

Quality of Higher Education: Assessing the Quality of a Political Science Program in Egypt
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Abstract

In an attempt to assess the quality of political science education in Egypt, this research investigates the quality of one of the political science programs in an Egyptian private university, which is the British University in Egypt (BUE). Using mixed methods, this research highlights and analyzes the main findings of assessing the political science teaching and learning in the BUE. In assessing the quality of political science teaching and learning in the BUE, three particular dimensions were evaluated, which are 1) knowledge of political science core facts and theories, 2) reading comprehension skills and 3) critical thinking. When comparing the change in year two and year four students, positive results were found with regards to students' critical thinking. The increase in the levels of students' critical thinking in year four compared to year two was quite obvious as the percent of students with strong critical thinking in BUE increased massively from 0% in year two to 18% in year four. Variables such as the school GPA, non-Egyptian high school degree and not meeting professors during office hours despite their presence and accessibility were found significant to students' levels of critical thinking. In addition, variables such as students' participation in activities outside university and number of studying hours outside class were found significant to students' reading comprehension.

Keywords: Quality, Political Science, Assessment, knowledge, Reading Comprehension, Critical Thinking.

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During the past 20 years, more emphasis were placed, especially by policy-makers in West Europe, on the quality of higher education.¹ As a result to the increasing emphasis on higher education, more efforts were stimulated to study and assess the quality of higher education. Stewart and Felicetti (1991) and Tomovick et al. (1996) assessed students' satisfaction towards business education either on the undergraduate or post graduate level.² McElwee and Redman (1993) attempted to assess the quality of higher education in general with reference to intangibility, heterogeneity and inseparability.³ Parasuraman, et al. (1985⁴, 1988⁵, 1994⁶), on the other hand, emphasized consistency of behavior or uniform quality. Apparently, very limited literature attempted to assess the quality of political science education, in particular, which points out a gap that this study attempts to fill.

In an attempt to assess the quality of political science education in Egypt, this research investigates the quality of one of the political science programs in an Egyptian private university, which is the British University in Egypt (BUE).⁷ As Stensaker (2007) states, quality is a broad concept.⁸ According to Vlasceanu et al. (2004), it is also a multi-dimensional and dynamic.⁹ In assessing the quality of political science teaching and learning in the BUE, three particular dimensions were selected to reflect quality in political science education. These dimensions are: 1) knowledge of political science core facts and theories, 2) reading comprehension skills and 3) critical thinking. Using mixed methods, this research highlights and analyzes the main findings of assessing the political science teaching and learning in the BUE. This research is divided into

¹ Liu, S., Tan, M. and Meng, Z. (2015), "Reassessment of expectations as a comparison standard on measuring service quality: implications for further research", *Higher Education Evaluation and Development*, Vol. 9 No. 2, December, pp. 17-34.

² See: Stewart, K. and Felicetti, L. (1991), "Marketing a public university to international students", *Journal of Professional Services Marketing*, Vol. 7 No. 1, pp. 67-74 and Tomovick C., Jones S., Al-Khatip J., Baradwaj B.G. (1996), An assessment of the service quality provided to foreign students at U.S. business school, *Journal of Education for Business*, No. 70, pp. 130-137.

³ McElwee, G. and Redman, T. (1993), "Upward Appraisal in Practice: An Illustrative Example Using the Qualed Model", *Education + Training*, Vol. 35 Issue 2.

⁴ Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1985), "A conceptual model of service quality and implications for future research", *Journal of Marketing*, Vol. 49, Fall, pp. 41-50.

⁵ Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1988), "SERVQUAL: a multiple-item scale for measuring consumer perceptions of service quality", *Journal of Retailing*, Spring, pp. 12-40.

⁶ Parasuraman, A., Zeithaml, V.A. and Berry, L.L. (1994), "Reassessment of expectations as a comparison standard on measuring service quality: implications for further research", *Higher Education Evaluation and Development* 9:2 (December 2015): 17-34, Vol. 9 No. 2, January, pp. 17-34.

⁷ This research is financed by a generous grant from Ford Organization to assess the quality of political science education in Egypt. The research was piloted in four Egyptian universities selected purposefully, two public and two private. This research aims to highlight and analyze the main findings related to one of the private universities among these four universities, which is the British University in Egypt (BUE).

⁸ Stensaker, B. (2007). Impact of quality processes. In L. Bollaert et al. (Eds.), *Embedding quality culture in higher education* (pp. 59-62). Brussels, Belgium: European University Association.

⁹ Vlasceanu et al. (2004), Quality Assurance and Accreditation: A Glossary of Basic Terms and Definitions; Bucharest, unesco –CEBRS, paper on higher education. <http://www.cepesro/publications/Defavlt.html>.

four parts. At a glance, the first part provides a background about the British University in Egypt and the Political Science Department there. The second part explains the methodology utilized for data collection. The third part highlights the main findings related to the BUE and attempts to analyze these findings while comparing the results of the second year (first year after preparatory year) students with those of the fourth year (last year) students. The last part provides concluding and final remarks.

I. Background

In 2005, the British University in Egypt (BUE) was established by a Presidential Decree as an Egyptian private university operating within the framework of Egyptian educational law and regulations. The BUE, which was inaugurated a year later by the Prince of Wales, was set to provide a British-style education with an ethos consistent with the UK academic standards and quality code for higher education.¹⁰ Since then, the BUE has been supported by a Board of Trustees comprising individuals drawn from UK and Egyptian business, public life and educational sectors whose professional and academic experience and emphasis on critical and analytical thinking and on producing graduates of UK standards for key sectors of the Egyptian economy has been integrated in the BUE vision, mission and strategic plan¹¹. The Board of trustees includes important public and scientific figures, such as Sir Magdi Yacoub, Sir Derek Plumbly, Sir Richard Ottaway, the Baroness Symons of Vernham Dean, Ambassador and Former Secretary-General of the Arab League Amr Mousa, Dr. Farouk El Baz, Prof. Mostafa El Feki and Prof. Mostafa El Sayed.¹²

