

# REFORMING ACADEMIC CURRICULA AT **LEBANESE** **INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY**

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## BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE LEBANESE INTERNATIONAL UNIVERSITY

The Lebanese International University (LIU) is a private institution founded in 2001; its primary mission is to provide students' accessible and affordable quality education. Today, LIU is the fastest growing university with nine campuses across Lebanon. It further established three campuses in Yemen (Sanaa, Aden, and Taiz), one in Mauritania, and another in Senegal.

Academic strengths are grounded in a wide range of outstanding majors and schools, each of which endeavours to achieve academic excellence and a position of distinction in its own field. The university comprises 5 schools: Arts and sciences, Business, Education, Engineering, and Pharmacy. It offers 41 undergraduate majors and 18 at graduate level. More than 1450 academic faculty provide provision to 30,000 plus Lebanese and overseas students.

Through its Teaching and Learning Office, the University fosters a culture of excellence and innovation in teaching by way of professional development programs, championing values of equity, diversity and inclusion across disciplines; promoting new and emerging instructional methods while supporting existing best teaching and research practices. In developing new educational programs, LIU works with relevant stakeholders to design and align program outcomes to serve industry and labour market demands. A considerable number of LIU graduates are employed in the Middle East and North Africa Arab Region.

The University, with more than 50 international agreements, is an active promoter of collaborative research, has created a new Office

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of Quality Assurance, Institutional Effectiveness & Accreditation (QAIEA) to comprehensively promote and embed a quality culture that also encourages interdisciplinary basic and applied research. Along with teaching, this is a key contributor in building modern curriculum and is achieved through a Centre of Excellence for Research & Development at the University level and assisted by Department Research Leaders at the schools' levels. LIU actively sponsors student exchanges, dual degree programs with Worms in Germany and faculty exchanges through EU agencies and programs such as Tempus, Erasmus Mundus, and EuropeAid Programme. Currently, LIU is working with European Union, UNIMED, British Council, and UNRWA in capacity building for Syrian and Palestinian students and Staff.

Governance structure and approach to policy and decision making plays a key role in that accountability and effectiveness in use of resources are aligned with the University's mission. Intermittent revisions of the organizational structure in terms of centralized and/or decentralized approaches are considered when it comes to administrative and academic relationships among various stakeholders. Such centralization model in human resources selection, promotion, students' admissions, student support, in a multi-campus university, has been rather feasible. However, growth and perennial drive for enhanced service learning and other provisions inexorably require constant change and modification inclined towards a decentralized academic approach may have better purchase.

From education to science to health and other academic areas, LIU's faculty and staff have demonstrated their commitment to community service and outreach engagement in innovative ways that touch the lives of people.

Below, we will present two case studies in which the University malleably worked to reform the curricula in order to address and accommodate two new challenges: education for refugees and continuing education in the public health sector.

## CHALLENGE 1: REFUGEE CRISIS

Effective education to migrants is an unprecedented refugee crisis spilling over to affect the Middle East, and especially Lebanon. In the past five years, Lebanon has witnessed massive population movement from Syria to Lebanese cities and Villages. One vital and under-reported aspect of the mass displacement is the lack of access



of millions of Syrians to a proper education. Ensuring the provision of such education should form an important part of the response to the crisis. This would help to combat at source some of the factors contributing to mass migration, extremism and the risk of a lost generation that could blight Syria's chances of recovery for years to come.

It is important to investigate if and how education might be reshaped to meet the needs of the refugee graduates. To date this issue has been empirically neglected. Using macro-level data for the Lebanese case, this paper contributes to filling this gap by providing a framework for a supportive response in the case of migrants in Lebanon. It is for these reasons that a plan and framework had to be put into place to address a situation that causes serious, sudden grief and disequilibria in such communities. In particular, it is concerned with the association between enrolment in the Lebanese International University in Lebanon and subsequent stay in Lebanon.

