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The Outcomes of the Reforming Higher Education System in the Kurdistan Region

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Abstract. The main purpose of this paper is to explain the outcomes and tangible inputs of reforming of teaching and establishing a teaching quality assurance system. The article design takes on a mix-method is employed by applying qualitative methods in a series interviews carried out with five decision-maker polices in the Ministry of higher education institutions in the KRG and quantitative methods have been applied too; the data has been collected by questionnaire and the participations are teachers from Salahaddin University, the University of Sulaimani, the University of Duhok, Koya University and Soran University. The sample in this paper consists of 575 teachers from these institutions. The results of this exploratory paper shows that the outcomes of the reforming of teaching quality assurance principle which was not quite changes in content in the sides of quality of students, relationship between student-teacher, methods of teaching, learning and evaluation of students.

Keywords. KRG, Higher Education System, Reforming Quality Assurance Teaching, Banking Method, Critical Thinking

Introduction

In 2003 after the removal of Saddam's regime, there was a great deal of optimism regarding the process of reconstruction of the country on the democratic and federal bases. Based on this optimism, in 2009 the ministry of higher education and scientific research of the Kurdistan Region Government (MoHESR-KRG) has started a reform policy. The reform process has covered all the higher education institutions in the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG), whether they are public or private in the higher education institutions in. One of the components of reforming in the MoHESR-KRG is teaching quality assurance principle. According to Rasul (2012) before 2009 the system of higher education in the KRG has problems in terms of conducting the quality of teaching, learning and style of teaching. It has been criticised by the local media, public opinion, and many international media platforms. Even some high governmental officials of the KRG have admitted to the existence of the low quality of higher education institutions system, including Dlawer Abdul-Aziz Ala'Aldeen himself, the previous Minister of the MoHESR-KRG.

One of the main aims of the reforming policy of the higher education in Kurdistan Region is to improve the standards and quality of universities in order to meet the demands of the current market economy and engage in international competitiveness. This in turn, divulges the proposal of the quality improvement in curriculum design and in approaches to teaching

and learning as a component of the reforming policy. This is highlighted in a report on higher education called 'The Roadmap to Quality: Reforming the System of the MoHESR-KRG. The reforming policy of the higher education has many stratagems that have been mentioned in the report of the MoHESR-KRG one of these stratagems is reforming teaching and establishing a teaching quality assurance (TQA) system (MoHESR-KRG, 2009:12).

This article aimed to examine the the outcomes and tangible inputs of reforming of teaching and establishing a teaching quality assurance system which was started in the sixth cabinet of the KRG which was in place from the late 2009 to the end of 2011.

Research Problem

Our main problem in this paper is to examine what are the outcomes and tangible inputs of reforming of teaching and establishing a teaching quality assurance system which has been implemented between 2009- 2018? In other word, this article is going to look at the gap between the ambitious reforming plan of the MoHESR-KRG and its actual outcomes after 10 years of implementation. In aiming to do so this paper rely and examine some of the important existing literature to identify some gaps and inconsistencies in the MoHESR's plan, then combine this with our own research framework and data, and the findings that unveils MoHESR-KRG's standpoint on education and higher education. Thus, the question that this article aims to engage with shall be finding out the extent in which the gaps between the intended objectives of the reforming policy and the actual outcomes, or the way in which they are deeply implicated within each other after ten years of implementation of the reforming policy.

Literature Review

A Brief Historical Sketch of Higher Education in the Kurdistan Region

The higher education system in Kurdistan Region started by building the University of Sulaimani in the year 1968, although before building the University of Sulaimani, the Kurdish youth or students for the purpose of study went to Baghdad and the countries around Iraq. When the University of Sulaimani opened the number of students of higher education increase in cities of Kurdistan Region. Subsequently in the year 1981 the University of Sulaimani was transferred to Hewler and its name was changed to Salahaddin University-Hawler. After the uprising in 1991 the Kurdistan Region had only one University and three technical institutions, also the higher education institutions faced many challenges and problems which are economic crises, migration of lecturers and civil war between 1994-1997 (MoHESR-KRG, 2016).

