

Organizational excellence achievement in Jordanian universities: Academic leader perceptions



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Abstract This study sought to define organizational excellence in Jordanian universities from the perspective of academic leaders. The study sample consisted of (20) academic leaders selected purposefully from Yarmouk University, Jordanian University of Science and Technology, Jadara University, and Irbid National University. To achieve the study's objectives, the researcher used semistructured personal interviews. The results showed that academic leaders agreed that achieving excellence in universities is basically and firmly related to providing adequate and modern infrastructure, the ability to afford highly qualified training programs, and distance learning programs. The findings were followed by recommendations.

Keywords: organizational excellence, leaders, academic leaders, Jordanian universities, Jordan

1. Introduction

Excellence is one of the most critical strategic goals that institutions seek to achieve, especially in the service marketplace, where competitive advantage marks the success or failure of institutions. As higher education institutions represent the service sector since they provide academic services for students, excellence is a key to success for these institutions. Jordan is one of the leading Middle Eastern countries providing educational services, as there are twenty-eight public and private universities serving more than one million students, both Jordanians, Arabs, and international students. For these reasons, excellence may be the most critical factor in attracting an increasing number of students to these universities, increasing the value of organizational excellence.

Organizational excellence is one of the modern management concepts that has received significant attention from management scholars, as it has become a necessity for all countries around the world that seek to achieve excellence in their different institutions, especially the institutions of higher education, as they are responsible for providing the community with a qualified and trained workforce capable of advancing society (Abas, 2018). In this respect, Al Hila et al. (2017) noted that excellence has become the only performance level accepted in a world characterized by competitiveness, globalization, knowledge, and openness in an era where communications and information technology is considered the ruler.

Excellence is a comprehensive and integrated concept that reflects management's thought and development. It has been created to express the need for a comprehensive approach that combines the elements of building an institution to enhance its capabilities in facing changes and achieving consistency and complete coherence between its components (Jumaah, 2019). This concept is characterized by a set of characteristics, including a focus on cooperative action, training of university faculty on advanced skills, the ability to address challenges and manage crises, and eliminating problems with traditional administrative systems such as the low morale of faculty, poor investment in competencies, and human brain drain through adopting the creative abilities of faculty to achieve the goals of the university to which they belong (Al-Hmoud & Al-Ghoul, 2022).

Organizational excellence is a comprehensive method of work that balances stakeholders' interests and boosts their chances of achieving long-term success through outstanding processes, practices, and performance (Al-Azawy & Muhsen, 2017). Simply speaking, organizational excellence is to exceed the performance of the organization's expectations, whether from the organization itself or its competitors in the market, as well as the expectations of those the organization provides its products and services (Aljohani & Taibah, 2022). At the same time, Khudair and Almatwari (2022) define it as planned efforts to achieve an institution's goals, strategies, and operations by relying on innovative employees to reach a sustainable competitive advantage.

To do so, Alnwaigah (2014) pointed to the necessity of conveying the organization's vision to employees at the middle and executive management levels concerning the process of organizational excellence. Moreover, it is essential to empower



employees, link excellence to the institution's activities and operations, assess its potential, employ technology, and promote individual, group, and organizational learning and development.

According to Alzahrani (2020), there are three domains of organizational excellence. The first is structural, which reflects the need to adopt a flexible structure capable of modernization, investing opportunities, and quick decision-making. The second is strategic, as organizational excellence should mirror the future vision of the institution within the surrounding changes and develop the appropriate plans to achieve them and agreed upon by workers. The latter is related to leadership style, which involves a set of strategies, skills, and behaviors adopted by the leaders of the institution to achieve the targeted objectives efficiently and effectively and the ability to leverage organizational and developmental opportunities.

Currently, institutions seek to adopt an administrative thought to achieve excellence in response to a variety of motives that promote excellence and aspire to attain it; these motives, as Waswas and Jwaifell (2019) outlined the fact that the environment surrounding the institution is rapidly changing, which has an impact on its operations and decisions. The high level of this in light of economic globalization has led to the emergence of new competitors, institutions realizing their need to provide high-quality services in light of the growing quality concept, as quality has become an essential criterion for achieving organizational excellence—finally, the information technology revolution.