The BUE has always recognized the value of research either on its own or as a method to enrich and improve the quality of education provided by the BUE staff. In the period from 2011-2016, the BUE acquired the highest number of citation per publication while Cairo University came in the third position and the AUC in the ninth after the German University in Egypt. In Top 10% most cited worldwide for the period 2011-16, the BUE publications came the first among the publications of the various universities in Egypt while Cairo University came in the fifth position and the AUC in the eighth. In Top 1% most cited worldwide for the period 2011-16, again the BUE publications came the first among the publications of the various universities in Egypt while Cairo University came in the fourth position and the AUC in the tenth.¹³

The BUE was established initially with seven faculties: Engineering, Informatics and Computer Science, Business Administration, Economics and Political Science, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Communication and Mass Media, and Nursing. Quite recently, the BUE has added up two more

¹⁰ The British University in Egypt (2017), History, retrieved from <http://www.bue.edu.eg/index.php/about-bue/bue-history>.

¹¹The British University in Egypt (2017), University Strategic Plan 2012 - 2017, retrieved from <http://www.bue.edu.eg/pdfs/TeachingAndLearning/BUE%20Strategic%20Plan-2.pdf>

¹² The British University in Egypt (2017), Board of Trustees, retrieved from <http://www.bue.edu.eg/index.php/bue-s-leadership/boards/board-of-trustees>.

¹³ Data was retrieved from SciVal and Scopus. Statistic from SciVal and Scopus were prepared for only 5 years back (See annex (2)).

faculties, which are the faculties of Law, and Humanities and Arts. In the 2016/2017 academic year, the total number of students enrolled in BUE has reached 9228 students.¹⁴

One of the faculties in the BUE is the Faculty of Business Administration, Economics and Political Science (BAEPS). In a very short time, BAEPS made a great progress. It succeeded to cooperate with two UK validating partners which are Loughborough University and London South Bank University¹⁵. In addition, it built a strong reputation and became a distinguished competitor through its globally oriented programs that provide students with a solid theoretical foundation as well as hands-on practical skills in the fields of their specializations. Achieving such high quality standards was possible thanks to the UK academic standards and quality code for higher education. BAEPS, which started in 2006 with a total number of students of 136 students, currently includes 2257 students enrolled. Hence, it has grown to become the second biggest faculty in the BUE after Engineering.¹⁶

BAEPS, which offers UK research-led learning experience, includes three Academic Departments: Business Administration which offers a Bachelor of Business Studies degree, Economics which offers a Bachelor of Science degree, and Political Science which offers a Bachelor of Arts degree. The Political Science Department, whose 40%-60% of its academic staff are foreigners from UK, Germany and other foreign countries, raises the slogan of 'Learn How to think not what to think'; a slogan that is visibly hanged on every wall and in every classroom in the Faculty. The aim of the department is not only to compete with other Political Science departments in Egypt, but even more to compete with regional and international universities. The Political Science students in the BUE enjoys access to a state of the art library which offers a range of study options and provides an extensive range of services including eBooks, eJournals, Study Guides, Workshops, as well as information on Academic Honesty and access to Turnitin accounts, which positively influence their academic standards and reduces chances of plagiarism.¹⁷

II. Methodology and Data Collection

This research is based on a combined methodology (mixed methods). Quantitative data were designed to be collected from the teaching faculty in the political science department followed by a lengthier questionnaire for a smaller sample of teaching faculty for the second and fourth year students. In addition, another set of questionnaires were designed for students in the second and fourth years of political science to assess for example their understanding of core facts and theories in political science. In addition, students had to read a passage based on a blog post (originally in English) and answer few questions about the reading. On the other hand, qualitative data was collected about students' critical thinking. In that particular regards, students had to answer an online critical thinking (CT) assessment, which is the California Critical

¹⁴The British University in Egypt (2017), Annual Growth rate for Enrolled Students, retrieved from <http://www.bue.edu.eg/index.php/bue-strategy/statistics/growth-indicators>.

¹⁵The British University in Egypt (2017), University Strategic Plan 2012 - 2017, retrieved from <http://www.bue.edu.eg/pdfs/TeachingAndLearning/BUE%20Strategic%20Plan-2.pdf>

¹⁶The British University in Egypt (2017), Annual Growth rate for Enrolled Students, retrieved from <http://www.bue.edu.eg/index.php/about-bue/bue-history>.

¹⁷ The British University in Egypt (2017), Library Description, retrieved from <http://lib.bue.edu.eg/index.php/librarydescription/#>.

Thinking Skills Test. In overall, the methods developed and their correlated data collection tools aimed to assess the extent to which the political science students in the BUE, during their study years: a) learn core facts and theories in the field of political science, b) enhance their reading skills, and c) improve their critical thinking ability.

The fieldwork took place after formal approvals were secured from the Dean of BAEPS. Formal consents of interviewees were also ensured all through the data collection process. Quantitative data were collected from a sample of 75 students who were asked about their knowledge of political science core concepts: 39 students from the second year and 36 students from the fourth year were interviewed. Part of this sample answered the other two tests assessing their reading comprehension skills or their Ability to read a basic academic article sample and their critical thinking skills. Table (1) below provides an overview of the sample including their socio-economic background according to gender, secondary school language of instructions, sector of secondary school and wealth. On the other hand, qualitative data were collected from a sample of 5 students from each year and some classes were observed in both years. Data were collected through computer-based questionnaires which took place at BAEPS computer labs. While the samples might look small on the surface, they represent, in reality, a considerable percentage of the students enrolled in year two and four. Students who answered the student questionnaire, for example, counted for 49% and 59% of the students enrolled in year two and four respectively. The percent of students who took the online critical thinking test was lower, however, than the percent of the students who took the student questionnaire and the student reading comprehension.

