

Assessment of ISO 21001:2018 Compliance in the Educational Quality Management System: A Case Study of the College of Arts, Al-Mustansiriya University

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Abstract: The study evaluates the implementation of the ISO 21001:2018 Educational Organizations Management System (EOMS) standard at the College of Arts, Al-Mustansiriya University using an IT-supported checklist-based approach. The main objective is to measure the gap between current institutional practices and the requirements of the international standard. A case study methodology was adopted, and data were collected through structured checklists, field observations, and interviews. Descriptive statistical tools were used to analyze compliance levels across key requirements, including organizational context, leadership, operation, performance evaluation, and improvement. The results indicate an overall compliance level of 31%, corresponding to a 69% implementation gap. The most significant deficiencies are observed in operational processes, internal audits, performance evaluation mechanisms, and continuous improvement practices, while relatively better performance is found in organizational context and stakeholder awareness. The findings reveal limited institutional readiness, insufficient documentation, and weak integration of quality management principles into academic and administrative processes. The study concludes that although partial alignment with ISO 21001:2018 exists, substantial managerial and structural improvements are required. It recommends strengthening quality culture, staff training, documentation systems, and integration of ISO-based practices across all levels of institutional governance.

1 INTRODUCTION

Quality is considered one of the basic inputs in any educational process, especially in universities, because of its prominent impact in achieving society's goals and advancing it to the highest levels of excellence. Therefore, the matter requires continuous quality performance improvement at the university, as the latter is considered the locomotive of development. Sustainability is then an essential pillar in the development, use, and dissemination of knowledge in the service of society, which requires it to improve its outputs and work on continuous improvement of the educational product, all in order to improve the skills of members of society, which is a basic condition and a necessary component for the development of society, to keep pace with the times and its challenges and to anticipate the future and its expectations. The standard is considered the international standard for quality management of

educational institutions, and it is ISO 21001, 2018 edition. It provides a comprehensive and consistent administrative model for institutions that provide educational services and products aimed at meeting the needs and requirements of the various parties related to the educational system, and it is also directed at reforming education at every stage [1].

The research dealt with evaluating the availability of requirements for implementing the quality management system in education in accordance with the international standard (ISO 21001: 2018) in the investigated college (research sample), and the checklist prepared in accordance with the requirements of the international standard (ISO21001: 2018) was used, in addition to Personal interviews and field visits. The research followed the descriptive and analytical approach. Also, it relied on a set of statistical methods to measure the size of the gap between the actual reality and the requirements of the international standard (ISO21001:2018).

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Reference [2] illustrates the quality system in higher education, which refers to a set of measures and procedures to improve the continuity of advanced educational services and products to help educational institutions achieve satisfactory results. It also indicates the specifications and characteristics of this educational product and the benefits and characteristics through which these specifications are controlled. The quality system in educational institutions also aims to meet the requirements of customers, interested parties, and beneficiaries by following up on the progress of activities and operations within educational institutions [3]. Quality management in educational institutions is a management philosophy and practice that seeks to maximize the institution's competitive advantage through continuous improvement of the quality of its employees, processes, products, services, etc. [4]. Therefore, higher education institutions must adopt quality management systems and benefit from their modern methods and tools in order to bring education to the highest levels, help them keep pace with developments in all fields, and help them enter and integrate into a global environment [5].

Reference [6] illustrates Quality management that captured the attention of education administrators and leaders who are concerned with ensuring educational results and the necessary changes and modifications to improve educational service. After the success achieved by the quality philosophy, specialists in the fields of education and pedagogy began to think about how to benefit from quality to get education out of the crises and challenges it faces as a result of society's increased awareness of its needs and aspirations towards the continuous change in knowledge and the requirements of the labour market and profession [7]. TQM in higher education institutions was first studied in the United States and the United Kingdom in the late 1980s. Among the quality management practices related to monitoring and coordinating study programs, the concept of total quality management in educational institutions generally focuses on ensuring and improving teaching, learning, and organizational performance and creating an advanced educational environment in order to achieve student and interested party satisfaction [8].

