation of tools and benchmarks and adoption of the specific terms and conditions. External assessment is to be conducted by independent highly qualified expertise who should be outsourced (Hamdatu, 2011). The self-assessment of the educational institution can be deemed as a leeway to improve performance campus-wide and develop well-wrought improvement plans; it is also one of the key components of the accreditation profile of the institution to be forwarded to the national accreditation agency (Yahya, 2011).

The self-assessment team should develop an action plan to conduct the process of assessment with a timeline embedded within; the participants should be identified, tasks and responsibilities assigned, and a follow up and monitoring system outlined. The team holds regular meetings to discuss with the participants their suggestions and perceptions so as to ensure that all stakeholders are engaged and achievement levels attained. The self-assessment study is then revealed to prepare the subjects as well the institution they work in – these are

considered to be instrumental to develop and explain the rationale behind the study as well as to motivate theses individuals to participate and render the exercise successful and deliver the objectives. The taskforces are then formed and trained on conducting the self-assessment exercise with tasks and functions assigned pursuant to the ends of the study or a specific quality assurance area in particular (Mohammed, 2011).

There are numerous areas to assessed as part of the academic institutions; these areas such program-based and institution-wide forms. They focus on addressing the weak points, enhancing the strengths and applying academic criteria flowing from the per-program or section task forces under the umbrella of the university's QA strategy. Such assessments also take stock ranking at program-level and preparation of these programs to obtain professional major-based accreditation as well as its institutional counterpart (Anninos, 2007).

Self assessment often aims at identifying the strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis the institutional objectives and community responsibility. It also encompasses the activation of such institutional objectives and processes for improved performance and enhanced quality fo the outputs; likewise, it seeks to develop a database on all institutional inputs and outputs, performance levels across the various departments and measurement of institutional activities to discern how successful resource management and assessment was across the university units.

Quality assurance at higher education institutions is ensured via ongoing assessment so as to monitor the group of concepts and procedures at work – for further comparison at the global level (Davis & Ringested, 2006).

Self-assessment is considered pivotal since it is deemed as an integral part of the overall framework for the development of the educational sector (including universities and faculties/ schools). Without this exercise, it would almost impossible to verify the progress toward achieving the objectives with regards to quality on institutional levels. There has always been keen interest in disseminating assessment outcomes in order to forge a more objective decision-making process at individual and institutional levels for enhanced competition (al-Juboori. 2005).

The numerous experiences in improving the quality of higher education across the globe outline the rigorous relationship between self-assessment, planning and quality assurance. Planning requires a clear diagnosis of the current status of the institution, program or unit; it also indicates the desired level via the appropriate strategies to accomplish the transition from one state to another. Institutional self-assessment can offer instrumental input in this regard such as analysis of the going concern, for capturing the institutional

performance at a certain point in time might reveal the key strengths as well as the areas that need to be further improved. The process will also help identify the external factors that impact the institutional operation in terms of the threats and opportunities that need to be factored in any future plans as well as the means to achieve consensus vis-à-vis the desired state of the institution. Another outcome would be the review of the various stages of strategic planning and survey of lessons learned (Lemaitre et al., 2007).

The list of key standards of self-assessment and continuous improvement includes the following items (Abdul-Rahim, 2010): (i) management commitment and engagement in the improvement of performance, (ii) ensuring the involvement of the directors, participants and employees in the improvement of performance, (iii) integration of the strategic objectives of the improvement activities at all levels, (iv) development of performance indicators and feedback systems and (v) keeping records and documentation of the entire TQM process.

The institutional self-assessment includes three phases (Lemaitre et al., 2007): first, the institutional self-assessment itself, second external assessment and third final decision-making in the form of a report. The first phase includes the preparation of the self-assessment report by surveying the inputs, outputs and operations involved while using quantitative and qualitative indicators; it aims at creating an opportunity for the institution to measure its own efficiency and effectiveness and identify the strengths and weaknesses to be either enhanced or developed. The second phase pertains to external assessment by the HAEC field teams following the appraisal of the internal assessment report. It includes a field visit and interviews with students, faculty and staff. The third phase uses the final report to outline the overall strengths and weaknesses as well as remedies if needed – to be followed by the recommendations.

