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Research Article

Inhibitors of Academic Progress in Arab Universities

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Abstract

Backgrounds: The purpose of this review is to create awareness among educational policymakers that poor global ranking of our higher education institutions necessitates an in-depth search for the possible constraints that hinder their academic progress. The author focused on certain inhibitors formulated in a questionnaire, format to be filled by participants.

Methods: The author in this review highlighted the possible inhibitors to the academic process and potential amendments; a brief one-page questionnaire has been distributed to attendees asking them to fill it on-site.

Results: 100.0% of the participants need to improve physical and financial resources and 72.5% have to develop their human resources. 62.9% need to recover the setting of their educational standards. 62.7% agree about the need to eradicate favoritism from their educational level 60.8% have to develop their citations per published paper. 52.9% have to improve the ratio of full-time faculty/ number of student enrolled 51.0% suffers from inequalities in access to higher education. 49.0% agree about the need to improve their attitude towards internationalization. 37.25% need to reform clear policy and guidelines for their faculty and are not satisfied with the non-alignment between information, technology, and higher education institutions.

Conclusions: Research analysis and objective judgment of the outcome were hereby presented. The governmental and institutional decision-makers will be informed about the possible inhibitors of our academic progress as perceived by educational experts and how could we all participate in minimizing their consequences.

Keywords

Arab Universities; Educational; Ranking; Inhibitors; Academic.

Declaration of Conflicting Interest

The author declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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Introduction

Attempts to introduce educational changes into our curricula, year after year, resulted in a minimal effect that kept our institutions behind the international standards. A brief review of the 2018-2019 global ranking of our universities, as compared to international universities, revealed a decline rather than progress which may be due to certain inhibitors or constraints.

Good standing higher educational institutions, worldwide, are reconsidering their educational

strategic planning to achieve equity and fairness among students and marginalized regions (Reif, 2008: Safina, 2015) and developing new policies and guidelines for faculty appointment, promotion and tenure. (B u c h a n a n, 2 0 0 9 : Moher et al. 2018)

Despite the sharp increase in the number of private institutions in the region and Lebanon in particular, the question to be raised is whether the decision-makers in these institutions have assured the availability of adequate human and physical resources before authorizations; in addition, have they realized that the fulfillment of the institution educational mission depends on the quality and commitment of their faculty? The following review of the Arabic Universities status on the ranking scale urges us to assess the possible inhibitors to progress in order to inform decision-makers and administrators to the actual educational standards of our institutions.

According to the US News & World Report/ Education- Global University Ranking 2019, the Arab Universities ranked poorly in a similar manner to 2018 with a total of 30/1250 (table1). Four Saudi Universities maintained their top rankings, the majority of the Arab Universities were Egyptian (11/30); another six universities from the Arabian Gulf, in addition to the other four Saudi, were ranked reasonably. Only 5 universities ranked above 500, while 25 were below 500. Total per country (Egypt- 11; Saudi Arabia- 4; Tunis- 4; Qatar- 2; Morocco- 2; UAE- 2; Jordan- 2; while Lebanon, Oman, Kuwait each 1) = 30.

Table 1. The US News & World Report/ Education- Global University Ranking 2019		Ranking / 1250	
Arab Universities	Country	Arabic Rank	International Rank
University	Country	Arabic Rank	International Rank
King Abdul-Aziz University	(Saudi Arabia)- Jeddah -1	1	76
King Abdullah University of Science & Technology	(Saudi Arabia)- Thuai -2	2	168
King Saud University	(Saudi Arabia)-Riyadh -3	3	356
Cairo University	(Egypt)- Cairo (1)	4	448
Texas A&M University at Qatar	(Qatar) - a	5	526
King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals	(Saudi Arabia) – Dhahran -4	6	597
American University of Beirut (AUB)	(Lebanon)- Beirut	7	601
Khalifa University of Science & Technology	United Arab Emirates- Abu Dhabi -1	8	627
University of Qatar	Qatar – b	9	656
Mansoura University	Egypt- Mansoura (2)	10	698
Suez Canal University	Egypt- Ismailia (3)	11	717
Ain Shams University	Egypt- Cairo (4)	12	729
Alexandria University	Egypt – Alexandria (5)	13	745
Univ. of Marrakech, Cadi Ayyad	Morocco –i	14	753
Mohammed V University	Morocco –ii	15	759
Jordan University of Science & Technology	Jordan – Irbid (i)	16	799
United Arab Emirates University	United Arab Emirates- Al Ain -2	17	845
Assiut University	Egypt- Assiut (6)	18	853
Universite de Tunis El- Manar	Tunis- El Manar -a	19	872
Universite de Sfax	Tunis- Sfax -b	20	927
Sultan Qaboos University	Oman – Muscat	21	934
Al Azhar University	Egypt – Cairo (7)	22	985
Zagazig University	Egypt- Zagazig (8)	23	989
Kuwait University	Kuwait	24	992
University of Jordan	Jordan- Amman(ii)	25	1028
Tanta University	Egypt – Tanta (9)	26	1060
Helwan University	Egypt- Helwan (10)	27	1077
Universite de Monstir	Tunis- Monstir -c	28	1080
Universite de Carthage	Tunis- Carthage -d	29	1146
Menofia University	Egypt- Menofia (11)	30	1164