Reference [9] illustrate ISO 21001:2018: an international standard that promotes a new management model targeting educational organizations and aims to define the objectives of the educational institution to ensure that it moves towards the ideal future and provides high-quality services to

be able to compete in the educational services market required in the labour market. ISO 21001 encourages educational institutions to take greater social responsibility and provide students with open and equitable educational services. [10], some see it as a document that defines the rules and requirements related to the management system for organizations working in the field of education [11]. The ISO 21001:2018 standard represents a management tool for institutions that provide educational products and services, wish to improve their ability and continue to pay attention to the quality of their services [12]. International standards requirements (ISO 21001:2018) include ten items, which are as follows [13], [14]:

- **Scope.** The specification specifies the requirements for an educational institution management system (EOMS). The standard's requirements (ISO 21001:2018) are general. They are intended to apply to any organization using a curriculum to support competency development through teaching, learning or research, regardless of the type, size or method of delivery.
- **Organization context.** This requirement includes 4 sub-requirements related to understanding the challenges of the educational environment that affect the organization's strategy, social responsibility, goal, and purpose.
- **Leadership.** This requirement includes 3 sub-requirements related to establishing educational policy and organizational roles, defining responsibilities and powers, and proving the ability of senior management in the educational organization to lead, commit, and hold accountable.
- **Planning.** This requirement includes 3 sub-requirements related to taking risks and opportunities into account, whether in the educational organization or stakeholders, and determining how to deal with these risks and exploit opportunities.
- **Support.** This requirement includes (5) sub-requirements related to resources, competence, awareness, communication, and documented information from records and documents.
- **Operation.** This requirement includes (7) sub-requirements related to internal and external operations.
- **Performance evaluation.** This requirement includes (3) sub-requirements related to the monitoring, measurement, analysis, evaluation process and internal audit operations.

- Improvement. This requirement includes (3) sub-requirements, which include corrective improvement procedures for cases of non-conformity, in addition to continuous improvement and improvement opportunities.

3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research aim consists of a number of points:

- Clarifying the documented procedures for the standards currently applied in evaluating the quality of educational service in the college (research sample).
- Measuring the gap between the actual reality in the college (the research sample) and the requirements of the international standard (ISO21001:2018).
- Diagnosing the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of educational service the college provides (research sample).

The research problem consists:

- What are the standards currently applied to evaluate educational service quality at the College of Arts/Al-Mustansiriya University?
- Is there a gap between the actual reality in the college (the research sample) and the requirements of the international standard (ISO21001:2018)?.
- What are the strengths and weaknesses of the quality of educational service the college provides (research sample)?

4 PRACTICAL SIDE

In this aspect, the results of the checklist for the quality management system in educational institutions in the investigated college (College of Arts/Al-Mustansiriya University) are presented in accordance with the international standard (ISO 21001: 2018), and for ten requirements, which are (context of the organizer, leadership, planning,

support, operation). (Performance evaluation, improvement) using seven-weighted checklists, from the lowest weight (0) to the highest (6), aims to diagnose the actual reality, measure the size of the gap, and diagnose the strengths and weaknesses.

4.1 Organization Context

Table 1 displays the extent of actual documentation of the requirement (organizational context) of the investigated college (research sample) and its comparison with the requirements of the international standard (ISO 21001: 2018) and a summary of the analysis of the checklist as follows. The results of the checklist in Table 1 indicate that the level of implementation and actual application of the fourth requirement (organizational context) in the College of Arts / Al-Mustansiriya University, as it achieved an arithmetic average of (4.98) out of (6) grades, with a matching rate of (82.94%). This indicates a gap of (17.06%). The results of the checklists for the fourth requirement (organizational context) indicate the presence of strengths and weakness as follows:

- The college relies on the SWOT methodology to analyze its internal and external environment, which identifies strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats, and information related to these issues is reviewed and updated periodically.
- The study sample documents matters related to the strategic direction, such as the vision, mission, goals, and basic values, and a commitment to social responsibility by preserving the environment and occupational safety in the college's various facilities.
- The study sample adopts a specific organizational structure for administrative and scientific jobs and departments.
- The college identifies and documents the needs and desires of stakeholders, including students, college administration, faculty members, employees, and the labour market.
- Weak points: none.

Table 1: Examination of organization context.