Table (1): An overview of the BUE Sample

| Students Interviews Sample | | | | | | |
|---|----------------------|--|---------------|--|---------------------|--------------|
| Type of Interview | | Second Year (total 66 students) | | Fourth Year (total 73 students) | | Total |
| Student Questionnaire | | 39 (59%) | | 36 (49%) | | 75 |
| Student Reading Comprehension | | 37 (63%) | | 28 (38%) | | 65 |
| Student – Online Critical Thinking | | 27 (40%) | | 17 (23%) | | 44 |
| Gender | | | | | | |
| Male | | Female | | Total | | |
| 29.3% | | 70.7% | | | | 75 |
| Main Language of Instruction in Secondary School | | | | | | |
| Arabic | | English | | Total | | |
| 13.3% | | 86.7% | | | | 75 |
| Sector of Secondary School | | | | | | |
| Public | | Private | | Total | | |
| 12.0% | | 88.0% | | | | 75 |
| Wealth Quintiles | | | | | | |
| Year | Least Wealthy | Less Wealthy | Middle | More Wealthy | Most Wealthy | Total |
| Second Yr | 7.7% | 15.4% | 35.9% | 17.9% | 23.1% | 39 |
| Fourth Yr | 5.6% | 22.2% | 19.4% | 16.7% | 36.1% | 36 |

Some difficulties were met, however, during data collection. One of the problems was accessibility to labs, which were often reserved to economics and business students from the same faculty. Hence, the research team had to resort sometimes to labs outside the faculty. In

addition, while many students showed enthusiasm in participating in the research and in knowing the results of their online critical thinking assessment, a number of students were not quite cooperative. They did not even sound to appreciate the certificate they were going to receive in acknowledgment of their participation in the research. For the fourth year students, these attitudes can be understood by realizing the loads of dissertations and research papers which students had to submit in particular deadlines, which made them feel pressured and less willing to participate in the research. In their fourth year, students are fully aware the British system criteria of assessment for their papers has grown up very high and, hence, requires further reading, analysis and critical thinking, which are quite time-consuming. Lastly, as the students in BUE are offered multiple opportunities to attend workshops, training and internships, they did not highly value an additional certificate, unlike students in other universities who may not have access to such opportunities.

Luckily, however, the teaching system in the BUE made it easier to reach the full cohort in the beginning or the end of a lecture which the full cohort of students are attending unlike universities that function on the American system of liberal education, for example, where only very few courses include the full cohort and the political science students from a given cohort may be found in many different classes.

III. Research Results and Findings

As mentioned earlier, the research methods and their correlated data collection tools aimed to assess the BUE political science students learning of core facts and theories in political science, their reading skills and, finally, their critical thinking ability. Hence, this part of the research aims to explain the main findings related to these three dimensions on learning, reading and critical thinking. In addition to qualitative analysis which the study attempts to offer along the findings, the final section of this part explores the possible causations and presents some factors that might have affected the BUE results related particularly to critical thinking.

1. Knowledge of Political science Core Facts and Theories

Throughout the questionnaires, around 10 questions attempted to assess students' knowledge of core concepts and theories in political science including political parties, political systems and international relations. While five basic questions were posed to both second and fourth year students, five other more advanced questions were posed only to the fourth year students. In total and as it appears in table (2), the average of the fourth year student's correct answers to the knowledge questions (42.3%) is much higher than the second year students' correct answers (19.52%). Despite that the second group of questions, which were only posed to the fourth year students, were more advanced than the first 5 political science knowledge questions, the fourth year students did well in answering these questions correctly and scored over 65%. In fact, one of these advanced questions, which is the 'Approaches in International Relations' question, was answered correctly by more than 83% of the fourth year students. A closer look at the results of the first 5 political science knowledge questions (in table 2) shows, however, that the average of the correct answers of both second and fourth year students is almost the same (19.5%) and the average of the wrong answers is also almost the same (80.5%). Both second and fourth year students did not answer well that particular group of questions which, though were basic, required memorization of definitions instead of analysis or understanding.

Table (2): Results of Students' Answers the Basic Political Science Knowledge Questions

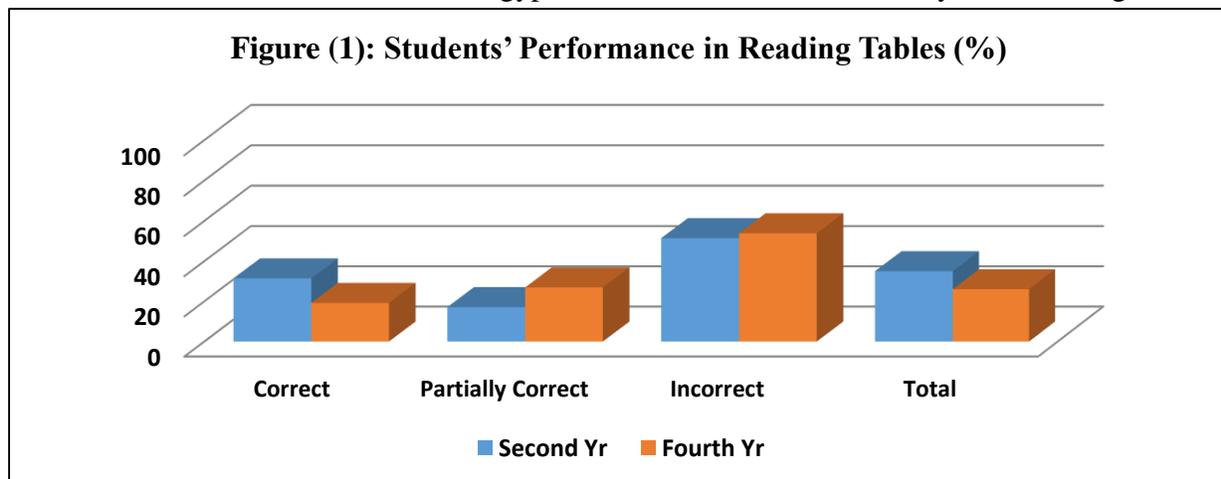
| Question | Second Year | | Fourth Year | | Statistically significant differences between the two years (Chi-Square test) |
|---|--------------------|------------------|--------------------|------------------|---|
| | Correct Answer (%) | Wrong Answer (%) | Correct Answer (%) | Wrong Answer (%) | Sig |
| Definition of Political Parties | 34.3 | 65.7 | 16.7 | 83.3 | 0.075 |
| Definition of Political Participation | 8.6 | 91.4 | 13.9 | 86.1 | 0.371 |
| Differentiating types of political systems | 19.4 | 80.6 | 2.9 | 97.1 | 0.030 |
| Modes of political socialization | 17.1 | 82.9 | 27.8 | 72.2 | 0.216 |
| Definition of a citizen | 18.2 | 81.8 | 36.1 | 63.9 | 0.081 |
| The First 5 questions' Average Answers | 19.52 | 80.48 | 19.48 | 80.52 | |
| Functions of Interest Groups | -- | -- | 76.7 | 33.3 | -- |
| Approaches in International Relations | -- | -- | 83.3 | 16.7 | -- |
| Approach in Comparative Politics | -- | -- | 52.8 | 47.2 | -- |
| Political Thought of Plato | -- | -- | 36.1 | 63.9 | -- |
| Identification of UN Bodies | -- | -- | 77.1 | 22.9 | -- |
| The Extra 5 questions' Average Answers | -- | -- | 65.2 | 36.8 | -- |
| Total Average Answers | 19.52 | 80.48 | 42.34 | 58.66 | -- |