In 1992 the Kurdistan Regional Government was established, at that time there was not a Ministry of higher education, nevertheless, a higher council for the educational affairs was established to deal with the issues of higher education in Kurdistan. The members of the council worked hard to establish, develop and maintain the institution of higher education, but they were unable to bring about any tangible progression as the process was disrupted by the financial hardship and the civil war in the region. In fact, the period between 1991 to the war to remove Saddam from power was, for two reasons, a difficult one. First, the imposition of international economic sanctions on Iraq, including Kurdistan, in 1990 by the United Nations (in addition to Iraqi economic sanction on Kurdistan which lasted until 2003) which meant that Kurdistan was under two severe economic sanctions concurrently - one by the international community and one by the Iraqi government. Second, the outbreak of civil war between Kurdish parties from 1994 to 1998, as a result of which the KRG was divided into two administrative entities.

This development brought further damage to the educational system, particularly higher education institutions (Ahmed, 2016:119). In fact, it was a great blow to the process of reforming the higher education in Kurdistan (Amin, 2013). In addition, due to decades of wars and instability, the KRG's higher education system witnessed several significant challenges concerning access to and the quality of education (Pacheco, 2013:14). Pacheco argues that, after the invasion of Iraq in 2003 by the USA and its allies and subsequently the collapse of Ba'ath regime, many conferences were organised to address the challenges of higher education system, which led the Kurdish authorities to plan and implement the process of rebuilding, reforming and modernising the higher education system. That was a difficult task as the Iraqi and Kurdish higher education system has sustained heavy damage with significant loss in capacity to provide the quality of higher education in a reduction in services and a widening gap between the educational opportunities and demands prior to the invasion of Iraq by the USA and its allies in 2003 (2013:12-14).

According to Ali (2012:1308) the Kurdistan Region of Iraq has made significant progress since 2003. They have broadly opened their investment doors to overseas investment and forces of the international free market and therefore the need to progress and higher standards in the fields of management and technology is prioritised so as to invest in people and raise the human capabilities of professional cadres. In 2006 the unification of the two administrations (Sleman and Erbil) into a single one coincided particularly with the formation of the Ministry-KRG. According to the Ministry-KRG the higher education system that Kurdistan Region was inherited from Iraq was an out-dated and malfunctioning system that supported a closed-market economic system (Ala'Aldeen, 2010). Thus, the Ministry-KRG has mapped out a plan of modernisation of the higher education institutions in order to enable the system to be flexible and more responsive to the needs of the public for higher skilled professionals. As the minister of that time puts it is not a secret that the current system of higher education, which Kurdistan has inherited from Iraq, is out-dated and its dysfunctional pyramid-style management structure. There is little transparency, democracy or accountability in the system, and the role of staff and students in management is negligible. Internal audit, performance monitoring and quality assurance is virtually non-existing. In short, the existing system is a major barrier for progress, incapable of healthy evolution or modernisation (2010:8).

The new ministry's initial steps were concentrated on building the infrastructure rather than concentrating on quality. Though, contacts began with universities all over the world and the curriculum development or progression was the main issue which was tackled by the Ministry at that time (Ala'Aleen, 2010:96).

The Aim of Education

Education has different meanings and the etymological meaning of education for example the meaning with regard to the origin of the word. The word "*Education*" has originated from the Latin word "*Educatum*" the meaning of which is "*to lead out*" or "*to bring ideas out of the mind*", therefore, education is a process or an activity, which leads ideas or emotions out of the mind. Currently, the wider meaning of education is that it is a lifelong process of modification of behaviour through every experience of life. In this sense, education is imparted by every person to anybody, at any time, at any place and any way, it aims at the total development of the person. So, in the narrow sense, education means the training that is given within the four walls of an educational institution during a particular period of time to attain prescribed purposes and objectives (Kumar and Ahmad, 2008). From this stance education is not a dead process, but it is lively dynamic bipolar process of transformation. According to this view, there must be two poles for its operation, the one is the teacher and the

other is the student. The teacher processes some beliefs, ideals and values and these influence the student. In other words, we can say that the teacher is a philosopher who tries to develop the student, according to his philosophy to attain a desirable type of individual. Adams has rightly remarked "education is the dynamic side of philosophy. It is active aspect of philosophical belief" (Singh, 2008: xi).