Req. 4	Requirement name context the organization	Arithmetic mean likely	Matching Percentage	Gap size (%)
4.1	Understanding the organization and its context	5.5	90.90%	9.10%
4.2	Understanding the needs and expectations of interested parties	5.66	94.44%	5.56%
4.3	Determining the scope of the educational institutions' management system	5.5	91.66%	8.34%
4.4	Educational Institutions Management System	3.28	54.76%	45.24%
4	The overall rate of requirements for the organization context item	4.98	82.94%	17.06%

4.2 Leadership

Table 2 displays the extent of actual documentation of the (leadership) requirement of the investigated college (research sample) and its comparison with the requirements of the international standard (ISO 21001: 2018). The results of the checklist in Table 2 indicate that the level of implementation and actual application of the fifth requirement (leadership), as the College of Arts/Al-Mustansiriya University achieved an arithmetic mean of (4.78) out of (6) grades, with a matching rate of (79.6%), which indicates the presence of A gap of (20.3%). The results of the checklists for the fifth requirement (leadership) indicate the presence of strengths as follows:

- The college has a policy that supports the institution’s vision and mission and is appropriate to the purpose of the organization’s context. It also frames the institution’s goals by adhering to applicable legal and regulatory requirements.
- Senior management adopts a methodology that supports the participation of individuals working in the effectiveness of the organization’s quality management system, which enhances its success.
- The college is working on preparing customized plans to ensure that people with special needs receive awareness and training and provide the appropriate educational environment they need.
- The administration is working to build an integrated system for continuous self-evaluation of all college work and operations.

The results of the checklists for the fifth requirement (leadership) indicate the presence of weaknesses as follows:

- Weak procedures must be taken to identify risks and opportunities that affect the level of educational services provided.
- Senior management’s weak ability to integrate the quality management system requirements

in educational institutions with college management processes consistently and effectively.

4.3 Operational

Table 3 displays the extent of actual documentation of the (operational) requirements of the investigated college (research sample) and its comparison with the requirements of the international standard ISO 21001 (2018)) and the summary of the analysis of the checklist is as follows: The results of the checklist in Table 3 indicate the level of implementation and actual application of the eighth requirement (operational), as the College of Arts/Al-Mustansiriya University achieved an arithmetic mean of (2.4) out of (6) grades, with a matching rate of (62.41%), which indicates the presence of A gap of (37.59%). The results of the checklists for the eighth requirement (employment) indicate the presence of strengths as follows:

- The college is interested in documenting the process of teaching and learning activities and methods, which include procedures including reading, conducting research, conducting scientific experiments, or writing articles, in addition to its interest in scientific laboratories and calibrating their equipment periodically.
- The college takes measures to evaluate educational outcomes and is subject to direct observation and scientific measurement.
- The college seeks to open communication channels with media units in institutions in the government and private sectors to provide suitable job opportunities for all college graduates with various specializations.
- The college deals with some cases of non-conformity in the performance of faculty members through documents called (monitoring the progress of the educational process).

Table 2: Examination of the (leadership) requirement.

Requirement number 5	Requirement name	Arithmetic mean likely	Matching Percentage	Gap size (%)
	Leadership			
5.1	Leadership and commitment	4.26	71.00%	29.00%
5.2	Politics of the educational institution	4.8	80.00%	20.00%
5.3	Organizational roles, responsibilities, and authorities	5.28	88.00%	12.00%
5	The overall average for leadership requirements	4.78	79.60%	20.30%

Table 3: Examination of operational requirements.

Req. 8	Requirement name	Arithmetic mean likely	Matching percentage	Gap size (%)
	Operational			
8.1	Operational planning and control	3.96	66.00%	34.00%
8.2	Requirements for educational products and services	3.5	58.00%	42.00%
8.3	Design and development of educational products and services	3.51	58.50%	41.50%
8.4	Oversight of educational processes, products, and services provided externally	4.2	70.00%	30.00%
8.5	Providing educational products and services	4	67.22%	32.78%
8.6	Launching educational products and services	4	66.66%	33.34%
8.7	Control non-conforming educational outcomes	3.2	53.33%	46.67%
8	Total rate of operating item requirements	2.4	62.41%	37.59%

Table 4: Examination of performance evaluation.

Req. 9	Requirement name	Arithmetic mean likely	Matching Percentage	Gap size (%)
	Performance evaluation			
9.1	Monitoring, measuring, analyzing, and evaluating	3.38	56.00%	44.00%
9.2	Internal audit	3.75	62.50%	37.50%
9.3	Administrative review	4.12	68.66%	31.34%
9.4	The total average for the requirements of the performance evaluation item	3.75	62.38%	37.62%

The results of the checklists for the eighth requirement (employment) indicate the presence of weaknesses as follows:

- The college has a weakness in documenting what processes are necessary for effective planning, implementation, and control of the educational service process, which can include these documents for contracts, specifications, procedures, and work instructions.
- There is a weakness in documenting information about the results of evaluating the performance of external service providers.