Table 1 The US News & World Report/ Education- Global University Ranking 2019

Another analysis conducted by QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) on World Top 1000 University Rankings 2019. Among the top 1000 Universities, only one Arabic University ranked above 200 (189), eleven schools ranked between 200 and 500, and the majority (25 out of 37) ranked below 500 as shown in the table. This poor ranking together with other similar global ranking urged us to search for possible inhibitors to the progress of our academic institutions.

The Times Higher Education World University Rankings 2019 included more than 1250 universities. They used 13 carefully calibrated performance indicators to provide the most comprehensive and balanced comparisons, trusted by academics, university leaders and governments. The Arab region universities ranked poorly this year; although some newcomer universities were represented. Among the 50 universities represented, the majority came from Egypt 19 universities, followed by Saudi Arabia 6 (2 were on the top), Algeria 6, United Arab Emirates 4, Morocco 4, Jordan 3, Tunis 3, Lebanon 2, Qatar 1, Iraq 1, and Oman 1. As for Lebanon, two universities ranked 6 (AUB) and 15 (LAU) both are supported by the U.S.A. government.

Table 2. QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World Top 1000 University Rankings 2019		Ranking/ 1000	
List of Top Arab Universities		Country	International Arabic
King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals Saudi Arabia	Saudi Arabia	189	1
King Abdul-Aziz University (KAU)	Saudi Arabia	=231	2
American University of Beirut (AUB)	Lebanon	=237	3
King Saud University	Saudi Arabia	256	4
Khalifa University	United Arab Emirates	=315	5
Qatar University	Qatar	=332	6
United Arab Emirates University	United Arab Emirates	350	7
American University of Sharjah	United Arab Emirates	=376	8
The American University in Cairo	Egypt - Cairo	=420	9
King Khalid University	Saudi Arabia	=448	10
Sultan Qaboos University	Oman	=450	11
Saint Joseph University of Beirut (USJ)	Lebanon	=500	12
Cairo University	Egypt	521-530	13
Umm Al-Qura University	Saudi Arabia	541-550	14
American University in Dubai	United Arab Emirates	561-570	15
Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University "ex-University of Dammam"	Saudi Arabia	581-590	16
University of Balamand	Lebanon	591-600	17
Lebanese American University	Lebanon	601-650	18
University of Jordan	Jordan	601-650	19
Holy Spirit University of Kaslik	Lebanon	651-700	20
Jordan University of Science & Technology	Jordan	651-700	21
University of Baghdad	Iraq	651-700	22
University of Sharjah	United Arab Emirates	651-700	23
Abu Dhabi University	United Arab Emirates	701-750	24
Ain Shams University	Egypt	701-750	25
University of Kufa	Iraq	701-750	26
Zayed University	United Arab Emirates	701-750	27
German Jordanian University	Jordan	751-800	28
AGH University of Science & Technology	United Arab Emirates	801-1000	29
Al Akhawayn University Ifrane	Morocco	801-1000	30
Al Azhar University	Egypt	801-1000	31
Alexandria University	Egypt	801-1000	32
Al-Imam Mohammad Ibn Saud Islamic University	Saudi Arabia	801-1000	33
Assiut University	Egypt	801-1000	34
Birzeit University Palestinian Territory, Occupied Palestine	Palestine	801-1000	35
University of Babylon	Iraq	801-1000	36
University of Bahrain	Bahrain	801-1000	37