Paulo Freire explains in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* in chapter 2 clearly the relationship between the teacher-students at any level inside or outside school or university. He reveals its fundamentally narrative character in which the teacher assumes the role of narrating subject material to which the students listen (Freire, 1996: 52). Freire refers this as the banking education, he analyses that in banking education: (a) "the teacher teaches and the students are taught; (b) the teacher knows everything and the students know nothing; (c) the teacher thinks and the students are thought about; (d) the teacher talks and the students listen—meekly; (e) the teacher disciplines and the students are disciplined; (f) the teacher chooses and enforces his choice, and the students comply; (g) the teacher acts and the students have the illusion of acting through the action of the teacher; (h) the teacher chooses the program content, and the students (who were not consulted) adapt to it; (i) the teacher confuses the authority of knowledge with his or her own professional authority, which she and he sets in opposition to the freedom of the students; (j) the teacher is the Subject of the learning process, while the pupils are mere objects"(Freire, 1996: 54).

Freire in opposition to this banking education suggests a problem posing education which will break the vertical pattern characteristics of the traditional teacher-student relationships by establishing a horizontal dialogue. Kerala states that "Freire accepted dialogue as a method of learning. Dialogue is the encounter between men, mediated by the world, in order to change the world. Dialogue is the principal tool of problem posing method. It is a co-operative activity involving mutual respect in which teachers and students learn together. It is a talk *with* the other, instead of talking *to* the other. Dialogue requires a co-equal relationship between teacher and student. It begins with the experiences of learners. Praxis as a synthesis of reflection and action (theory and practice) in the learning process: Praxis means the use of a theory in a practical way. He defined praxis as reflection and action upon the world to transform it. It is a complex activity by which individuals create culture and society and become critically conscious human beings. It involves development of critical consciousness combine with social action"(2014).

Methodology of the Research

The article design employed mix-method which includes qualitative and quantitative methods. In a qualitative methodology, after getting consent, in-depth semi-structured interviews were conducted and the data gathered from five interviewees chosen on the basis of similar demographic backgrounds, being from the MoHESRs of the Kurdistan region-Iraq. The thematic analysis method is to analyse transcribed data. Also, quantitative methods were applied; the data has been collected by questionnaire and the participations are teachers from Salahaddin University, University of Sulaimani, University of Duhok, Koya University and Soran University. The sample in this article consists of 575 teachers for the aim of collecting data and responding the article's questions. For the analysed data SPSS software has been used (Version 22). With that I analysed the documents that the MoHESR-KRG published about the reforming process.

Findings and Discussion

Here I would like to interpret and analyse the relationship between teacher and student, methods of evaluation, teaching and testing at universities after the reforming quality assurance process in 2009. As the MoHESR-KRG mentions, the classical approach by which to assure the quality of education in the past was to monitor the attendance of the students in the classroom and to conduct final examinations. However, time has proved that the KRG universities and institutes have not been able to reach the required standard of excellence in education and training or ever maintain a steady level in their respective fields. Consequently, education standards continuously fluctuate according to political circumstances, financial constraints of the country and the will of the teaching and the administrative staff. Maintaining and consolidating a steady level of quality is a complex and difficult process. Raising the standards of education and training requires a carefully designed and clear plan of action. There needs to be a continuous assessment of the educational curricula and the performance of students and academicians (2010: 26).

The method of evaluation, teaching, testing and the quality of students are traditional and banking educational system, in which the issue relates with several aspects, so some of them relate with the atmosphere and style of educating in higher education institutions. It is not clear that the universities want which system of education for implementing whether international or local system. In fact, the universities in the KRG have much more problems with the method of teaching, testing, evaluation, and the relationship between students and teachers. For this aim the respondent of A assert that

"we had a big gap and many problems in the higher education system in Kurdistan Region [...] for example previously, when the students went to the class, they did not know what lesson is about, because they did not give them the title of the lesson and they did not prepare anything for that lesson. The lectures were presented according to lecturers' mood, if one of the lecturers went to the class early or late, nobody inquired and disciplined him/her. In addition, the students did not have any feedback to know why they have passed or failed [...]. The system could only confirm how many students were graduated and what were the scores, and how many failed? But nobody asks how the students got these grades? And how have they been evaluated by the academic staff? What are the criteria for the pass-fail formula, and why? In the side of law and structure, the relation between students and academic staff were not important. The universities had much more support for the academic staff than the students".

Thus, the respondents of these major policy makers at the MoHESR-KRG conclude: "The main aims of the quality assurance was to change the poor quality of instruction at the universities, as well as pay much more intention in students and make them the centre of teaching culture and process". These respondents denounced the so-called poor quality teaching in the KRG before 2009, where impersonal lecture courses where bored faculty members doled out disconnected bits of information, which students dutifully recorded in their notes and regurgitated on their exams. They denounced the system in which students did not have any rights, and the lecturers have all the roles and authorities in this process.