### *Context of the Study*

A number of workshops and retreats took place to identify, prepare and develop a reform strategy, one which would serve to enhance the effectiveness, efficiency, and quality of education provision for the instructors enrolled in the 5 schools; School of Arts and Science, Business, Education, Engineering and Pharmacy. The review was captured in technical studies encompassing the themes of the quality of LIU education, the organization and management of LIU education, the evolving nature of LIU's schools and modified education programming in LIU for displaced students.

The LIU Education program (2015) was now in a very good position to meet the evolving demand of an education system in the twenty-first century for migrant education, including Syrians and Palestine refugee students in. In alignment with the vision of the education program at LIU, a new principle was incepted, the vision of education for all.

To attain it, we implemented the following activities in the field of teacher development and school empowerment. The main outcome of the programme was to have professional, qualified and motivated teaching force through developing an overall LIU Strategy. It constituted developing capacity of Syrians and Palestinian teachers. The aim of the program was to transform classroom practices, a professional development program for LIU instructors on how to embrace new

methods of supporting migrant student learning away from a didactic approach towards holistic styles and approaches (active learning). The program was planned to take 9 months, with instructors engaging with one module each month. The program adopts a blended learning approach and is designed to support the teaching of all areas of the curriculum.

In addition, a workshop on the facilitation and support of learners with particular needs was conducted. The learning outcome of this project was to develop a strong pool of instructors in the school of education and to prepare them on facilitation and support of Syrian instructors who will continue on and teach Syrian students in the refugee camps with particular needs. The ultimate purpose was to deliver a TD program that should reflect on the role of the educator as a facilitator, reflect on developing skills and knowledge in others in a changing world, consider the relationship between theories of learning and practice, examine skills required for facilitation, engage in a range of facilitated activities, explore methods of active teaching and learning, reflect on and develop participants' own facilitative skills

The workshop lasted over 2 days, it was held in Beirut campus on the 3rd and 4th of November for twenty-two SoED instructors in partnership with Lebanese Association for Scientific Research (LASER) and the Lebanese Education for Development in the Arab Program (LEADAR) through British expert Dr. Robin Attfield. During the workshops, participants were provided with handouts designed and delivered to guide the user step-by-step with hand-on-activities.

Finally, the learnt lessons were implemented. LIU in general and the SoED in particular promote multi-tiered teaching which provide a continuum of services, support, and interventions to students across Lebanon. This workshop empowered the participants with an effective overview in serving the needs of all students (including students with post-traumatic stress disorder) because of its focus on school-wide, group, and individual interventions. This workshop provided the participants with tools based on effective, research-based instruction, and assessment strategies. It also empowered the SoED instructors in identifying educational, literacy, and processing demands which pivotal roles in evaluating the curriculum at hand which will hybrid between LIU's current curriculum and the integrated one - as requested by our partners to meet their intended learning outcomes.



## *The Educational Needs of Refugee Children*

Most refugees have experienced extended stay in refugee camps in rural and urban areas. This affects the way they experience school and the relationship they form with teachers and peers. Pre-settlement experience of refugee children can have significant implications on their post-settlement and academic performance, psychosocial service needs, and sense of belonging in school.

When it comes to exploring the educational needs of young refugees in first asylum countries like Lebanon, there are four key aspects of educational experiences that were particularly salient.

First, limited and disrupted educational opportunities. Recent studies suggest that the enrolment rates of school-age Syrian refugee children in Lebanon are around 20%. The number of school-age Syrian children outstrips the capacity of Lebanon's entire public-school system. Even when they enrol, Syrian refugee children are more likely than their non-refugee fellow students to receive poor or failing grades or drop out from school. Refugee children often experience frequent disruptions and limited access to schooling, performing under their age-appropriate grade level.

Second, language barrier to educational access. Refugee children are also frequently exposed to multiple languages of instruction over the course of migration, resulting in language confusion and difficulties mastering academic content. In Lebanon, refugee children are taught in French or English as well as Arabic.