Furthermore, organizational excellence and performance are closely connected, as stated by Al-Dhaafri, Al-Swidi, and Al-Ansi (2016), in which enhancing performance enables institutions to achieve higher levels of excellence and receive excellence awards. As a practice and strategy, organizational excellence may assist institutions in developing their processes, achieving competitive advantages, and enhancing performance.

In higher education institutions, Albashiti (2021) indicated that several factors affect organizational excellence, including internal and external factors. The internal factors include personnel, material, intellectual, financial, and infrastructure resources. External factors include alterations in macro environmental factors; political factors, such as how government political decisions affect higher education institutions; and economic factors, such as how entrepreneurship is organized. It affects higher education institutions' growth; social factors such as cultural aspects, population, level of education, and attitude toward a career; and technological factors such as research and development, technological changes, and innovations.

As universities are adamant about pursuing excellence, there is a need to provide a supportive environment for university management and glean knowledge from the minds of faculty members by fostering a shared vision among them so that they contribute to creating the strategic changes needed for excellence (Naser & Al Shobaki, 2017).

Organizational excellence, as noted by Al-Towaijri (2020), enables a university to continuously improve its performance in the long term, achieve unprecedented results, outperform its competitors by utilizing a variety of strategies and models to increase its educational status, and reorganize its management and work policies and methods to achieve quality and excellence in educational and research services and programs in a way that enables the university to face challenges and ensures its continuity and competitive advantage.

Higher education institutions in Jordan gained international recognition, as evidenced by the nearly 28,000 international students of various nationalities who are now enrolled in Jordanian universities. Higher education institutions must pay attention to organizational excellence to ensure consistency in an era of competition, change, and knowledge explosion (Al Halaseh & Al-Rawadyeh, 2020). Additionally, as higher education is experiencing unprecedented challenges that require a response by providing better excellence in higher education practices, there is a need for continuous assessment of the level of performance of these institutions compared with the level of performance of the world's competitive educational institutions in terms of their outputs and flexible systems (Bashyouth, 2016). Thus, this study highlights the organizational excellence of higher education institutions to define the methods needed to improve them because these institutions significantly impact the process of preparing and rehabilitating human resources.

Several researchers have examined organizational excellence. For example, Kheng and Yean (2017) analyzed the effects of transformational leadership, entrepreneurial orientation, quality management practices, and effective entrepreneurial education on the organizational excellence of Malaysian public universities. The data were collected through a survey distributed to a sample of 255 academic leaders (deans, deputy deans, directors and heads of academic departments, program coordinators, and deputies). According to the multiple regression analysis, only transformational leadership, good management practices, and an entrepreneurial mindset have a substantial positive link with organizational excellence. In contrast, entrepreneurial orientation was not significantly related to organizational excellence.

Another study in Saudi Arabia, Daradkah (2017), sought to determine the relationship between administrative empowerment and organizational excellence at Taif University from the perspective of (331) faculty members. For data collection, the researcher developed a questionnaire consisting of 78 items. The study revealed that the levels of administrative empowerment and organizational excellence were moderate from faculty members' perspectives. Additionally, there was a statistically significant link between administrative empowerment and organizational success, showing that administrative empowerment may accurately predict organizational excellence (89.3%). In terms of organizational excellence, there were no statistically significant differences according to gender, faculty, academic rank, or

years of experience. In terms of administrative empowerment, a statistically significant difference in favor of men was also discovered. However, there were no variations in the faculty, academic level, or years of experience.

Using a sample of academic administrators ($n = 249$) working at Al-Hussein Bin Talal University in Jordan, Waswas and Jwaifell (2019) studied the electronic management implementation level and organizational excellence at the university. A descriptive design was employed by using a questionnaire. The analysis revealed that the level of EM applied at the university was moderate, and the level of organizational excellence was moderate. According to a linear regression analysis, Al-Hussein Bin Talal University's level of use of electronic management can be used to predict the degree of achievement of organizational excellence.

To address the impact of intellectual capital on achieving organizational excellence, Herzallah and LebDAH (2020) developed an instrument consisting of (109) items administered to a sample of (213) faculty members working at Al-Quds University in Palestine selected using stratified random sampling. The results revealed that intellectual capital and organizational excellence at Al-Quds University were moderate. The study revealed a significant impact of intellectual capital on organizational excellence at Al-Quds University.