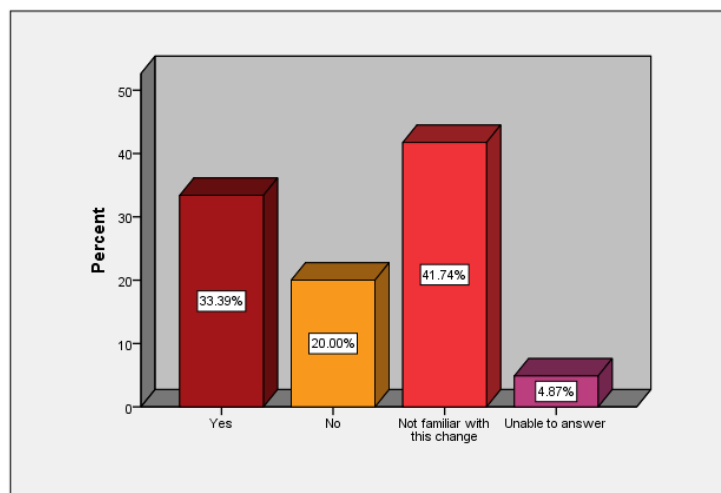
However a question is overlain what is the situation now and after ten years of implementation of the reform? How did the reform policy change the higher education in

Kurdistan? Do the teachers or universities change the method of teaching and evaluating students? Has the quality learning and teaching have been improved? The survey result shows that reforming quality assurance in higher education system was only in form, but not in content, because the quality of teaching at the KRG's universities we note that the poor quality of instruction are the same that the reform policy denounced and aimed to change it. The teaching system by which lecturers and faculty members doled out disconnected bits of information; which students dutifully recorded in their notes and regurgitated on their exams. To be more precise, much has not changed after ten years of the implementation of the reform policy.

As far as the objective of students-centred educational system is concerned the data shows there is not much change. The reform policy has clearly stated that the principles of this process is on that basic that the system of universities identifies the missions and the rights of the students, requested them to be commitment on their works, by a clear and fairness mechanism to save their rights. The students must be known what do they study? Why they study? And how to be sure that the best knowledge and the modern training shows them? How in the future they will the benefits from the programs of study? How the teacher's assurance the results for them? (Ala'Aldeen, 2013: 366). Respondents of B and E opinions is similar and identical, as they put it "we took the educational system from the old Iraqi system in to the KRG's higher education system ". Students became the centre of learning and the teachers become the helpers of them for the purpose of raising the quality of students as the respondent D mentions that "the aim and objective of reforming Policy and the quality assurance principle was to improve the learning outcomes, studying process, and to foster skilful students and makes them the centre of learning."

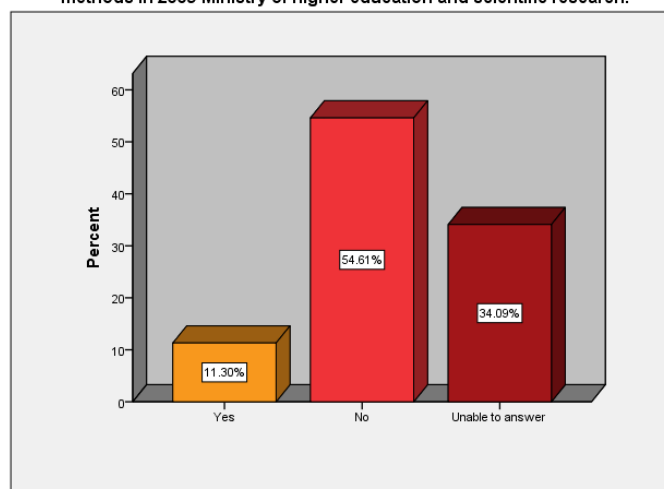
It might be after reforming policy and the quality assurance principle the relationship between teachers and students have been changed, but these changes were only in form, but not in the content. For example the respondents' answers in the survey in figure 1 about the reform of quality assurance in higher education, the majority of respondents (41.74%) were not familiar with the policy change, (4.87%) of them were unable to answer it, and (20%) of them say the new policy change do not focus on bridging the gap between quality and quantity of higher education system, but (33.39%) of participants supported the changes and they say the new policy change focuses on bridging the gap between quality and quantity of higher education system.

Figure (1): Respondents opinion about the change policy in the MoHESR which focuses on bridging the gap between quality and quantity of higher education.