A note: A series of simple OLS and ordinary logistic regressions were conducted. Four different sets of variables were tested on how far they could explain students' performance on the three tests mentioned above.

2. Reading Comprehension Skills

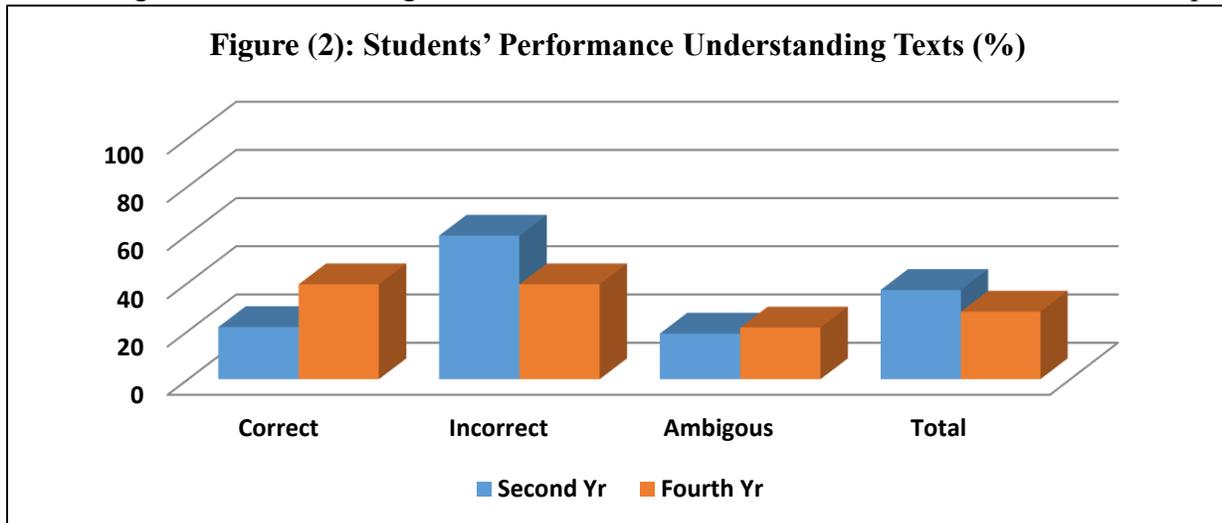
A section of the questionnaires assessed the students' ability to read a basic political science article which included some tables and figures and answer two questions. This part of the assessment is considered more sophisticated than the previous one. It tended to assess students' ability to read and understand numerical tables as well as their overall ability to understand texts.

Students were given a text of less than 600 words about the 2011 Egyptian uprising. In an attempt to assess the students' ability to read and understand numerical tables, the students were asked to spot the inconsistency between the numbers in the text given to them and some tables that included data from the 2009 Egypt Labor Market Panel Survey. In that regards, the



percentage of year two students who succeeded to spot the inconsistency between the numbers in the text and the numerical tables (31.4%) was higher than year four students (19.2%) as shown in figure (1). This can be explained by looking at the amount and placement of BUE courses that emphasize quantitative or numerical data analysis. Courses that involve quantitative or numerical data analysis in the Political Science Department in BUE are mainly two courses, which are ‘Statistics for Political Science’ and ‘Research Methods’. Both courses are placed in the preparatory year (year one) and involve only preliminary understanding of the foundations of quantitative analysis. Hence, as appears from the findings, year two students who have just taken those courses in year one were more able than year four in gearing the correct answers. Introducing more courses that involve quantitative or numerical data analysis throughout the following years would have been expected to improve students’ performance in reading and understanding numerical tables.

On the other hand and unlike year four performance in reading and understanding numerical tables, their performance in understanding texts was far better than year two’s ability to understand texts. Students were asked questions such as “Does education result in strong economic growth?” “According to the author, what is the causal direction of this relationship?”,



“Does education result in economic development?”, “Does economic growth result in a more educated population?”, etc... As shown in figure (2), around 39.3% of year four students succeeded to answer these questions correctly while only 21.6% of year two students answered them correctly. Clearly, year four students’ performance surpassed the performance of year two students. Apparently, since these questions involved qualitative rather than numerical or quantitative analysis, year four students’ performance was better than year two student’s performance as it reflected the upgrade in their level of understanding with each additional course they take over the years. It is worth noting that only one national university along with the BUE witnessed an improvement in the levels of students understanding to texts.