Table 2 QS (Quacquarelli Symonds) World Top 1000 University Rankings 2019

Table 3. World University Rankings 2019 the Times Higher Education		Rank/ 1250	
University	Country	Arabic	International
King Abdul-Aziz University	Saudi Arabia	1	201-250
Alfaisal University	Saudi Arabia	2	301-350
Khalifa University	United Arab Emirates	3	301-350
Jordan University of Science and Technology	Jordan	4	351-400
United Arab Emirates University	United Arab Emirates	5	351-400
American University of Beirut	Lebanon	6	401-500
Qatar University	Qatar	7	401-500
King Saudi University	Saudi Arabia	8	501-600
King Saud bin Abdul-Aziz University for Health Sciences	Saudi Arabia	9	501-600
American University in Cairo	Egypt	10	601-800
Benha University	Egypt	11	601-800
Beni Suef University	Egypt	12	601-800
Kafreishikh University	Egypt	13	601-800
King Fahd University of Petroleum and Minerals	Saudi Arabia	14	601-800
Lebanese American University	Lebanon	15	601-800
Mansoura University	Egypt	16	601-800
Suez Canal University	Egypt	17	601-800
Alexandria University	Egypt	18	801-1000
American University of Sharjah	United Arab Emirates	19	801-1000
University of Baghdad	Iraq	20	801-1000
University of Bijaia	Algeria	21	801-1000
Cairo University	Egypt	22	801-1000
Fayoum University	Egypt	23	801-1000
Farhat Abbas University 1	Algeria	24	801-1000
University of Jordan	Jordan	25	801-1000

University of Marrakech, Cadi Ayyad	Morocco	26	801-1000
Mohammed V University of Rabat	Morocco	27	801-1000
University of Sfax	Tunis	28	801-1000
University of Sharjah	United Arab Emirates	29	801-1000
Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdallah University	Morocco	30	801-1000
Sohag University	Egypt	31	801-1000
Sultan Qaboos University	Oman	32	801-1000
Tanta University	Egypt	33	801-1000
Ain Shams University	Egypt	34	1001+
Al Azhar University	Egypt	35	1001+
Assiut University	Egypt	36	1001+
Bahdji Mokhtar University- Annaba	Algeria	37	1001+
University of Constantine 1	Algeria	38	1001+
Helwan University Egypt	Egypt	39	1001+
Imam Abdulrahman Bin Faisal University	Saudi Arabia	40	1001+
Menoufia University	Egypt	41	1001+
Minia University	Egypt	42	1001+
University of Monastir	Tunis	43	1001+
University of Science & Technology, Houari Boumadian	Algeria	44	1001+
South Valley University	Egypt	45	1001+
University of Tiemecen	Algeria	46	1001+
University of Tunis El Manar	Tunis	47	1001+
University Hassan II de Casablanca	Morocco	48	1001+
Yarmouk University	Jordan	49	1001+
Zagazig University	Egypt	50	1001+

Table 3 World University Rankings 2019 the Times Higher Education

A modified version of the comparison between 2018 and 2019 US News & World Ranking top 30 Arab Region Universities out of the top 1250 global universities (Table 4). Low performance of the majority of Arab universities is still prevailing and decision-makers must be aware of the conflict between intended educational objectives and the existing curricula in terms of proper utilization of human and financial resources.

Arab Universities	2018		2019	
	Arabic Rank	International Rank	Arabic Rank	International Rank
King Abdul-Aziz University (S.A)	1	110	1	76
King Abdullah University (S.A)	2	183	2	168
King Saud University (S.A.)	3	377	3	356
Cairo University (Egypt)	4	450	4	448
King Fahd University of Petroleum & Minerals (S.A.)	5	623	6	597
Helwan University (Egypt)	6	634	27	1077
American University of Beirut (AUB) (Lebanon)	7	680	7	601
Suez Canal University Egypt)	8	686	11	717
Univ. of Marrakech(Morocco)	9	686	14	753
Ain Shams University (Egypt)	10	714	12	729
Alexandria University (Egypt)	11	742	13	745
Mohammed V University (Morocco)	12	800	15	759
University of Qatar (Qatar)	13	800	9	656
Assiut University (Egypt)	14	835	18	853
United Arab Emirates University (UAE)	15	868	17	845
Sultan Qaboos University (Oman)	16	912	21	934
Universite de Tunis El Manar(Tunis)	17	919	19	872
Universite de Sfax (Tunis)	18	929	20	927
Jordan University of Science & Technology (Jordan)	19	943	16	799
Kuwait University (Kuwait)	20	966	24	992
Al Azhar University (Egypt)	21	977	22	985
Zagazig University (Egypt)	22	985	23	989
University of Jordan (Jordan)	23	1037	25	1028
Tanta University (Egypt)	24	1070	26	1060
Universite de Monstir (Tunis)	25	1090	28	1080
Menofia University (Egypt)	26	1154	30	1164
Universite de Carthage (Tunis)	27	1158	29	1146
Texas A&M University at Qatar (Qatar)	28	-	5	526
Khalifa University of Science & Technology (UAE)	29	-	8	627
Mansoura University(Egypt)	30	-	10	698