The respondents' answers indicate that the majority of the teachers have not much more information about the reforming process that the MoHESR-KRG has been done under Dr. Ala'Aldeen. Ala'Aldeen states that the reforming process has covered all the higher education institutions in the region, and one aspect of this reform was establishing the quality assurance teaching programs that is focused on the style of teaching, evaluation, testing and relationship between teachers and student. Consequently, he continues, 'when a university lecturer does not have information and knowledge about this process how can we expect him to implement it? How can then the reforming process reflect on the quality of universities and train students in a way that they could be successful in labour market and useful to their society?' In addition, he states 'the lack of information on the process might be related with the time constrain and situation of carrying out it, which was only two years.' At the same time, the respondent A says that "the fixed term of the government was for only two years". The information and knowledge about the reforming quality assurance process in higher education system by teachers and students was very few, because the MoHESR-KRG was directly carrying out it and there were not any training courses for students and teachers before implementing it. As Ala'Aldeen argues that this process was new in Iraq and Kurdistan and the teachers and students did not have information about it. As the survey shows us the training and resources challenged the traditional teaching methods in 2009 of higher education system. Above half (54.61%) of them answered —No, only (34.09%) responded enable to answer, while only (11.30%) answered —Yes (See Figure 2).

Figure (2): Trainings and Resources challenged your traditional teaching methods in 2009 Ministry of higher education and scientific research.



The respondents' responses show that reforming quality assurance in higher education has not much more impacted on the process of teaching and educating, and it reveals that the teachers used the same methods which were used before 2009 by them. As Ala'Aldeen states 'students have a habit of trying to memorize things rather than profoundly and the teachers have all the authorities in the classrooms (2009:26). However, although he was aware of the fact that rote memorisation is counter-productive but did not explain what they can do about and how the reform policy changes this problem.

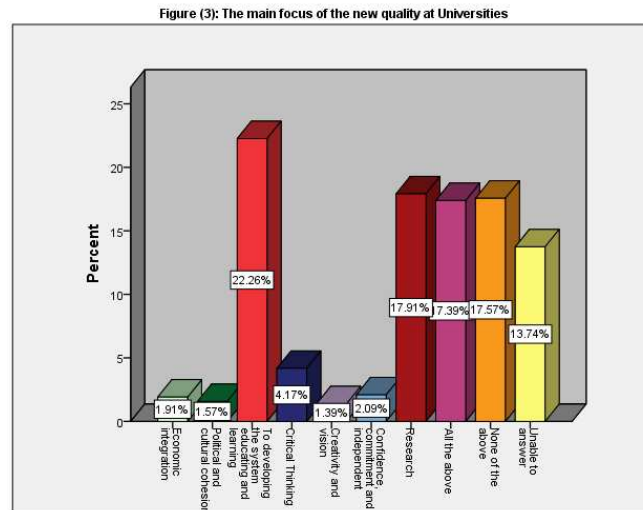
As we have noted there are different quality assurance schemes worldwide. Each country tends to develop and evolve its quality assurance programme according to the inherited culture, history and local capacities. The main objective of this plan was to protect the students' rights in knowing: What do they study and why? How can they get benefit from their studies

and secure a professional life in the future? How are they examined and in what topics? What are the limits of students' responsibilities and how can they participate in the process of education, training and management? How can they protect their rights and what are the channels through which they can express their suggestions, complaints and criticism? As was expounded in the literature review the quality assurance system each country has its own characteristics and reforming policy aims to raise the quality of universities internationally and locally for getting international accreditation, economic growth and bring together universities' curriculum with market-intensive development.

All these attempts were by the MoHESR-KRG and Ala'Aldeen for raising the level of quality of teaching, using new sources and changing the system of studying and the subjects of studying for the aim that the students be familiar with the new sources and the system, because in the previous decades, the style of studying in Iraqi universities did not allow the students to learn critical thinking and academic debate. They did not learn how to search new information in a modern style and how to choose, analyse and write again the useful knowledge in the sources and in the subjects precisely and then use them for himself/ herself and people (Ala'Aldeen, 2013: 370). As the respondent C argues, "one of the main elements of reforming quality assurance system is the development programme of studying because of the property substructure and the atmosphere of higher education institutions for students to learn. There was not any modern mechanism for assessing the property of studying programs and human capability". But after 2009 these have been changed as the respondent E says that "quality assurance system impacted on the level of studying of higher education, because a high committee in the MoHESR-KRG inspects us yearly. When they come for inspection they take nearly 200 hundred students and ask them about the level of knowledge and information at the university. They will do this for the assessment quality of university. With that we try to make the teachers' experiences for improvement. For this purpose, we did much more training courses for the teachers. Also, we encouraged teachers to participate in English courses and in other courses, for the aim to learn English language and to search about different sources. Then we encouraged them to participate in international conferences. These all are in the area of quality assurance system".