Furthermore, in the interviews with the students, the students extensively reported that the teaching faculty in BUE highly depends on peer-reviewed texts as their main reading materials instead of a professor’s book, or a “university” book, that may summarize the content of the course, and are less likely to be peer reviewed. As appears in table (3), the majority of fourth

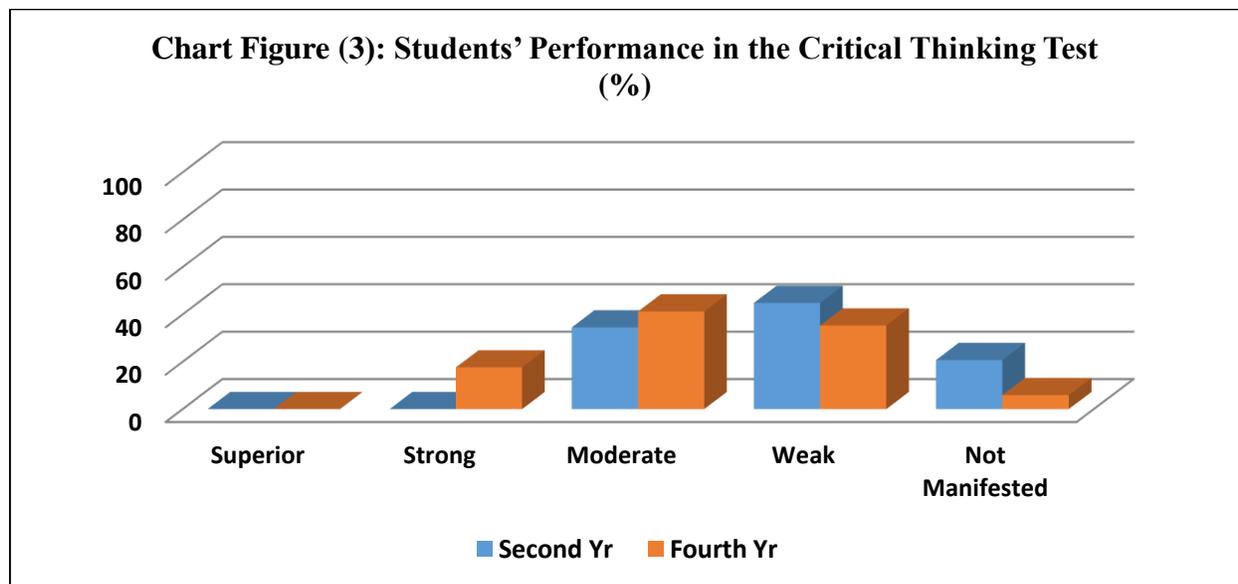
year students reported that the academic staff uses only peer reviewed materials (82.2%) compared to 58.7% in year two. The BUE highly surpassed the four assessed universities in using peer-reviewed sources. Using various types of readings teaches the students to spot authors' opinions and points of views, acknowledge differences among authors and attempt to understand and analyze texts on their own.

Table (3): Results on Materials Used in Classes / Taught

| Type of Reading Materials Used in Classes / Taught | Second | Fourth |
|--|-------------|-------------|
| Mostly Non-Peer Reviewed | 6.3 | 1.2 |
| Mostly Peer Reviewed | 34.9 | 16.6 |
| All Peer Reviewed | 58.7 | 82.2 |
| Total | 126 | 163 |

3. Critical Thinking

Assessing the students' level of critical thinking was carried out through the California Critical Thinking Skills Test which was purchased for that purpose. Despite the unavailability of any superior answers, the findings on the BUE students' performance in the critical thinking test were the most impressive ones. Among the four tested universities, the BUE was the only university that has experienced a leap in the students' levels of critical thinking. While the levels of critical thinking in most of the universities under study deteriorated or witnessed a slight improvement, which did not exceed 2.5%, the levels of students in the BUE having strong critical thinking increased massively from 0% in year two to 18% in year four. As shown in figure (3), the levels of students in the BUE having moderate critical thinking also increased from 35% in year two to 41% in year four. Realizing that the aim of the department is not only to compete with other Political Science departments in Egypt, but even more to compete regionally and internationally, it was necessary for the department to prioritize critical thinking and analysis.

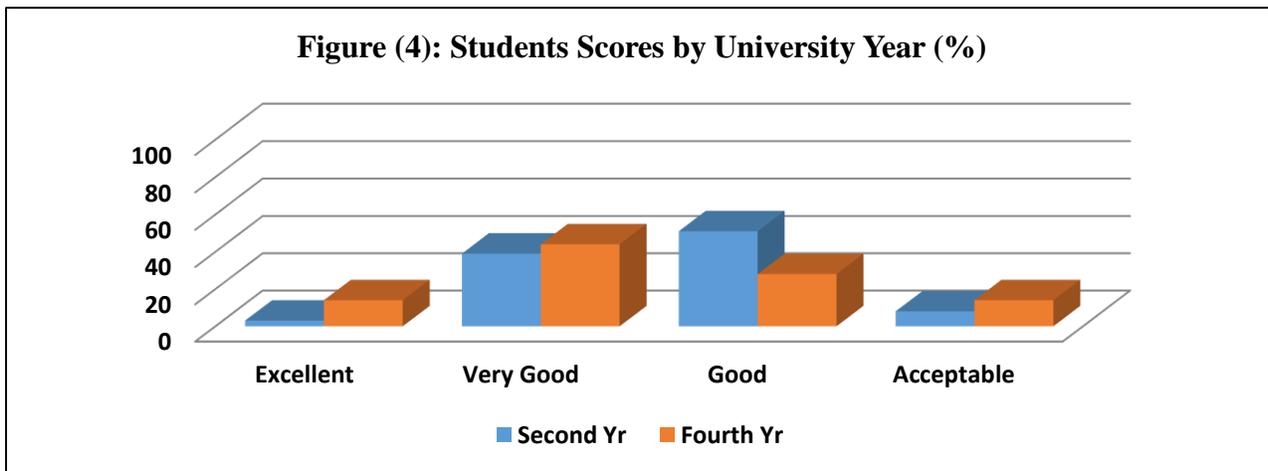


As a part of the British assessment criteria for written assignments and research papers, students have to demonstrate critical thinking in their writings and research papers. Starting degree year three, some critical evaluation is expected for the student to receive a grade of 'C'. Receiving grades of 'B' and 'A' requires more extensive critical thinking and even original contribution. The British assessment criteria are designed to grow stronger from one year to another, reaching its utmost level in year four. Hence, it is expected that students grow intellectually and critically stronger in their final year. In the interviews with the students, it was evident that students in BUE have obligatory written assignments and research papers in almost all courses. As appears in table (4), the percentage of students who reported that they have written assignments was always above 94% which explains the students' devotion to critical thinking. The only course which fourth year students do not have a written assignment for is the final project module which though does not involve a particular assignment, it helps the students into writing their final dissertation.

