

# The situation analysis of the international relations management and inter-university collaboration in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Iran, during the years 2005-2010

Alireza Farajollahi<sup>1</sup>, Abolghasem Amini<sup>2</sup>, Mohammad Reza Rashidi<sup>3</sup>,  
Abbas Shahbazi<sup>4</sup>, Saber Azami Aghdash<sup>5</sup>

## Original Article

### Abstract

**BACKGROUND:** Nowadays, with the development of science and communication, collaboration with other countries and universities seems inevitable to universities. The aim of this study was to analyze the situation of international relations management and inter-university collaboration (IRM-IUC) in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (TUMS), Iran, during the years 2005-2010.

**METHODS:** In this descriptive study, one checklist was used for analysis of the inter-university collaboration management and another one for the situation analysis of international relations management which included 4 sections itself. There were a total of 56 questions designed and developed through literature review and the expert panel.

**RESULTS:** The results indicated the poor performance of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences in the international relations management and inter-university collaboration fields. Most of the reviewed items had not been adequately paid attention to in the management of international relations and only one out of 14 evaluated items was considered in the field of inter-university collaboration.

**CONCLUSIONS:** In line with the overall globalization process, education and research have also become globalized processes, and as a result, it is necessary for universities to develop effective ties and relationships with other organizations. However, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences has not been doing quite optimally in this regard. Thus, it is suggested that, based on the shortcomings pointed out in this study, new appropriate plans and policies be set to develop fruitful and effective relations and correspondences with other universities and countries.

**KEYWORDS:** Situation analysis, International relations, Inter-university collaboration

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### Introduction

Today, universities have been affected by the world events and conditions and are considered as institutions that

are responsible for eliminating the gap between technologies and strengthening the scientific, educational and cultural exchanges between nations and cultures. On the other

1- Associate Professor, Medical Education Research Center, Department of Medical Physics, School of Medicine, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

2- Professor, Medical Education Research Center, Department of Medical Education, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

3- Professor, Research Center for Pharmaceutical Nanotechnology (RCPN), Department of Pharmacology, School of Pharmacy, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

4- Associate Professor, Research Center of Infectious and Tropical Diseases, Department of Parasitological, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

5- Tabriz Health Services Management Research Center, Department of Health Services Management, School of Management and Medical Informatics, Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, Tabriz, Iran

**Corresponding Author:** Saber Azami Aghdash, Email: [saberazami@yahoo.com](mailto:saberazami@yahoo.com)

hand, the growing social relations in the present century have made various fields of social life including higher education system face with two distinct but parallel phenomena, i.e., globalization meaning unification and internationalization meaning collaboration and partnership.<sup>1</sup> The internationalization of higher education has provided many positive outcomes such as developing intercultural communication skills,<sup>2</sup> increasing fields of study,<sup>3</sup> increasing international cooperation, and strengthening scientific research.<sup>4</sup>

The universities can troubleshoot when their education and research are of good quality. One of the ways for improving the quality in the universities of developing countries is establishing international relations.<sup>5-7</sup> On the other hand, today, developments in management knowledge have made having an evaluation system inevitable. So that, the lack of evaluation in various dimensions including how to use the resources and facilities, personnel, objectives and strategies, is considered as one of the symptoms of sick organization. In order to understand the desirability and quality of their activities, especially in complex and dynamic environments, any organization needs systematic evaluation. However, absence of evaluation and control in a system is considered as the absence of communication with internal and external environment which results in aging or even the death of the organization.<sup>8-10</sup>

Since the scientific relationships in the universities has become more specialized and complicated, the new communication technologies and tools have been risen, subsequently the demand for online scientific/specialized services, easily accessible and with high quality at the same time has grown.

Due to the importance of planning and evaluation in management, the special importance of the situation analysis in determining strategies and decision-making

and the apparent lack of information on the internal and external environments of university relations management, the present study aimed to carry out situation analysis of structure and performance of international relations management and inter-university collaboration (IRM-IUC) in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences (TUMS), Iran; the results could be used to provide appropriate strategies for fulfilling the possibility of identifying and analyzing the current situation, strengths and weaknesses of the activities, offering services, future needs and objectives.

## Methods

In this descriptive study, we reviewed the situation analysis of international relations management and inter-university collaboration in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences during the years 2005-2010. The sampling was census and all of the documents and the data were examined.

The data collection tool was two checklists provided by 8 research experts. First, the checklists were designed using the literature review in the foreign and domestic University web sites, databases and search engines; then, within six sessions of expert's panel, the checklists were finalized. The reliability and validity of the checklists were evaluated by test-retest ( $\alpha = 0.7$  for both) and content validity, respectively.