This issue that mentioned above it might be impacted on the students, because the students blame the teachers more about the higher education system. Teachers had the absolute authority on the process, content and styles of teaching and learning. They have the full authority on the students in the way of testing them, without having any academic supervisor (Ala'Aldeen, 2013: 340). Thus, the reforming of higher education institutions influenced on students, they have been familiar with their rights and duties for that aim the respondent E said that "students have got certainty for getting the rights, because they participated in quality assurance process. For example, at the end of each year students do feedback for the academic staff, but sometimes they are frustrated, because they said we did feedback of the academic staff, nevertheless it does not have any influence on teaching style. It is not a secret, if we want to discipline one of an academic staff, we do in an appropriate way we invite them to the deanship of faculty and tell them what they have to change their method. As well as we ensured student accountability and high-stakes testing, coupled with students' right to ask the quality assurance committee to look at their final papers and grade if it does not match their expectation and predicting grade. In a such case scenario the director of quality assurance system creates a committee which includes three specialist teachers for correcting the marks of the exam notebook, as I can say that the majority of rights have been given to the students in quality assurance system".

The reforming process has been presented in a good shape; it might have a good influence on students as the survey results revealed that (22.26%) agreed that the new quality assurance focuses on developing the system of educating and learning, while (17.91%) agreed it concentrates more on research, with (4.17%) choosing critical thinking, (2.09%) confidence, commitment and independent, (1.91%) economic integration, (1.39%) creativity and vision, (17.91%) selecting all the above, but (17.57%) choosing none of the above and (13.74%) unable to answer (See Figure 3).



Student evaluations of teaching are very important to students, faculty, and administrators in higher education. Most universities employ student evaluations in some form as a measure of the efficacy of instructors and lectures, making them a key factor in determining not only the quality of a lecturer's performance but also the quality of the education provided. Thus, one must acknowledge this aspect of the reforming policy of the MoHESR-KRG. However, this is a complex process with many different stages and inherent risks. It will often require an investment of time and money before any positive effects become visible.

In addition, it is likely that feedback is most beneficial when it helps students reject erroneous hypotheses and provides cues as to directions for searching and strategizing. Such cues can sensitise students to the competence or strategy information in a task or situation (Hattie and Timperley, 2007:91-92). In the reforming policy the students' feedback framework is structured around a set of questions such as were the aims and messages of the topic clear and relevant? Were the topics useful and relevant for the aims of the course? Were the course books relevant to the topics? Did the teacher highlight the core topics and points in an easy-to-understand manner? Did the teacher arrive and conclude the lectures on time? Did the teacher behave in a professional manner during the lecture? Were the slides that used clear and comprehensive? Did the teacher leave any time for questions and answers? Did he/she answer them satisfactorily? And were the reading references new and relevant to the topic?

All these questions are important for the development of the teaching system, the importance of teaching. However, it is important to note that when doing this on the part of the students it may create problems, as many of the students are not able to evaluate the lesson on the basis of the truth of the lesson itself, which in many cases may be the student's assessment of the lesson and how to teach the teacher's personality. It therefore has a very negative impact on the education system. It seems that teachers who do not have a lot of student assignments in their lessons and say jokes while lecturing in classrooms or with students, while doing feedback

on the part of the students for their teachers and their lessons, those teachers achieve a very good result and feedback. However, teachers who with their students seriously and in the context of their lessons and assign their students to their lessons are as bad as they are when doing feedback from students to their colleague teachers and lectures. This may somewhat be connected to the environment and atmosphere of education system in the KRG. The implementation of this system in universities without any information on the part of the students in terms of importance, how to do it? It will not have a positive impact on the educational situation in the KRG. In addition, some teachers try to gain student's approval by facilitating students in their lessons, such as how to evaluate students? How to avoid being subjected to any kind of discipline by their university presidents? Because a part of the change in academic life means raising and changing the academic title of a teacher directly related to these students' feedback.