Third, inadequate quality of instruction. The magnitude and size of Syrian refugee children influx has stretched educational resources in Lebanon. There are huge shortages of teachers and books, and many other things. Most teachers have not been trained in dealing with the needs of traumatized children. Further exacerbating the problem, Lebanon's policy of not allowing Syrians to teach, although employing them could help provide instruction in Arabic and ease classroom overcrowding.

Fourth, discrimination in school setting/environment. Hostility towards Syrian children has been pronounced in Lebanon, in an environment of growing resentment, refugees may and in fact encounter discrimination and verbal and physical abuse in schools, which further deters parents from enrolling children and can seriously affect their cognitive, emotional and social development and increase their academic challenges.





A number of factors beyond the limited capacity of existing schools contribute to the low enrolment of refugee children in Lebanon which in October 2015 MEHE announced plans to waive tuition and book fees for Lebanese and refugee children up to grade nine in the public-school system.

Refugees are at risk from a range of mental health issues resulting from their traumatic experience. Research on refugees identifies post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) as the most common problem, followed by depression. Studies suggest stressors associated with Syrian refugee children such as economic hardship, language barrier, social isolation and discrimination can negatively affect their long-term development. Furthermore, many fall significantly behind in their schooling, or drop out altogether, while educators in host and resettlement countries may struggle to re-engage these students and help them bridge the gaps in their formal education.

## THE SOLUTION: NEW TEACHING DIPLOMA IN MIGRANT EDUCATION

Education program provided by LIU financed a massive scale-up of support to UNRWA and LASER student-teachers to enable 1907 students to enrol in 54 majors. The study was done on the Teaching Diploma where these graduates will cascade their experiences to an additional 172,000 refugee children in school, while also providing for accelerated learning programs, non-formal and early childhood education and child protection activities. Together, these actions will target up to 587,000 school-age children and adolescents (6 to 17 years) that are currently out-of-school. As a result, LIU education

support was marginally supporting the remaining gap to achieve the long-pursued goal of the global “No Lost Generation” initiative to bring 1 million Syrian and Palestinian refugee children into education.

LIU aimed to widen and enhance access of refugees across Lebanon to primary, secondary and tertiary health care, psycho-social support, and protection from sexual and gender-based violence. It will reach and benefit at least 350,000 refugees.

## PROJECT OUTCOMES

The project provided a customized training modular curriculum and instructional material of pedagogy, aligned with the UNRWA and LASER values and principles in general, and the education program vision and reform initiatives in particular. The training included education methodology, education psychology, and seminars in compliance with the reform initiatives implemented by the education department at all UNRWA and LASER schools, such as: school-based teacher development, inclusive education, and curriculum framework, among others.

Organized and conducted simultaneous training sessions, as per the syllabus developed, for teachers in five areas where UNRWA and LASER - operates: North, Beirut, Beqaa, Saida and Tyre - within a training modality that complies with the training approach, such as, but not limited to, interactive/active learning, presentations, projects, cooperative learning, and e-learning when available.

A team of 17 instructors from Dean, Chairs, Assistant - Deans and highly qualified lecturers delivered a significant degree level of completion of activities that all campuses completed 100% of the planned activities. All the five campuses worked directly towards this objective and completed all outcomes. Some of the most effective measures taken under this objective included the dissemination of information about current education policies through training and awareness-raising sessions for teachers. All the UNRWA and LASER students now have visible copies of the course content. Associated to this has been the establishment or strengthening of internal practicum procedures to ensure cases of task-based teaching.

The researchers drew data from the population of instructors and the number of registered migrant students as subpopulations at LIU in Tyre, Saida, Beirut, Tripoli and Khyara campuses.



## CONCLUSION AND FUTURE RECOMMENDATIONS

The intrinsic purpose of this study was to examine the impact of the migrant education Program in developing the capabilities of the students from Syria and Palestinian students from Syria across all other majors.

The results from observation contribute to a robust theoretical framework that informs both existing and future strategies in teaching these students. It also provides the stepping stone for further research as certain issues need to be investigated and certain questions need to be answered.