Institutional self-assessment includes as well a number of criteria that are related to the institution's mission, objectives and aspirations in addition to those that pertain to organization, regulation, planning and academic management, including communication, institution-wide and major-based scope, research, community and professional services, resources, services, capacity, development and effective assessment tools (Lemaitre et al., 2007).

Characteristics of the effective self-assessment include the following areas (Vokurka, 2004): established connection between what is assessed and the institution's educational mission and objectives; strong presence of the assessment strategy that is channeled toward the improvement of student performance and capacity building of staff and faculty for effective majors and programs; ongoing assessment of education and feedback; designating

specific objectives for the assessment approach and performance indicators; availability of clear guidelines on the way to use the assessment findings; and ongoing assessment of the assessment regime itself for better correlation with reaching the student performance-based targets.

Those who conduct the self-assessment should have skills that could help them administer the process in the best manner possible; hence, this study is set to identify the level of self-assessment acquired by the academic leaderships at Jerash University.

**Methodology and Procedures:**

The study was applied to all deans and department heads at Jerash University-Jordan, 30 in total. In order to achieve the objective of the study, a questionnaire was used after counseling the literature and prior lore of studies that addressed the issue such as Abu Daqqa and Dajani (2011), self-assessment guides issued by HAEC, Union of Arab Universityes, and Al-Hussein Fund for Excellence. The questionnaire consisted of 41 items across three main areas as follows: planning (18 items), implementation/ execution (11 items) and assessment/ evaluation (12 items).

**Findings and discussion:**

**Findings and discussion of the key question and objective of the study:**

**What is the level of self-assessment skills acquired by the academic leaders at Jerash University-Jordan?**

In order to answer the question, the medians, means and standard deviations were identified vis-à-vis the level of self-assessment skills acquired by the academic leaders at Jerash University (JU). Table (1), below, lists the medians and standard deviations in descending order.

Table (1)

Self-assessment skills among academic leaders at JU by median

| No. | Area | Median | Standard deviation | Rank | Level of acquisition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 3 | Assessment | 3.69 | 0.70 | 1 | High |
| 1 | Planning | 3.65 | 0.81 | 3 | Medium |
| 2 | Implementation | 3.63 | 0.83 | 2 | Medium |
| | Overall self-assessment skills | 3.66 | 0.73 | | Medium |

The table shows that the medians of the sample population ranged between 3.63 and 3.69; assessment ranked first among the other three areas with a median of 3.69 and a high level of self-assessment skills. Planning ranked second (3.65) with a medium level of acquired self-assessment skills. Implementation/ execution ranked last among the three with a median of 3.63 and a medium level of acquired skills. Overall, the median of the tool stands at 3.66 –indicating a medium level of available self-assessment skills.

Such medium ranking of self-assessment skills among the JU academic leaders might be attributed to the tendency campus-wide to apply TQM criteria and the increasing trend at all universities to train their leaders on such skills. As a result, academic management developed an increasing interest in self-assessment skills. As for the assessment/ evaluation area of the questionnaire that ranked high, it is influenced by the use of indicators and documentation that are monitored and archived as proof for progress and ongoing development. They reflect the abilities an academic leader has by virtue of his/her expertise and position. Planning, however, ranked middle since its skills need a profound understanding of the self-assessment process; it also needs one to be acquainted with the data collection and information gathering techniques that are needs-based so as to develop a needs assessment plan. Implementation/ execution also ranked at medium levels since it faces difficulties of executing the study – such as leadership support, drafting the annual institutional performance report and documentation as well as review of data and plans. It also draws upon making use of research findings, feedback, IT applications, review of modus operandi procedures and provision of quality requirement.