Another objective of the reforming policy was to advance critical thinking in the KRG's universities. It can be said that the critical thinking is the art of analysing and evaluating thinking with a view to improving it (Paul and Elder, 2006: 4). Therefore, one of the characteristics of critical thinking is developing thought and thinking, which is most important for the students. As a result the critical thinker raises vital questions and problems, formulating them clearly and precisely; gathers and assesses relevant information, using abstract ideas to interpret it effectively; comes to well-reasoned conclusions and solutions, testing them against relevant criteria and standards; thinks open-minded within alternative systems of thought, recognising and assessing, as need to be, their assumptions, implications, and practical consequences; and communicates effectively with others in figuring out solutions to complex problems. Critical thinking is, in short, self-directed, self-disciplined, self-monitored, and self-corrective thinking. It requires rigorous standards of excellence and mindful command of their use. It entails effective communication and problem-solving abilities and a commitment to overcome our native egocentrism and sociocentrism (Paul and Elder, 2006: 4).

Despite the implementation of the reforming policy the critical thinking and dialogue in the higher education institutions in the KRG is very weak because the higher education system in the KRG has been built on the banking system. Also, the tools and principles of this method are a great way for teaching and educating. So, those who use the banking approach, knowingly or unknowingly (for there are innumerable well-intentioned bank-clerk teachers who do not realise that they are serving only to dehumanise), fail to perceive that the deposits themselves contain contradictions about reality. But, sooner or later, these contradictions may lead formerly passive students to turn against their domestication and the attempt to domesticate reality. They may discover through existential experience that their present way of life is irreconcilable with their vocation to become fully human. They may perceive through their relations with reality that reality is really a process, undergoing constant transformation. If men are searchers and their ontological vocation is humanisation, sooner or later they may perceive the contradiction in which banking education seeks to maintain them, and then engage themselves in the struggle for their liberation (Freire, 1996:56).

According to this method it follows logically from the banking notion of consciousness that the educator's role is to regulate the way the world "enters into" the students. His task is to organise a process which already occurs spontaneously, to "fill" the students by making deposits of information which he considers to constitute true knowledge. And since men "receive" the world as passive entities, education should make them more passive still, and adapt them to the world. The educated man is the adapted man because he is better "fit" for the world. Translated into practice, this concept is well suited to the purposes of the oppressors, whose tranquillity rests on how well men fit the world the oppressors have created, and how little they question it.

The more completely the majority adapt to the purposes which the dominant minority prescribe for them (thereby depriving them of the right to their own purposes), the more easily the minority can continue to prescribe. The theory and practice of banking education serve this end quite efficiently. Verbalistic lessons, reading requirements, the methods for evaluating "knowledge," the distance between the teacher and the taught, and the criteria for promotion: everything in this ready-to-wear approach serves to obviate thinking (Freire, 1996:57).

The MoHERS-KRG makes the case that the education and training in the region is very traditional and behind the times. It neither helps students to develop their skills, nor does it assist them in thinking creatively or independently. In Iraq, students from preparatory school right through university training are taught merely to memorise materials and feed it back" (MoHESR-KRG, 2011: 28). Thus the reforming policy is presented in a way that convince students are privileged to have an educational opportunity and to learn anything and use it to help them to develop into more rational and intellectual human beings which serves as both a benefit to themselves and to their community (Majeed. 2012: 1).

Another aims of the reforming policy was to improve universities' materials resources and library. Although, many of universities in the KRG may have their own libraries, the structure of the library's design and the way it is accessed sources are very weak. Many academic resources are not available in libraries. Nowadays, there are many academic resources online, which are also not easy for students to access, because they need material costs, which is one of the problems of the libraries of universities in the KRG. One of the goals of the reforming of higher education, as mentioned in the Ministry's report 2009 is to pay attention to the students in order to make them to become the centre of learning and with the construction of individual critical thinking, but this can be achieved without sufficient learning sources.

In addition, the reforming policy explicitly aims to foster dialogue based on good relationships between teachers and students. However, since dialogical approaches both require and foster equality between participants teachers in the KRG need training on how to deal with and treat students to change the asymmetric relations between teachers and students. Thus, since the present ethos is so overbearingly teacher-centred, it is required a big change to allow and encourage students to communicate freely and discuss issues with teachers; and so to think critically and reflect upon the on-going structural violence that they experience in schools and society. Only through this they will be able to develop peace-orientated attitudes and behaviour.