Table (4): Results on Written assignments

| Having Written assignments | Second | Fourth |
|-----------------------------------|---------------|---------------|
| No course | 0.0 | 0.0 |
| Some courses | 2.6 | 5.6 |
| All courses | 97.4 | 94.4 |

With time, fourth year students' critical thinking improve and surpass the second year students' performance, which reflects positively on their GPA. In comparing the GPA of year four students with year two students as shown in figure (4), it appears that while only 3% of year two students achieved excellent scores, 14% of year four students achieved excellent scores. In addition, while only 39% of year two students achieved excellent scores, 44% of year four students achieved excellent scores. The BUE was the only university among the four universities to show such improvement. It becomes evident from these findings how the BUE overall vision



and BAEPS vision, in particular, in becoming a high quality educational institution that promotes analytical thinking and produce graduates of UK standards.

Finally, critical thinking was further emphasized by the fact that about 75% or fewer of the teaching faculty in BUE received their highest degree from prestigious international universities. Such universities normally emphasize critical thinking and analytical skills, which the BUE teaching staff subsequently pass to their students. In general and as mentioned earlier, the Political Science Department in the BUE raises the slogan of 'Learn How to think not what to think', which sums up the degree the BUE stresses on critical thinking.

4. Testing causations – Factors affecting knowledge and critical thinking in BUE

Although the sample size does not allow for complex multivariate regressions, a series of simple OLS and ordinary logistic regressions were conducted. Four different sets of variables were tested on how far they could explain students' performance on the three tests mentioned above:

- a) The effect of the pre-university education measured by the secondary school sector, secondary school language, secondary school type, and high school GPA.
- b) The effect of the students' eagerness to study measured by frequency of borrowing books from library, frequency of use of computer lab, meeting professors during office hours and number of study hours outside classes.

- c) The effect of number of courses taken since joining university and the number of political science courses taken since joining university.
- d) The effect of extra-curricular activities and social status measured by students' participation in activities inside university, students' participation in activities outside university, amount of money spent on clothing during academic year, having a personal car or family having villa/flat on beach.

The results of the regression analysis shown in annex (1) indicate that many of the variables were insignificant to students' levels of core knowledge, critical thinking or reading comprehension skills. This can be traced back, partially, to the small sample size, which did not allow proper revealing for factors of significance or correlations. Nonetheless and despite the small sample size, few variables were found significant particularly to students' levels of critical thinking. One variable that was found significant is the school GPA. Surprisingly, those with the highest secondary school GPA (>95%) have significantly *lower* critical thinking scores. This negative relationship between high GPA and students' levels of critical thinking can be explained in light of the current education system which still emphasizes memorization instead of critical analysis to reach high GPA (>95%).

Another variable that tended to impact critical thinking significantly is having a non-Egyptian high school degree was one of the variables that affected students' level of critical thinking. It seems that students who acquire non-Egyptian high school degrees (e.g. .g IGCSE, American Diploma, etc...), are more likely to be trained to think critically and question information instead of taking it for granted, which is one of the advantages of the British system of education in particular. According to the table in annex (1), students do better on the critical thinking assessment, even after controlling for the pre-university education variables. With time, year four students tend to build on and enhance their critical thinking skills, which they initially acquired during schooling.

One of the variables under the 'students' eagerness to study' category was found highly significant, which is not meeting professors during office hours. Not meeting professors during office hours despite the professors' continuous presence and accessibility as per the university staff attendance policy reflect two important issue. First, professors explain the topics and the syllabus clearly, guide the students and put them on the right track during the lectures' times. This process apparently moves smoothly and without any difficulty which does not force the student to meet the professors during their office hours and encourages them to send an email in case any additional quick help is needed, especially the BUE strategy require the professors to respond to students' emails swiftly. In addition, not meeting professors during office hours reflects a higher tendency from the side of the students to depend on themselves in studying, researching, finding information and analyzing, which justifies why those particular students have higher critical thinking abilities than other. Independent study and student-centered learning are two of the most important teaching approaches in the BUE. According to Watkin "independent learning involves problem-solving, inter-personal skills, industrious activity, self-motivation, creativity, and being reflective"¹⁸. Among Cropley's nine behaviors which can foster

¹⁸ Watkins, C. & Welikala, T. (2008), *Improving Intercultural Learning Experiences in Higher Education: Responding to cultural scripts for learning*. London: Institute of Education.

creativity is encouraging students to learn independently¹⁹. Like the previous variable, the quality of independent learning instead of meeting professors is a significant variable for fourth year students even more than second year students as per annex (1).

Very few variables were also significant to students' levels of core knowledge or reading comprehension. Students who used the computer labs less than once a month and did not have a personal car were more able than others to solve the core knowledge questions correctly. Students who do not frequently visit the lab and do not have a personal car are students who mostly own a laptop or have access to computer and internet at their homes. Hence, these students have higher access to computer at all times. Also, because they do not own a car, they mostly ride the BUE buses to the campus in Sherouk. Thus, they come to university in a precise time in the morning and tend to attend lectures more regularly and respect the lectures' times more than others. As a result, it is expected that their core knowledge which are mostly driven from lectures and readings to be much better than others who visit computer labs or have a car.