In Egypt, Othman (2020) sought to determine proposed mechanisms to achieve organizational excellence in Egyptian public universities as an entry for activating organizational participation. A descriptive design was employed by taking expert opinions into account. The findings show that the most critical mechanisms proposed consist of two domains from the experts' perspective: leadership orientation, which consists of empowerment, e-management, strategic leadership, quality management, and restructuring, and leadership strategies, which consist of information sharing, administrative liaison, management consulting, management collaboration, and administrative empowerment.

To define the impact of creative thinking on achieving organizational excellence, Ali and Dawood (2021) collected data using a questionnaire distributed to a sample of Basra University employees (352) selected randomly. The analysis results confirmed that creative thinking positively affects the achievement of organizational excellence.

Al-Hroub (2021) followed the random analytical survey approach to address dynamic capabilities and their relationship to organizational excellence in private universities. The study sample consisted of (317) faculty members working at private universities in Jordan. In terms of gender, academic rank, and academic path, the results demonstrated no statistically significant variations in the sample responses to the level of dynamic capabilities and organizational excellence. Additionally, it revealed a statistically significant positive association between outstanding organizational performance and dynamic skills in Jordan's private universities.

It can be noted that there is much attention given to organizational excellence in universities in the Arab world, indicating its great importance in light of the changes occurring in the world and the need for educational institutions to keep pace. Thus, the current study sought to employ interviews to collect data to provide a better understanding of the extent to which university excellence has been achieved in public universities in Jordan by taking the opinions of a group of academic leaders.

2. Problem of the Study

Organizational excellence is a significant and vital indicator of the quality of products and services organizations provide for their targeted customers and clients. In a competitive marketplace, organizational excellence is a competitive advantage, especially for organizations operating in the service sector, including higher education institutions. Studies such as Al-Hroub (2021) and Waswas and Jwaifell (2019) emphasized the importance of organizational excellence as the key to success in attracting highly qualified students, which reflects the organization's vision aiming to graduate students able to penetrate the future labor market.

Reviewing previous studies, the status of organizational excellence, despite its significance, has yet to be fully addressed in the educational administration literature, and this dictates the need for more examination of the status quo of organizational excellence in Jordanian public and private universities. Therefore, the problem of this study is summarized in the following question:

- What are academic leaders' perceptions of organizational excellence achievement in Jordanian universities?

3. Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is that it is robust. First, this study sheds light on one of the essential topics in the educational administration field of study, organizational excellence, which has become one of the main objectives that higher education institutions seek to achieve to maintain an excellent position in the educational market characterized by high competitiveness between academic institutions. Second, this study may provide academic leaders with invaluable suggestions and recommendations to increase the quality of educational services provided to students.

4. Operational Definitions

Organizational excellence: Is to exceed the performance of the organization's expectations, whether from the organization itself or its competitors in the market, as well as the expectations of its clients (Aljohani & Taibah, 2022). It is defined in this study as providing high-quality educational services for targeted students enrolled in university.

Academic Leaders: Individuals who are entrusted with the university's administrative work, including the university chancellor, his deputy, deans of colleges, their deputies, and heads of departments in colleges (Muqibel, 2021). These individuals are responsible for making academic decisions at higher education institutions.

5. Limitations of the Study

The current study is limited to a sample of Jordanian universities in northern Jordan during the summer semester of the 2021/2022 academic year: Yarmouk University, Jordanian University of Science and Technology, Jadara University, and Irbid National University. This implies that the results obtained in the context of this study cannot be generalized to other populations or other universities in Jordan located in other geographical regions.

6. Methods and Procedures

6.1. Methodology

The study employed a qualitative design to achieve the study objective since the researcher developed an open-ended personal interview based on a thorough review of related literature and previous studies.

6.2. Settings

The study was conducted at (4) public and private Jordanian universities in the northern region. These include:

- Yarmouk University: A public university founded in 1976 in the Irbid Governorate, which includes (1071) faculty members and (35008) students distributed among (15) faculties.
- Jordanian University of Science and Technology: A public university founded in 1986 in Irbid Governorate, which includes 962 faculty members and 28091 students distributed in 12 faculties.
- Jadara University: A private university founded in 2005 in the Irbid Governorate, which includes 150 faculty members and 5200 students distributed among 8 faculties.
- Irbid National University: A private university founded in 1994 in the Irbid Governorate, which includes (76) faculty members and (2500) students distributed on (6) faculties.