4.4 Performance Evaluation

Table 4 displays the extent of actual documentation of the (performance evaluation) requirement of the investigated college (research sample) and its comparison with the requirements of the international standard (ISO 21001; 2018) and a summary of the analysis of the checklist as follows: The results of the checklist in Table 4 indicate the level of implementation and actual application of the ninth requirement (performance evaluation), as the College of Arts/Al-Mustansiriya University achieved an

arithmetic mean of (3.75) out of (6) grades, with a matching rate of (62.38%), which indicates There is a gap of (37.62%). The results of the checklists for the ninth requirement (performance evaluation) indicate the presence of strengths as follows:

- The college continuously applies and documents the program file for scientific departments as a guide for monitoring, measurement, analysis, and evaluation, as the file contains a description of the subject and a copy of assignments and tests.
- The college adopts appropriate means and methods to monitor and measure learners' satisfaction, such as a questionnaire about learners' performance on the subject and its teaching methods to obtain information for review.
- The college adopts a method for dealing with complaints, appeals, and suggestions, such as the presence of a special box for complaints, as is evident in the corridors of the college, and the presence of a special program for complaints that is conducted through the website it maintains. Confidentiality and objectivity of complainants.

Table 5: Examination optimization.

Req. 10	Requirement name	Arithmetic mean likely	Matching Percentage	Gap size (%)
	Optimization			
10.1	Corrective action for non-conformity	2	33.33%	66.67%
10.2	Continuous improvement	5	83.33%	16.68%
10.3	Opportunities for improvement	3	50.00%	50.00%
10	The overall rate of improvement requirement items	3.33	55.50%	44.40%

The results of the checklists for the ninth requirement (performance evaluation) indicate the presence of weaknesses as follows:

- The college does not have a documented and clear mechanism for investigating, responding to, closing complaints and appeals, and resolving them.
- There are no audit procedures prepared by the administration within the educational institution’s quality management system audit plan and program in accordance with the requirements of the specification (ISO21001: 2018).

4.5 Optimization

Table 5 displays the extent of actual documentation of the (improvement) requirement of the investigated college (research sample) and its comparison with the requirements of the international standard (ISO 21001; 2018) and a summary of the analysis of the checklist as follows: The results of the checklist in Table 5 indicate the level of implementation and actual application of the ninth requirement (performance evaluation), as the College of Arts/Al-Mustansiriya University achieved an arithmetic mean of (3.33) out of (6) grades, with a matching rate of (55.5%), which indicates there is a gap of (44.4%). The results of the checklists for the tenth requirement (improvement) indicate the presence of weak points as follows:

- The presence of an internal audit program at the college resulted in the inability to find cases of non-conformity that could occur in training plans, the performance of employees and learners, and the materials and services provided to the educational institution.
- The college works to develop plans and procedures to improve the performance and effectiveness of the educational institutions’ management system and prevent undesirable effects.

- Weak points. There is no documented information on how the management system of educational organizations can make continuous improvements.

5 CONCLUSIONS

The application of ISO 21001:2018 enables a systematic assessment of strengths and weaknesses across key requirements, including organizational context, leadership, planning, support, operation, performance evaluation, and continuous improvement within the studied institution. The findings indicate that the institution demonstrates partial implementation of the standard, with notable deficiencies in several critical areas. These weaknesses are primarily attributed to limited financial resources and insufficient support from top management, which hinder the effective adoption of a structured quality management system. Although the institution provides diverse educational services, it lacks comprehensive documented procedures aligned with ISO 21001:2018 requirements, particularly in quality management documentation and system integration. On the positive side, the institution has implemented tools for analyzing its internal and external environment, including the identification of strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, which supports strategic awareness. Additionally, communication channels and teamwork structures are in place and are supported by basic resources and training initiatives, particularly to assist learners with special needs. However, significant gaps remain in planning and risk management processes, as risk identification and mitigation are mostly reactive rather than systematic. There is also a lack of formalized emergency planning and structured risk registers, which limits the institution’s ability to proactively manage potential challenges affecting educational objectives.

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