Two variables were hardly significant to students' reading comprehension, which were students' participation in activities outside university and number of studying hours outside the class. Students who do not participate in activities outside the university were more likely to get a higher mark in their reading comprehension test than other who participate in activities outside the university. That can probably be traced back to invest more time in reading and studying their courses and the related readings more than engaging in extra-curricular activities. Even when they participate in activities, they usually participate in ones that are inside the university and hence will not consume much of their time in commuting from and to Sherouk (where the university campus lies) which is a long distance. Hence, expectedly, the number of studying hours outside the class was also significant. Students who studies a lot (between 15 and 20 hours) were more likely to receive a higher grade in their reading comprehension test.

Finally and surprisingly, variables that might have been expected to be significant, such as the frequency of borrowing books from library or the number of political science courses taken since joining university, were not found significant to students' levels of knowledge, critical thinking or reading comprehension. However, this can be traced back probably to the impact of other factors, such as technology (negative or positive impact), accessibility to internet, online sources and wide range of reputable journals member journals in the BUE online library, independent learning, etc...

IV. Final Remarks and Conclusion

In the 2016-2017 Global Competitiveness Report, Egypt ranked 112th of 148 countries in higher education system and training, which should best prepare students to meet the needs of economy²⁰. With the goal of improving higher education in Egypt to best serve the needs of the country and the economy, the effectiveness of political science higher education in Egypt was assessed to investigate students' knowledge of political science core facts and theories, reading comprehension and critical thinking were investigated in four Egyptian universities, two public and two private. This research highlighted and analyzed the main findings related to one of the

¹⁹ Cropley, A.J. (1997). Fostering creativity in the classroom: General principles. In M. A. Runco. (Ed.) *Creativity research handbook*. Vol. 1, pp. 83-114. 83-114.

²⁰ Schwab, K. (2016), The Global Competitiveness Report 2016–2017, Geneva: The World Economic Forum.

private universities among these four universities, which is the British University in Egypt (BUE). Despite its pilot nature, this research provided an overview of the effectiveness of Political Science education in the BUE. In assessing the students' knowledge of core theories and concepts in political science, their comprehension reading skills and their critical thinking, the following points can be pointed out:

- a. Despite the difficulties met during data collection in accessing labs or convincing students to take the online critical thinking test, the teaching system in BUE made it easier to reach the full cohort in the beginning or the end of a lecture which the full cohort of students are attending. Hence, quantitative data on knowledge of political science core facts and theories were collected from a sample of 39 students from the second year and 36 students from the fourth year. Of that sample, 37 second year students and 28 fourth year students filled the reading comprehension questionnaire and 27 second year student and 17 fourth year students took the online critical thinking test.
- b. Students' reading comprehension skills were assessed through evaluating students' ability read and understand numerical tables and students' ability to understand texts. Unlike year four students' performance in reading and understanding numerical tables which was lower (19.2% answered correctly) than year two students' performance (31.4% answered correctly), their performance in understanding texts (39.3% answered correctly) was far better than year two (21.6% answered correctly). The low performance of year four students in understanding numerical data can be explained by looking at the courses that involve quantitative or numerical data analysis which are only two courses and are placed in the preparatory year (year one). The increase in students' understanding of texts can be traced back, on the other hand, to the BUE and BAEPS vision in becoming a high quality educational institution that promotes analytical thinking in addition to the staff reliance on peer-reviewed texts as their main reading materials. In doing that, qualitative analysis was emphasized over quantitative analysis, mostly due to the nature of the Political Science discipline.
- c. Very interesting and promising results were found with regards to students' critical thinking. The increase in the levels of students' critical thinking from year two to year four was also quite obvious. The increase in students' levels of strong critical thinking from 0% to 18% reflected an effective aspect of political science education in BUE. After all, the value of assessing education in general, and fields such as humanities and the social sciences is to evaluate students' critical thinking and find ways to help them think more critically. Increasing students' ability to think, analyze and investigate critically is expected to reduce extremism, boost original ideas and unleash creativity. The increase in the levels of critical thinking in BUE can be traced back to the high number of written assignments and research papers which students have to submit, the associated British assessment criteria for written assignments and research papers and the multi-cultural foreign staff engaged in teaching.
- d. Although the regression analysis did not reveal many factors to be significant to students' levels of core knowledge, critical thinking or reading comprehension, some very interesting results can still be drawn. Variables such as the secondary school GPA, non-Egyptian high school degree and not meeting professors during office hours despite their presence were found significant to students' levels of critical thinking. In addition,

variables such as students' use of computer labs less than once a month and not having a personal car were found significant to students' core knowledge results. Finally, two variables were of marginal significance to students' reading comprehension, which were students' participation in activities outside university and number of studying hours outside the class.

Annex (1)

Results of regression tests on students' performance on the three tests conducted

| | Number of correct core knowledge first five questions | Overall grade of critical thinking test | Reading Comprehension | |
|---|---|---|----------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| | | | 1 st Article Question | 2 nd Article Question |
| <i>Effect of pre-university education</i> | | | | |
| Secondary School Sector | | | | |
| Public | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Private | 0.28 | -5.4 | 0.7 | 0.5 |
| Secondary School Language | | | | |
| Arabic | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| English | 0.5 | -3.5 | 2.2 | 1.1 |
| Secondary School Degree | | | | |
| Egyptian (Thanaweya Amma) | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Non-Egyptian high school degree (e.g IGCSE, American Diploma, etc...) | 0.1 | 8.9* | 0.6 | 0.9 |
| High school GPA | | | | |
| <70 | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| 70-79.9 | 0.3 | -5.5 | 0.2 | empty |
| 80-89.9 | 0.2 | 1.8 | 0.2 | 1.7 |
| 90-94.9 | 0.5 | 4.7 | 1.9 | 2.1 |
| 95+ | 0.3 | -9.2* | 0.7 | 1.1 |
| Student Year | | | | |
| Second | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Fourth | -0.2 | 9.4** | 0.5 | 2.0 |
| R-squared | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.1 | 0.0 |
| N | 68.0 | 46.0 | 56.0 | 55.0 |
| <i>Effect of students' eagerness to study</i> | | | | |
| Frequency of borrowing books from library | | | | |
| Once A week | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Once A month | -0.4 | -1.2 | 0.2 | 0.6 |
| Less than once a month | -0.4 | -6.0 | 0.6 | 0.5 |
| Frequency of use of computer lab | | | | |
| Daily basis | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| 1-3 times a month | 0.3 | 4.1 | empty | 3.8 |
| Less than once a month | 0.69** | -4.1 | 3.6 | 2.8 |
| Meeting professors during office hours | | | | |
| Yes | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| No | -0.3 | 18.4** | empty | empty |
| Number of studying hours outside classes | | | | |
| Less than 5 hours | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| 5-<10 hours | -0.4 | 9.0 | 3.6 | 0.5 |