In order to identify individual rankings of the subjects per each area, the medians and standard deviations were calculated as follows:

**Planning:**

Table (2) shows the medians and standard deviations of the planning items (of the questionnaire) ranked in descending order:

Table (2)

Planning medians ranked in descending order

| No. | Item (skill) | Median | Standard Deviation | Rank | Level of acquisition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 9 | Knowledge of university modus operandi | 3.83 | 1.08 | 1 | High |
| 3 | knowledge of the elements of the university's strategic plan | 3.81 | 0.83 | 2 | High |
| 6 | Knowledge of the Organigram | 3.81 | 0.95 | 2 | High |
| 13 | Time management skills | 3.79 | 0.96 | 4 | High |
| 11 | Developing a time table to deliver on administrative tasks | 3.77 | 1.01 | 5 | High |
| 1 | Selecting the appropriate means of data collection | 3.75 | 0.96 | 6 | High |
| 2 | Drafting the objectives of the plan | 3.74 | 0.97 | 7 | High |
| 14 | Knowledge of quality standards | 3.73 | 0.81 | 8 | High |
| 4 | Data collections skills | 3.72 | 0.98 | 9 | High |
| 7 | Being objective in data collection and information gathering | 3.72 | 0.92 | 9 | High |
| 5 | Ability to offer objective answers in self-assessment | 3.68 | 0.91 | 11 | Medium |
| 8 | Knowledge of interpreting statistical indicators | 3.66 | 0.99 | 12 | Medium |
| 15 | Ability to prepare technical administrative reports | 3.66 | 0.93 | 12 | Medium |
| 17 | Ability to explain data in light of the | 3.58 | 1.06 | 14 | Medium |

| | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | statistical outcomes | | | | |
| 18 | Ability to process data statistically | 3.54 | 1.00 | 15 | Medium |
| 10 | Use of observation in data collection | 3.53 | 0.90 | 16 | Medium |
| 16 | Electronic processing of data | 3.47 | 1.00 | 17 | Medium |
| 12 | Use of questionnaires in data collection | 3.31 | 0.93 | 18 | Medium |

Table 2 shows that the medians ranged between 3.31 and 3.83; item 9 on "knowledge about university modus operandi" ranked first with a median of 3.83 whereas as items 3 and 6 on "knowledge of the elements of the strategic plan" and "knowledge of the Organigram" ranked second with a median of 3.81 each. The three items fall within the category of high level of skills acquired. Item 12 on "use of questionnaire in data collection" ranked last with a median of 3.31; others like item 16 on "electronic processing of data" scored 3.47 and item 10 on "use of observation in data collection" with 3.53 – ranking among the medium levels as far as self-assessment skills are concerned.

The reason why item 1 ranked first with a median of 3.83 might be attributed to the fact that academic leaders already have expertise and hence do have knowledge of the modus operandi. Item 3 ranked second since some academic managements are mandated with developing the strategic plans for the various schools and departments campus-wide – a task that entails knowledge of the institution's strategic plans that are developed in a participatory approach.

Item 16, "ability to process data electronically", ranked medium with 3.47 as a result of the fact that very few academic leaders have such skills. The reason item 18 ranked very low (3.31) might be attributed to the fact that leaders often depend on observation and experience more than questionnaires that are often difficult to develop, disseminate and collect.

**Implementation/ Execution:**

Table (3) shows the medians and standard deviations for the area of implementation ranked in descending order:

Table (3)

Implementation Medians in descending order

| No. | Item/ Skill | Median | Standard Deviation | Rank | Level of acquisition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 22 | Observing majors when forming taskforces | 3.83 | 1.02 | 1 | High |
| 24 | Ability to take the appropriate decision based on assessment findings | 3.72 | 1.01 | 2 | High |
| 27 | Ability to right annual institutional performance reports | 3.67 | 0.99 | 3 | Medium |
| 19 | Ability to document university data | 3.66 | 0.94 | 4 | Medium |
| 23 | Ability to review data periodically | 3.64 | 0.77 | 5 | Medium |
| 25 | Ability to adapt plans as per available resources | 3.63 | 0.98 | 6 | Medium |
| 26 | Ability to make use of R&D findings | 3.63 | 1.01 | 6 | Medium |
| 29 | Ability to use feedback for improved performance | 3.63 | 0.97 | 6 | Medium |
| 28 | Ability to use IT in administrative procedures | 3.60 | 0.99 | 9 | Medium |
| 21 | Ability to review modus operandi periodically | 3.58 | 0.98 | 10 | Medium |
| 20 | Ability to provides TQ requirements | 3.37 | 0.91 | 11 | Medium |