Four conclusions flow from the programme:

1. The outcome of the program to Syrian and Palestinian can be placed in the following dimension for student satisfaction results after a face to face interview by ASFARI Foundation with the students: (a) setting directions, (b) building relationships and developing the students, (c) developing the program, (d) leading the instructional program, and (e) securing accountability?" clearly showed that there is a positive impact of the education program delivered by LIU
2. The researchers conclude that the afore mentioned five dimensions of education satisfaction should have equal significance with respect to the participants of the study if quantitative analysis is done
3. The researchers conclude that school principals are practicing satisfactory levels of accountability at their majors.
4. The main area of enquiry under this project focused on the relevance and applicability of the learning theories in approach in practice. Overall, student-teachers felt that one of the main areas of value that these approaches added as compared to other education initiatives was its emphasis on their techniques in teaching and in education and its capacity to utilize strategies in teaching throughout the process. The uniqueness of the approach and its capacity to support the application of task-based approach in practice within LIU's School of Education broader program of work was also highlighted. Overall the TD project has successfully managed to increase awareness of UNRWA and LASER's student-teachers to teaching and in education.

Yet, attention should be given to the following aspects:

1. CPD programs for instructors are very significant for professional growth and development of LIU's 'management and leadership outcome practices and competencies at the administrative and technical level. So, LIU School of education department should ensure delivering and presenting those programs for their positive





outcome in delivering the commitments of this educational transformational change driven by instructors at LIU.

2. School of Education should ensure the sustainability of the impact of the migrant education in the five provinces.
3. School of Education at LIU should ensure the implementation of accountable, effective, and reliable assessment and evaluation policies for migrant education program to ensure its effectiveness and efficiency, based on tangible indicators and reliable data sources.

## CHALLENGE 2: NEW GRADUATE PROGRAM IN PUBLIC AND APPLIED HEALTH SCIENCES (PAHS)

Reports show that graduates of basic and medical sciences majors tend to seek jobs in the public health sector, yet without prior formal training in this professional field. Moreover, medical professionals – MLTs, nurses, pharmacists, physicians, etc. – need to accrue Continuing Medical Education (CME) credits, be it in the form of research, professional development, or formal education, etc. However, not all of them are equipped to undertake one or more of the above tasks.



Although there are some other programs that may partially or totally serve the same purposes as stated above, these programs are very limited in terms of their admissions. Such a matter, along with the limited options that non-public-health graduates have, paused itself as a major challenge for our university, which has an ethical obligation/social responsibility to try to find some feasible solutions to its graduates. Nevertheless, any new program needs to address several aspects, interdisciplinarity, applicability, and internationalization

are just some of them, to name a few. Such an approach necessitates some solid collaboration, extensive research, and a pilot study.

## THE SOLUTION: THE ATHEALTH TEMPUS PROJECT

A solution to the above channel was to design and implement – through an EU-funded Tempus project, Advance Training and Lifelong Learning in Applied Health Sciences (ATHealth) – a degree program that meets the mentioned requirements. To do so, LIU partnered with several European, Lebanese, and Arab universities in a Tempus project. The partners worked over three years in the design of the degree program via several work packages and dedicated the fourth extended year for the piloting and implementation.

The project identified several specific steps:

- Identification of the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) of the existing training and study programs, including academic and non-academic staff skills and knowledge regarding public health and other related health care subjects;
- Introduction and modernization of the training curriculum, teaching material and exam methods;
- Training/retraining of a number of university and non-university staff, trainees and trainers (TOT);
- Establishment of a sustainable virtual health care quality training Centre (VQC) for health care sector;
- Promotion the university-industry-society partnerships by jointly establishing vocational training centres;
- Dissemination of the results.

To achieve such objectives, several work packages were developed, and work was undertaken so as to attain the targets, be it via training, equipment acquiring, or information dissemination. LIU's contributed to all aspects of the work packages, the details of which is as follows:

WP1. SWOT analysis and Staff Training. LIU team contributed to the review and analysis of the existing educational situation related to healthcare programs in general, and continuing education in particular. It helped in the identification of SWOT factors relevant to the study at hand and participated in the initial (Sweden) and subsequent (Lebanon) training sessions held to finalize the findings of the SWOT analysis.