Table 4 US NEWS & World Report/ Ranking/ World's top 1250 Universities

Aim of the Study

The purpose of this review is to create awareness among educational policymakers that poor global ranking of our higher education institutions necessitates an in-depth search for the possible constraints that hinder their academic progress. The author focused on certain inhibitors formulated in a questionnaire, format to be filled by participants. They will be kindly asked to rate their institutions according to their perception relevant to the fairness and equity in faculty recruitment, promotion, and tenure.

Methods

The author in this review highlighted the possible inhibitors to the academic process and potential amendments, a brief one-page questionnaire has been distributed to attendees asking them to fill it on-site, table 5.

Possible inhibitors to be discussed:

Nepotism (Favoritism) – Faculty recruitment, promotion, and tenure-transparency Vs. opacity.

Lack of human, physical, and financial resources.

Lack of clear Faculty development scheme, quality & commitment.

Name (Optional):		Title:.....		University/ School:.....		Years of Experience:		
Possible Inhibitors of Academic Progress in our Institutions (Poor Global Ranking)	Your Objective Judgement Helps in Developing & Enhancing our Regional Educational Standards			Please Rate Your Institution by Encircling one of the following 1-5:				
				Agree (Satisfied)		Disagree		
				1	2	3	4	5
Nepotism (Favoritism): Lack of Transparency or Impartiality, Potential Conflicts of Interest	Faculty Recruitment (Hiring), Promotion, and Awarding Contracts for favored Groups.	Preferring or Supporting Relatives. Political, Religious Influence						
No Clear Policy or Guidelines for Faculty Appointment, Retention & Promotion	Subjective Evaluation (Selection) Committee, Lack of Agreed Upon Evaluation Standards	Contribution to Curriculum Development, Innovation in Pedagogy & Research Activity						
Ratio of Full-time Faculty/ # of Students Enrolled (Faculty with a PhD Degree)	Quality of Teaching (Mentor as Facilitator/ Counselor),	Innovative Curricula- Constructive Faculty/ Student Contact						
Web Impact	Institution On-line Presence (Explicit Standards)	Indication of International Engagement & Communication (Transparency)						
Non-alignment Between Information Technology & Higher Education Institutions	Trivial Investment & Minimal Application of IT in University Higher Education Processes	Barriers to Application of IT in Teaching, Learning & Research Processes						
Citations Per Published Paper Papers Per Faculty	Research & Academic Environment Reputation Data from Scopus # of Articles/ Recent Years	Impact of Institution's Research # of Papers Published / Faculty- Research Productivity Rate						
Inequalities in Access to Higher Education) Equity & Fairness Policy (Equal Opportunities for Students' Access in Higher Education)	Equal Access to Minorities, Disabled Students, Assuring Scholarships/ Financial Aid (Low Income Groups)	Lack of Commitment to Make Higher Education Equitable - Human Rights-						
Negative Attitude Towards Internationalization by Our Higher Education Institutions	Institution's Ability to Attract International Academics Students' Mobility	International Diversity/ Collaboration of Institution's Educational Environment						
Setting the Educational Standards (Watching Rather Than Participating)	Risk of Copying Rather Than Developing Our Relevant Educational Standards & Curricula.	Negligible Overall Academic Activities (Department & Institutional Level)						
Lack of Human Resources (Faculty/ Student Ratio, Appropriate Administrative and Technical Assistants)	Absence or Unclear Faculty Development Scheme No Adequate Training in Pedagogy (Andragogy) Funding Invited Speakers (National & International)	Shortage of Qualified Faculty Compromises the Quality of Education & Service Competency, Values & Educational Skills						
Lack of Physical & Financial Resources (Limited Funding Availability) Relying Heavily on Tuition Fees	Academic Infrastructure (Lack of Adequate Educational Classrooms, Laboratories & Equipment), Lack of Recreation Centers, etc.,	Inadequate Infrastructure (Poor Learning Environment), Negatively Affects Processes.						
				Total				
Additional comments:								

Table 5 Filled questionnaire by participants.