6.3. Study Participants

The researcher selected (5) academic leaders purposefully from each of the following universities: Yarmouk University, Jordanian University of Science and Technology, Jadara University, and Irbid National University, totaling (20) academic leaders. The selection process was carefully designed so that the researcher could choose those academic leaders who will be informed about the efforts being made by the university to enhance the quality of the academic services provided in its attempt to attract as many students (undergraduates, graduates) as possible.

6.3.1. Instrument of the Study

The researcher used semi structured personal interviews to determine academic leaders' perceptions of the achievement of organizational excellence at Jordanian universities.

6.3.2. Content validity

In the current study, face validity was obtained via a jury of (5) specialized faculty members in educational administration, as they were asked to provide their remarks related to the instrument questions and their appropriateness to the study objectives and if there was a need to add any other questions.

6.3.3. Reliability

The researcher administered the interview twice on a pilot sample of (3) academic leaders to ensure that the questions were clear and appropriate for the study. Then, the researcher analyzed the answers obtained to define the differences between the answers in the first and second interviews. The results showed slight differences and a high correspondence rate at both time points, indicating the appropriateness of the interviews.

6.4. Data collection

Audiotape was the main method used to collect data to ensure that none of the informants' information was taken into consideration. On average, each of the individual interviews lasted.

The interviews lasted an average of 32 minutes (20-41 minutes). The interviews were transcribed fully, checked for accuracy, and subsequently pseudonymized. After 17 interviews, a question about data saturation arose, and it was concluded that saturation was reached in the content and attitudes expressed by the participants. The transcripts of the interviews were returned to all participants with an invitation to review the transcription and send any corrections or clarifications; a total of 6 responses were received with minor corrections to language, and the interviews genuinely mirrored the intended responses.

7. Results and Discussion

What are academic leaders' perceptions of organizational excellence achievement in Jordanian universities?

A grounded theory perspective was employed for the data analysis. Since this study employed a qualitative design, as the responses of the academic leaders were gathered face to face, it was satisfactory to employ triangulation for the responses to categorize the most common themes among the participants according to their significance as reported by the academic leaders.

Theme 1: The importance of infrastructure in Jordanian universities (public, private)

The participants agreed that achieving excellence in the universities is basically and firmly related to providing adequate and modern infrastructure. For example, since universities are academic institutions, modern equipment and access to various databases are necessary if these universities seek to achieve excellence. For example, one of the academic leaders stated:

"Universities in Jordan do not adequately realize the importance of infrastructure as a major means for achieving excellence. Although the benefits of infrastructure as one of the most effective strategies for raising the quality of education at higher education institutions have been well demonstrated in the literature on educational administration, Jordanian universities are still unaware of this important organizational variable".

The words of this participant, who is a distinguished faculty member, reflect the status quo of Jordanian public and private universities. Adequate infrastructure is the key to achieving excellence. For example, Aithal and Aithal (2019) stressed the importance of infrastructure as one of the key pillars for modern universities if they want to improve the quality of their educational services provided to students. The authors also noted that with the increasing numbers of private universities worldwide, public universities should work on providing the necessary infrastructure to help them achieve organizational excellence as one means of attracting more students.

In this respect, the author believes that higher education institutions are no longer just organizations providing academic services for different stockholders. However, they became institutions working to obtain profits to maintain academic services for students. Emphasizing this fact, one of the academic leaders said:

"Jordanian universities should acknowledge that they must direct their processes toward making a profit, as the state is no longer responsible for funding their organizational operations. This dictates the need to ensure adequate infrastructure so they can maintain affording to provide students with high-quality academic services".

This quote mirrors the importance of infrastructure for universities, as it is the heart and soul of academic institutions, enabling them to give students excellent opportunities to attain the best education possible. This means that infrastructure is the basis of all academic services universities deliver to students since this means that they are more than successful in fulfilling their responsibilities toward students, which implies that they can achieve excellence. This task will only be completed if Jordanian public and private universities try to create universities that meet students' and academic staff's hopes and inspirations since the former look forward to receiving rich learning experiences. Moreover, the latter always seek to provide their students with the best learning experiences.

