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Can Quality Be Assured During Exceptional Circumstances? The Bahraini Case of Reviewing the Schools' Responses and Educational Practices during COVID-19

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Abstract

Since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, educational systems around the world have faced many challenges, compelling them to rethink their methods and strategies at all levels related to the educational process in schools, in order to ensure that students obtain their right to learn. Systems' responses varied globally in providing solutions to deal with the consequences of the pandemic, with the increased focus on educational technology as a basic element, and the re-design of: learning experiences, methods of assessment, support mechanisms, schooling day including schooling hours and timing, and the emergence of an urgent need to qualify teachers and principals to ensure quick adaptation thereof.

The Kingdom of Bahrain was not far from the global approach, as it dealt immediately with these circumstances with a set of strategic decisions and close follow-up to all developments led by His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, the Crown Prince and Prime Minister, since March 17, 2020 to date. In the first phase, the Education and Training Quality Authority (BQA) has studied and evaluated the quality of distance education and training practices in a sample of private schools and surveyed the views of school leaders and teachers in public schools and parents; in addition to evaluating educational practices in the period from March to June 2020. Then, BQA issued its first report in this regard with a set of recommendations to improve performance. In the second phase, after consulting with the concerned parties, and benefiting from the outcomes of the first phase, the Authority designed an exceptional framework in a unique experiment around the world, with the aim of evaluating the quality of school practices in the exceptional circumstances of public and private schools in the Kingdom of Bahrain. The exceptional framework introduced in the academic year 2020-2021 proved to be a valuable resource to schools during COVID-19; it was a guiding roadmap for schools to set priorities and ensure the quality of school practices



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during exceptional situations. This paper highlights the school quality review challenges and opportunities from Bahrain's perspective. It also presents a summary of findings and major recommendations offered to schools. Additionally, it shares the learned lessons about reviewing schools during exceptional circumstances on both levels: standards and review processes.

Keywords: quality; schools reviews; improvement; effectiveness