Statistical analyses

Descriptive statistics were used to describe the response of participants to each of the ten items related to inhibitors. Subjects are asked if they strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree or strongly disagree with the possible inhibitors of Academic progress in their institutions. The responses were described using frequency and percentage. Responses are thereafter scored on a scale ranging from 1 (for strongly agree) to 5 (for strongly disagree). The summary scores range from 12 to 60 with a higher score indicating disagreement concerning the possible inhibitors.

For each item, the rate 1 and 2 were categorized as agreeing the need to reform the educational system, rate 3 was categorized as No opinion and rate 4 and 5 were categorized as satisfied with the educational system.

Results

51 participants recruited from 7 local institutions faculty and one international faculty responded to the questionnaire. The number of years of experience varies between 5 and 25 years. The frequency and percentage of their responses are described in the following table # 6.

For each item, the rate 1 and 2 were categorized as agreeing the need to reform the educational system, rate 3 was categorized as no opinion and rate 4 and 5 were categorized as satisfied with the educational system. Percentage of participants that agree to new reform concerning each item of the questionnaire or are satisfied with their educational system is illustrated in the following table. Our findings revealed that:

Possible inhibitors of Academic Progress in institutions (Poor Global Ranking)	1 Strongly Agree	2 Agree	3 Neutral	4 Disagree	5 Strongly disagree
Nepotism and favoritism	32(62.7%)	0(0.0%)	7(13.7%)	6(11.8%)	6(11.8%)
No clear policy and guidelines for faculty appointment, retention and promotion	12(23.5%)	7(13.7%)	13(25.5%)	12(23.5%)	7(13.7%)
Ratio of full time faculty/ number of student enrolled	12(23.5%)	13(25.5%)	19(37.3%)	0(0.0%)	7(13.7%)
Web impact: Non alignment between information, technology, and higher education institutions	12(23.5%)	7(13.7%)	12(23.5%)	13(25.5%)	7(13.7%)
Citations per published paper / papers per faculty	6(11.8%)	25(49.0%)	7(13.7%)	6(11.8%)	7(13.7%)
Inequalities in access to higher education	0(0.0%)	26(51.0%)	0(0.0%)	6(11.8%)	19(37.3%)
Negative attitude towards internationalization	13(25.5%)	12(23.5%)	7(13.7%)	0(0.0%)	19(37.3%)
Setting the educational standards (watching rather than participating)	12(23.5%)	20(39.2%)	6(11.8%)	6(11.8%)	7(13.7%)
Lack of human resources	18(35.3%)	19(37.3%)	14(27.5%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)
Lack of physical and financial resources	31(60.8%)	20(39.2%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)

Table 6 Responses of participants to each item.

100.0% of the participants need to improve physical and financial resources and 72.5% have to develop their human resources. 62.9% need to recover the setting of their educational standards. 62.7% agree about the need to eradicate favoritism from their educational level 60.8% have to develop their citations per published paper. 52.9% have to improve the ratio of full-time faculty/ number of student enrolled 51.0% suffers from inequalities in access to higher education. 49.0% agree about the need to improve their attitude towards internationalization. 37.25% need to reform clear policy and guidelines for their faculty and are not satisfied with the non-alignment between information, technology, and higher education institutions.

Possible inhibitors of Academic Progress in institutions	Agree about the need to reform educational system	Neutral No opinion	Satisfied with our educational system
Nepotism and favoritism	32(62.7%)	7(13.7%)	12(23.5%)
No clear policy and guidelines for faculty appointment, retention and promotion	19(37.25%)	13(25.5%)	19(37.25%)
Full time faculty/ number of student enrolled	27(52.9%)	19(37.3%)	7(13.7%)
Alignment between information, technology, and higher education institutions	19(37.25%)	12(23.5%)	20(39.2%)
Citations per published paper / papers per faculty	31(60.8%)	7(13.7%)	13(25.5%)
Inequalities in access to higher education	26(51.0%)	0(0.0%)	25(49.0%)
Attitude towards internationalization	25(49.0%)	7(13.7%)	19(37.3%)
Setting the educational standards (watching rather than participating)	32(62.7%)	6(11.8%)	13(25.5%)
Human resources	37(72.5%)	14(27.5%)	0(0.0%)
Physical and financial resources	51(100.0%)	0(0.0%)	0(0.0%)

Table 7 Percentage of participants that agree to new reform or satisfied with their educational system