Table 3 illustrates that the medians ranged between 3.37 and 3.83 while falling within the medium rank of assessment skills acquisition levels – save for items 22 on "factoring majors when forming taskforces" and 24 on "the ability to make the right decision" that ranked among the high skill levels with 3.83 and 3.72 respectively. Item 20 on "TQM requirements" ranked last with 3.37 and a medium level of skills acquired in this area.

The fact that the item on factoring majors in taskforce formation ranked highest with a median of 3.83 can be attributed to the practice leaderships already follow in this regard as they often consider majors in forming the committees and taskforces. They do so simply because it guarantees better performance. The item that ranked the lowest was the one on

"TQM requirements" with a medium level of skills; such a rank might attributed ot the fact that leaderships face difficulties in providing TQM requirements and resources – financial, physical, human or organizational/ regulatory as the universities often lack senior management support and clarity of performance indicators and standards.

**Implementation/ Execution:**

Table (4) shows the medians and standard deviations of the implementation in descending order:

Table (4)

Implementation medians ranked in descending order

| No. | Item/ Skill | Median | Standard deviation | Rank | Level of acquisition |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 36 | Use findings to improve performance/ work | 3.88 | 0.87 | 1 | High |
| 31 | Monitor evidence and proofs of self-assessment | 3.86 | 0.64 | 2 | High |
| 37 | Ability to deal with teams and taskforces | 3.79 | 0.93 | 3 | High |
| 39 | Ability to deal with emergencies | 3.78 | 0.86 | 4 | High |
| 40 | Objectivity in decision-making | 3.76 | 0.99 | 5 | High |
| 34 | Use of evidence to prove achievement | 3.73 | 0.74 | 6 | High |
| 41 | My assessment is bias-free | 3.68 | 1.00 | 7 | High |
| 38 | Compare performance with designated benchmarks | 3.62 | 0.90 | 8 | Medium |
| 32 | Periodic reviews of activity and achievements | 3.59 | 0.95 | 9 | Medium |
| 30 | Ability to assess institutional effectiveness | 3.55 | 0.93 | 10 | Medium |
| 33 | Possess self-assessment strategy | 3.54 | 0.69 | 11 | Medium |
| 35 | Review self-assessment items | 3.44 | 0.78 | 12 | Medium |

Table (4) shows that the medians ranged between 3.44 and 3.88; item 36 on "using findings to improve work" ranked first with 3.88, followed by item 31 on "using evidence in self assessment" with a median of 3.88 as well. Item 37 on "teamwork skills" came second with

3.79 but with a high level of self-assessment skills – unlike item 35 that came in with medium level of skills and a median of 3.44.

The high ranking of item 36 can be explained by the fact that leaderships are always keen on constant improvement to achieve the designated aspirations and execution of plans, conducting research and community service. The lower ranking of item 35 on "reviewing self-assessment items" might be attributed to the fact that leaderships might not be involved in developing such items at higher education institutions. It can also be attributed to the poor engagement in analyzing the internal and external environment, leading to lack of universality in planning the work of these institutions. This type of assessments should be prompted by the strategic objective of the institution under the supervision of the quality and accreditation unit at the institution. This can also be attributed to the lack of a ready-made and specific design of the self-assessment process.

**Recommendations:**

In light of these findings, the study makes the following recommendations:

- Hold training workshops on the procedures to execute/ implement self-assessment that focus on the practical aspects and development of quality-based performance criteria;
- Establish an R&D unit – under the quality management department – to be mandated with commissioning self-assessment studies and promotion of self-assessment culture campus-wide;
- Commission more studies on self-assessment at universities;

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