One checklist was used for situation analysis of inter-university communication management and the other for the situation analysis of international relations management which included 4 sections. There were a total of 56 questions in the checklists. The characteristics of the used checklist are explained below.

1. The checklist on situation analysis of inter-university communication management (14 questions).

2. The checklist on analysis of the management of international affairs. It includes:

- 2.1. The checklist related to the physical-

virtual space of international relations management (6 questions).

2.2. The checklist on personnel and financial situation of international relations management (4 questions).

2.3. The checklist on the equipment and means of the international relations management (4 questions).

2.4. The checklist on duties of the international relations management (22 questions).

The checklists were filled by two researchers using the available records and documents in the research deputy of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences, and examining the documents available in the International Affair Management Office and conducting observations and interviews with the related authorities. The necessary permits for data collection were obtained from the authorities. The extracted data was analyzed by SPSS software 19.0 (SPSS In., Chicago, IL, USA) using descriptive statistics.

## Results

The situation analysis of the international relations management in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences outcomes are shown in table 1.

In the physical-virtual aspect, the only case observed among out of all other cases was the existence of a library in the international affairs office.

In the personnel and financial aspects, 50% of the cases were considered. Out of the 10 positions allocated to this unit there was a position with an asterisk (i.e. the position which cannot be filled by anyone) and there were also two vacant positions. The survey of financial and personnel situation revealed that only 20% percent of the staff was working in accordance with the duties assigned. As far as equipment was concerned, of the 10 pieces deemed necessary in the study, only 6 pieces were available.

In the field of international relations management, the only Item observed was the

existence of a job description for the staff; however, the job description of international affairs management did included most of the items under investigation.

Table 2 has demonstrated the situation of inter-university and academic communities relations at Tabriz University of Medical Sciences.

Of the 14 reviewed cases, only the packages introducing the specialized and scientific features of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences to the academic communities and other universities got "yes" answer which included English catalogs of the university.

Out of various tasks/activities concerning communications with other universities and academic communities, there were employees for university's subscription in academic societies and making mutual contract; even they were not specifically involved in these activities. As far as the mutual contracts with other universities and scientific societies were concerned, there were 20 such agreements in the period of our study; yet only in four cases had practical measures been taken to meet pre-specified goals.

## Discussion

Nowadays, organizations of different sorts are leading their lives in a dynamic and ever-changing environment; in such circumstances, the success of almost all organizations hinges on their ability to adapt and adjust themselves to the environmentally changing factors. Organizational environment consists of people, things, organizations, institutions, systems and other environmental factors which, in one way or another, either in the provision of resources the organization would need or through using the goods and services produced and provided by the organization itself. Also, the organizational environment could be thought as consisting of all the factors influencing the functioning of an institution and which an organization would need to adapt itself to for

**Table1.** Situation Analysis of international relations management in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences

A. Physical-virtual situation analysis of international relations management		Yes	No	D. Situation analysis of international relations management duties		Yes	No
International relations management owns a meeting room.			✓	There is documented job description international relations manager.			✓
International relations management owns independent work place.			✓	There is documented job description international relations staff.		✓	
International relations management owns library.		✓	✓	There is ceremonial unit in international relations management.			✓
International relations management owns teleconferencing facilities.			✓	International relations management owns strategic plan.			✓
International relations management owns office and special office assistant.			✓	There is client-oriented plan in international relations management.			✓
International relations management owns updated website.			✓	Respecting clients program has been implemented international relations management.			✓
B. Personnel and financial situation analysis of international relations management.		Yes	No	The flowcharts of international relations management processes have been provided.			✓
International relations management owns independent organizational chart.		✓		International relations management owns online system for issuing certificates.			✓
All posts of international relations were completed.			✓	International relations management owns exclusive database for its activities.			✓
International relations manager is faculty member.		✓		There is assessment system international relations manager and staff.			✓
International relations management owns exclusive budget.			✓	There is documented assessment system for international relations.			✓
C. The check lists of examining the equipment of international relations management.		Yes	No				
Computer and peripheral equipment		✓		There is a timetable for the presence of international relations manager.			✓
Archive file			✓	Notification of meetings and conferences		✓	
International relations management owns Fax machine		✓		Inviting foreign professors and experts		✓	
Copy machine			✓	Doing the affairs related to international correspondence of professors		✓	
Camera		✓		Doing the affairs related to subscribing individuals in international communities		✓	
Printing machine		✓		Duties of international relations management			
Unlock code telephone lines		✓		Doing affairs related to foreign students			✓
Scanner			✓	Coordination with international relations of the related ministry			✓
Video projector			✓	Doing the affairs related to relationship with foreign universities		✓	
Equipment for holding public meetings		✓		Doing the affairs related to foreign currency for publications and books		✓	
				Doing the affairs related to sabbatical and scholarship		✓	