| | Number of correct core knowledge | Overall grade of critical | Reading Comprehension | |
|---|----------------------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------|-------------|
| 10-<15 hours | -0.4 | 1.4 | 6.2 | 0.8 |
| 15-<20 hours | 0.0 | 0.3 | 30.9* | 0.5 |
| 20+ hours | -0.6 | 4.6 | 4.3 | base |
| Student Year | | | | |
| Second | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Fourth | -0.2 | 7.8* | 0.4 | 1.1 |
| R-squared | 0.2 | 0.3 | 0.2 | 0.1 |
| N | 63.0 | 41.0 | 37.0 | 44.0 |
| <i>Effect of number of courses studied</i> | | | | |
| Number of courses taken since joining university | 0.1 | 0.2 | 0.9 | 1.5 |
| Number of political science courses taken since joining university | -0.1 | 0.3 | 1.0 | 0.7 |
| Student Year | | | | |
| Second | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Fourth | 0.5 | -1.8 | 24.9 | 1.5 |
| R-squared | 0.0 | 0.1 | 0.0 | 0.1 |
| N | 68.0 | 46.0 | 56.0 | 60.0 |
| <i>Effect of extra-curricular activities and social status</i> | | | | |
| Students' participation in activities inside university | | | | |
| Yes | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| No | 0.2 | -4.8 | 1.3 | 1.0 |
| Students' participation in activities outside university | | | | |
| Yes | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| No | -0.3 | 2.4 | 0.6 | 0.2* |
| Amount of money spent on clothing during academic year | | | | |
| | 0.0 | 0.0 | 1.0 | 1.0 |
| Having Personal car | | | | |
| Yes | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| No | 0.56** | 4.2 | 34.7 | 0.9 |
| Family has villa/flat on beach | | | | |
| Yes | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| No | 0.1 | -4.0 | 0.4 | 0.4 |
| Student Year | | | | |
| Second | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline | Baseline |
| Fourth | 0.0 | 8.9** | 0.6 | 1.8 |
| R-squared | 0.1 | 0.3 | 0.3 | 0.1 |
| N | 65.0 | 43.0 | 56.0 | 60.0 |

Robust standard errors in parentheses *** p<0.01, ** p<0.05, * p<0.1

Odds ratios of the students' ability to critically read political science text controlling for other variables (reference group = wrong answer).

Annex (2)

Universities' Citation Record for the past 5 years

| Scopus | | | | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------------|------------|------------|------------|------------------------|-------------------------|
| | Year | BUE | GUC | AUC | Nile University | Zwail University |
| Number of Publication Per year | 2017 | 130 | 79 | 190 | 66 | 143 |
| | 2016 | 205 | 188 | 336 | 93 | 227 |
| | 2015 | 156 | 132 | 325 | 76 | 140 |
| | 2014 | 123 | 109 | 355 | 72 | 105 |
| | 2013 | 113 | 143 | 399 | 84 | 68 |
| | 2012 | 114 | 127 | 299 | 76 | 45 |
| | 2011 | 110 | 117 | 248 | 66 | |

| | | | | | | |
|----------------------|------------------|-----|-----|------|-----|-----|
| Document Type | Article | 717 | 423 | 1100 | 343 | 489 |
| | Conference Paper | 178 | 410 | 734 | 170 | 198 |
| | Book Chapter | 23 | 24 | 147 | 3 | 6 |

| Scival | | | | | | |
|---|----------------|----------------|----------------|---------------|-----------------|--|
| Total number of publications appeared in Scopus | 1,076 | 1,260 | 3,574 | 687 | 703 | |
| Overall views count | 42,983 | 15,126 | 52,291 | 7,076 | 18,092 | |
| Overall views count per publication | 39.9 | 12 | 14.6 | 10.3 | 25.7 | |
| Field-weighted views impact | 4.27 | 0.96 | 1.12 | 1.09 | 2.83 | |
| Total number of citations | 9,950 | 6,508 | 20,669 | 4,560 | 4,096 | |
| Cited publications | 66.2 | 61.9 | 61.4 | 62.1 | 60.7 | |
| Citations per publication | 9.2 | 5.2 | 5.8 | 6.6 | 5.8 | |
| Field-weighted citation impact | 1.48 | 0.92 | 0.86 | 1.46 | 1.6 | |
| Publications in top 10% most cited worldwide | (417) 38.8% | (104) 8.3% | (377) 11.8% | (52) 7.6% | (175) 24.9% | |
| Publications in top 5% most cited worldwide | (328) 30.5% | (38) 3% | (216) 6.8% | (27) 3.9% | (20.2) 20.2% | |
| Publications in top 10% journals according to SNIP | (189) 20.7% | (102) 13.4% | (415) 17.2% | (72) 18.8% | (129) 22.6% | |
| Publications in top 5% journals according to SNIP | (132) 14.5% | (41) 5.4% | (181) 7.5% | (50) 13.1% | (81) 14.2% | |

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