WP2. Developing & modernizing professional training/study program and training centres. LIU team contributed to the redesign of some existing courses (Medical Informatics, Health Education and Promotion, Infection Control, Health Psychology, Introduction to Medical Laboratory Techniques, and Research Methodology), and commented on the content/structure of some other newly introduced courses. The team underwent training on ongoing development of modern and effective teaching methods and material. It also contributed to the delivery of the first draft of the master syllabus, and its approval by the Faculty Curriculum Committee, and made sure it was sent to the University Council for final approval.

WP3. Quality control and assurance, and monitoring of the project. LIU helped creating the Quality Steering Team (QST), composed of The Project coordinator (LNU), EU partners' coordinators, and the local Lebanese partners' coordinators, through the active participation of LIU Project coordinator in the team. The University performed its own internal quality monitoring, control, and assurance through standardized protocols of questionnaires, KPI's, and routine checks.

WP4. Dissemination and sustainability. LIU team worked on the dissemination of information about the project to potential users (information meetings, brochures to potential users, emails). The team lead the work on the project web site, Facebook page, and Twitter account. It also produced the monthly Project Bulletin, both in electronic and print formats.

WP5. Project management. LIU team actively participated in setting up the Management Committee, and in conducting the various management activities. The team dynamically joined in building management and quality control committees (the University project coordinator/manager). It vigorously contributed to the project coordination, administration & planning. This was evident in:

- a. The participation of LIU in the different financial management meetings and reports (mechanism for payment of the staff cost and travel costs, etc.)
- b. The gathering of all supporting documents that are required in order to proceed with payments.
- c. The active communication through emails, telephones, skype.
- d. The updates of the project activities and regulations that can be found on the project website.



## THE RESULTS: GRADUATE PROGRAM IN PUBLIC AND APPLIED HEALTH SCIENCES (PAHS)

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The global outcome of the above Tempus project was the creation of a Master of Science (M.S.) degree in Public & Applied Health Sciences (PAHS). The program is a 2-year, 36-credit program. The first three semesters involve traditional coursework in the areas of health education and health promotion, quality management of health systems, management and evaluation of health services, health policy and environmental health and statistical methods and design of research. The last semester is dedicated to implementing a community-based research project in civil society associations or public or private health care institution and the presentation of the Master's thesis. The thesis project rounds out the program by providing opportunities to apply many of the skills learned in theory to the real world of epidemiology and applied health sciences.

The program is made up of 36 credits with 24 credits as major and core course, a choice of 6 credits of elective courses and a 6-credit thesis. Each year of the program is structurally independent for the other, and the student may elect at the end of the first year to write a 3-credit graduate diploma project; else, upon the completion of the two-year coursework, the student is supposed to write a 6-credit thesis.

Pilot runs of the diploma and master programs took place at LIU and another Lebanese partner university. Moreover, mobility of students and staff to study and train at different EU partner universities for at least one semester is encouraged, where up to 5 students from each partner university studied abroad some topics of the program.

The outcomes of the project were benchmarked against similar programs, and the stakeholders – students, staff, and employers – were surveyed in terms of their satisfaction. The data was collected via questionnaires distributed among to the participants in meetings, trainings, and classes, to measure the technical and the functional qualities of the project activities during the activities, and the perceived satisfaction of the participants.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experience was new to the LIU team. The results of all the quality checks and satisfaction surveys proved to be very positive. The idea of the program is well designed and implemented. Although we did not have enough time to recruit international students to come over to LIU, the fact that our own students were able – through the very same



program – to go and get ICM transferred to their curriculum is a positive result per se.

We will continue implementing this program and capitalize on the experience to project this success story onto other students' needs, be it in terms of degree programs, professional diplomas, or, continuous professional development modules.