**Table 2.** Situation analysis of inter-university relations and academic communities of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences

Items	Yes	No	Items	Yes	No
There are University policies and strategies in the field of inter-university relations.	✓		The stakeholders have been informed about the agreements and their results.		✓
There is a certain plan for university subscription in the international communities.	✓		Some efforts have been done to achieve the objectives of the agreements.		✓
There is a certain plan for faculty members subscription in the international communities.	✓		There is a certain process to recruit professors of honor.		✓
There are certain packages introducing the specialized and scientific aspects of university to the academic communities.	✓		There is a database Iranian specialist and experts living in other countries.		✓
There is a plan for holding joint education courses with other universities.	✓		There are experts in the departments to do the affairs related to international relations.		✓
There is a flowchart for holding the suggested joint education courses with other universities.	✓		In an effort has been done to identify and introduce scientific centers registering inventions and genes.		✓
There has been an effort to identify the body grant.	✓		Has the academic tours been anticipated for the relations between domestic and foreign universities?		✓

its survival and keeping on its development.

The results of the present study showed that the Tabriz University of Medical Sciences had acted rather poorly in international relations management and inter-university relations.

In the study conducted by Khorasani and Zamani-Manesh,<sup>11</sup> four strategies, namely the communicational, political, service-related and academic strategies, were found to be effective in the development of international relations from the perspective of faculty members in Shahid Beheshti University of Medical Sciences (Tehran, Iran). The study has mentioned that supporting sabbatical for the faculty members and students, holding international and joint conferences and workshops with other universities, having documented and appropriate plans and policies, consistent and appropriate communication with relevant government and ministries, information exchange with other universities are the options for international relations management and globalization of the universities. In the present study, none of was found to have received adequate attention and all has been properly considered.

In his study, Arasteh<sup>12</sup> stresses the role of international scientific cooperation; adding

that international relations of Iran universities with the world top universities are limited and suggests that an office be established with the goal of creating and binding such ties. These results were in line with the results of the present study. It is urgent that the authorities and policy makers pay due attention to qualitative and quantitative development of international relations. It seems that the expansion of international scientific cooperation and academic links with other universities could pave the way for academic achievement in the universities of Iran help to enhance the quality of universities.

This study revealed that the facilities for proper management of international relations in Tabriz University of Medical Sciences were not in good shape and they do not seem to be adequate for the proper and effective management of international relations. In this regard, Fathi-Vajargah et al.<sup>13</sup> emphasized that increasing the funding and facilities of the university, along with effective management of international relations and enhancing the quality of higher education are essential in Iran. Although, it seems that increasing facilities including manpower, material, resources and etc. cannot be

expected to yield remarkable results in the short run, one might hope to witness significant improvements over a longer period of time. Accordingly, the policy makers should not lose heart at the short-term investments not leading to the expected results, particularly in the field of research; rather, they must endeavor to enhance the efficiency of such investment through appropriate long-term planning.

Based on examining some of the points and items above and the analyzed questions, we drew the conclusion that Tabriz University of Medical Sciences lacks well identified and ascertained rules and policies or plans for efficient management international relations or even if it does, they have never been operationalized in practice. In this regard, Fathi-Vajargah et al.<sup>14</sup> noted that the existence of transparent and documented regulations and policies are essential for a proper and effective management of international relations.

One of the shortcomings of the present work could have to do with the fact that the files, records and documents examined could have been incomplete, which might well have affected the findings even though the researchers conducted interviews and observations to lower such odds.

Regarding the subject and nature of such studies, using qualitative research methods including semi-structured in-depth interviews and focus group discussions can be an effective way of studying and situation analysis.

## Conclusion

Nowadays, developing relations with other universities and domestic and foreign academic communities is regarded as one of the important strategies to increase the quantity and more importantly, to enhance the quality of the education and research provided and conducted at universities.

The results of the present study showed that the performance of Tabriz University of Medical Sciences in the field international relations was unsatisfactory. Tabriz University of Medical Sciences has had a rather poor performance in the management of international relations and there are still quite a few shortcomings and weaknesses in this regard.

It is suggested that the information and findings arrived at in this research be optimally used in future planning, policy making and taking effective measures in order to improve the management of international relations and correspondences with other universities home and abroad.

## Conflict of Interests

Authors have no conflict of interest.

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