Theme 2: Training programs as part of human resource development

Participants indicated that one of the most critical themes to achieve organizational excellence in Jordanian public and private universities is the ability to afford highly qualified training programs that can equip teaching staff to keep abreast of modern teaching methods and strategies while maintaining that they are well informed about the advances and progress in the different scientific fields of study. For example, one of the public faculty members indicated:

"Training programs are a key part of professional development tools that can provide teaching staff in the various faculties with the opportunity to develop their teaching competencies and research skills. These are an integral part of the professional development process, and universities should work on providing the chance for teaching members to be well prepared in facing the changes happening in the higher education realm."

Training and development programs have many benefits. They support business culture, boost output, reduce attrition, and boost worker performance. You can learn more about the value of training and development programs for both people and organizations by pursuing a career in human resources.

Emphasizing the importance of training programs for successful institutions wishing to achieve competitive advantages, Rodriguez and Walters (2017) indicated that successful institutions realize the importance of training for employees working in different departments since these sharpen their skills and help them acquire new information about how operations can be completed with high quality. Furthermore, training programs renew the background knowledge

acquired in the past by employees and may provide them with the needed competencies, enabling them to excel in their work. This implies that training should target teaching staff, academic leaders, and administrators in various departments.

Additionally, one of the faculty members indicated that training programs should be an ongoing process in which public and private universities should provide their workers on a periodical basis. This means that training programs must not be a situational response to a specific urgent event but should be considered an integral part of seeking excellence. For example, this faculty member quotes:

"Public and private universities in Jordan should acknowledge an important fact that modern institutions always seek to develop their staff's skills by engaging them in training targeting keeping them informed about the changes worldwide and the advances that are achieved in a certain field of study."

This quote mirrors the reality of public and private universities in Jordan, which is related to the significance of training programs as effective tools for achieving excellence. These universities know that training programs can prepare faculty members and employees with different forms of advanced knowledge and skills. This is seen as having positive effects on the university's academic rank compared to other universities and on the quality of the learning experiences given to students. Therefore, it can be argued that training programs are effective tools for achieving organizational excellence.

Theme 3: Distance learning programs

With the emergence of modern information and communication technologies, there has been a trend in higher education institutions to widen the scope of their academic services to reach more students unable to be physically present in the compose by enabling them to enroll in the university via distance learning programs for various degrees. Although some academic faculty members still need to be more confident about the role of distance learning programs in achieving excellence, several studies have shown that distance learning programs are the future of higher education.

For example, Roy and Al-Absy (2022) stressed the significance of distance learning and the need for public and private universities worldwide to capitalize on the invaluable opportunities provided by such learning experiences since distance learning can attract as many students as possible by giving them a chance to enroll in the university without the need to be at the campus. This enables students to miss their chance of attaining a degree to enroll in the university when acknowledging that many students currently work during their university studies and cannot attend traditional courses because of their work hours. Furthermore, distance learning may pave the way for reducing the operational costs that burden universities, increasing their returns.

Building on this, one of the faculty members working in a humanitarian department said that distance learning could be the window for many students to study specializations based on theoretical knowledge only and does not need the students to be present at the campus to apply what he/she learned. Quoting this faculty member:

"Students in humanitarian faculties no longer need to be present at the campus since different learning platforms have been developed in the last few years, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic imposing a total lockdown. Despite the crisis caused by this pandemic, there were advantages of this crisis, such as opening the eyes of university administrations to realize the importance of distance learning as one means for providing learning experiences to students."

This quote may reflect a critical reality around the nature of distance learning. Access to the internet has increased drastically in the last few years. Students can now obtain their learning courses without needing to go to campus since the university administration has worked on scheduling the academic timetable at specific times and even in the evening, so students working during day hours can receive their course learning material.

8. Recommendations

The study recommends the following:

- Jordanian public and private universities should work on providing adequate infrastructure since faculty members have agreed that this is the first step toward achieving organizational excellence.
- With the importance of training programs, the Jordanian public and private universities should develop training programs of the highest quality to help faculty members and administrators acquire the most advanced knowledge and skills in different fields of study.

Jordanian public and private universities are providing students with the opportunity to complete time distance learning programs to meet the needs of more students.

Ethical considerations

To ensure ethical considerations related to the qualitative research protocols, all participants provided written informed consent after formal approval was obtained from the participating universities.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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