Freire explains the relation between dialogue and critical thinking that the two work better together. In this respect, he states that only dialogue, which requires critical thinking, is also capable of generating critical thinking. Without dialogue there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education. Education which is able to resolve the contradiction between teacher and student takes place in a situation in which both address their act of cognition to the object by which they are mediated. Thus, the dialogical character of education as the practice of freedom does not begin when the teacher-student meets with the students-teachers in a pedagogical situation, but rather when the former first asks her-self or him-self *what* she or he will dialogue with the latter *about*. And preoccupation with the content of dialogue is really preoccupation with the program content of education (Freire, 1996: 73-74). He further argues that dialogue alone will not help students become "more fully human" and can only be fruitful if it is coupled with critical thinking. And, in turn, critical thinking lends itself to transformation. Critical thinking involves the process of identifying what is oppressive. However, even if the contents do relate to society, whilst teachers avoid this aspect, education will not be fruitful in terms of peacefully transforming society. Thus, it is important that teachers support this for both students and teachers to recognise what is oppressive, and how people are oppressed.

Critical thinking also involves taking action to resist what is perceived to be oppressive since awareness without action can be worse than useless, because knowing about human rights violations and doing nothing might incur more oppressive consequences than ignorance. This is especially important in the KRG. In addition, whilst human rights educators may aim to change social and cultural norms, in doing so they may create great resistance from friends, parents and students since human rights education contradicts the majority of people's beliefs in the KRG, making dialogue even more important (Mohammed, 2016:228 as cited Lyseight-Jones, 1991).

Meanwhile students become critical thinkers they can begin a process that could lead to what Freire terms "becoming fully human". He refers to this as *praxis* and defines it as "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (1996:60). The constant reflection and evaluation involved can enable students to think about what oppresses them and, hopefully, resolve it through dialogue. Freire (1996:106-107) argues that reflection without action is only "verbalism" and action without reflection is only "activism", and one without the other will not change reality. Thus, bringing real issues of human rights violation into classes can change students' attitudes and strengthen their commitment for change by building students' knowledge, skills, and awareness of the importance of changing the status quo. Moreover, school is a convenient place for students to mobilise, work together and share ideas.

The quality of education, style of teaching, testing, evaluation students and the relationship between students and teachers in higher education system in the KRG is traditional. The centralist system reflected in the higher education, because when a new system appears it needs a good atmosphere before it implemented. This has been seen that the quality assurance system increased the routine and corruption, besides trying to solve the poor quality of education.

Conclusion

After a decade of implementing the process in higher education system within the framework of the establishment quality assurance teaching the MoHESR-KRG could not achieve those goals. It is true that the reforming policy and the principle of quality assurance in the higher education system has had an impact on some aspects such as the preparation of lessons with PowerPoint by teachers and student's feedback for teachers and methods of their lessons. On the other hand, lecturers and teachers in the MoHESR, did not have strong views about the plan, particularly about the quality assurance. The reason for that was, first they did not involve in the discussion of the plan, but it has imposed on them with no reliable data and appropriate training. Second, as a consequence of this, they were forced to implement a reform plan that they did not have its ownership. Consequently, they were not able to exert influence directly on its implementation and the gaps between the desired plan and the actual outcome.

Students have not become the centre of learning and studying and the teachers become the helpers of them as it mentioned in the reforming process. The reason for that is students did not have acquaintance with the reformation process. The majority of them do not prepare themselves with reading books in the frame of their lessons. They want to stay on the old methods of teaching and learning of the old system that is by giving them *Malzama*⁽¹⁾ by the teachers and memorise what is written in it. The role of students are only hearing and memorising. When the teachers take exam from the students, the students memorise the

⁽¹⁾ *Malzam* is a few papers which include little information. The lecturers give these papers by PowerPoint to the students while lecturing or after explaining the subjects that are written in it. It is required from the students to write that information in the *malzama* in the exam papers.

information that the teachers gave them by *Malzama* to pass from the exam. Their aim is to pass and get a diploma so that they will be employed in the future.

The new system also has fostered a kind of routine and bureaucratic complexities in Kurdistan Region's universities. It is true that the old system was bureaucratic and authoritarian as well which have made a negative effect on the process of education and the level of universities. However, with the advent of the new system the bureaucratic culture become much stronger and more centralised in the administrations of the MoHESR most the decisions are centralised made by the MoHESR-KRG and the universities' presidency without any concern or attempt to include teachers and students in the process of decision-making.

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