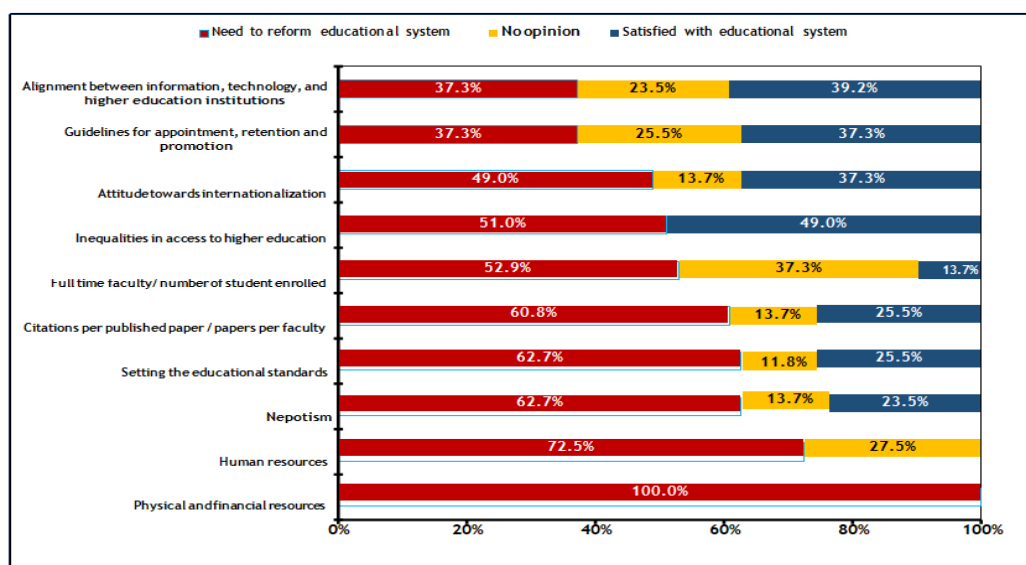


Figure-1 Percentage of participants that agree to new reform or satisfied with their educational system

The mean total inhibitors score in the overall sample was relatively low 25.33 ± 8.751 (with a range that varies between 13 and 40). The box plot was used to display the distribution of the total inhibitors score in the overall sample based on the minimum and maximum value, first quartile, median and third quartile. 50.0% of the sample presented a total score of 25 and less, 25% presented a total score of 21, and 75% presented a score of 34 and less.

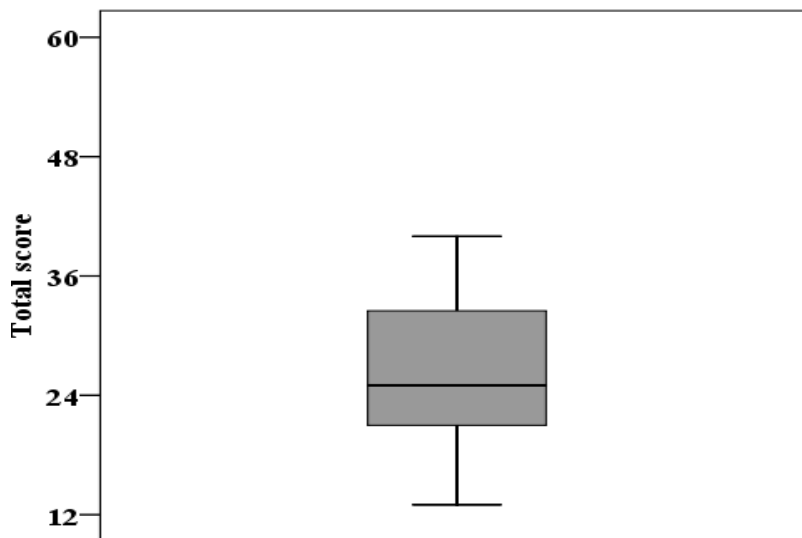


Figure-2 Boxplot: Distribution of total score in the overall sample

Conclusions and Educational Implications

Research analysis and objective judgment of the outcome were hereby presented. The governmental and institutional decision-makers will be informed about the possible inhibitors of our academic progress as perceived by educational experts and how could we all participate in minimizing their consequences. It is worth reflecting on and merits to be studied in more depth, especially if one considers ranking to be an essential part of our institutions' mission and symbol of quality.

The major limitation of this study is the few numbers of participants. The author, therefore, suggests further studies with a larger sample size to add to the objectivity and meaningfulness of our educational system development.

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