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**The Role of the Practice of Excellence Strategies in Education to Achieve Sustainable Competitive Advantage to Institutions of Higher Education-Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza a Model**

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## **Abstract**

This study aims to look at the role of the practice of excellence strategies in education in achieving sustainable competitive advantage for the Higher educational institutions of the faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, a model, and the study considered the competitive advantage of educational institutions stems from the impact on the level of each student, employee, and the institution. The study was based on the premise that the development of strategies for excellence in education, and its implementation is a vital important prerequisite to achieve sustainable competitive advantage in higher educational institutions. The study followed a systematic exploratory descriptive methodology through review of the theoretical literature, and the adoption of the experience of the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza as a model for its unique experience in the field of excellence in education.

**The study results showed that the most important are:**

There is a strong correlation between the level of exercising excellence strategies in education and the achievement of higher educational institutions to the sustainable competitive advantage. The results include a general required number of important sub results on the subject of the model - Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza as follows:

- The student considered the academic focus of the operation in the development process of the workers' skills, particularly academics at the university helps to distinguish students and increase the employment rate after graduation.
- The existence of consistency in development efforts and quality improvement for all three levels (student, employee, and the university), and this contributes to the Faculty excellence.
- The Faculty has been able to achieve competitive advantages by offering excellent services without harming the efficiency, and this alone is a

great success because improving service properties requires great investments, which negatively affect the continued institutional development.

**The study also reached a set of recommendations as follows:**

- The need to exercise excellence strategies in education, excellence reward at the national level, and those higher educational institutions follow the criteria for measuring the competitive advantages of its institutions always.
- There is a need to increase efforts to implement programs of excellence, the allocation of adequate time, reward outstanding efforts as well. There is a necessity for each faculty to achieve competitive advantage and sustainability, using the general philosophies of competitive advantage, but with a different strategically content from what is in the private commercial sector, it reflects the Faculties mission and objectives, depending on making improvements and excellence in processes that ensure the safety of its outputs. As well as the need to find a balance between the work of teaching and research work of the faculty members, this has important implications regarding the criteria used in the process of excellence evaluation. The study recommended the adoption of strategies for excellence in education on a national public policy level mainly in the processes of change in higher education institutions. The need to support the existence of a common understanding of the efforts of excellence to create a general culture

that appreciates excellence in faculties and universities. This underlines the need for transparent, fair rewards systems, to encourage innovation in education. The need to conduct a comprehensive surveys on the graduates of faculties and universities including the areas of employment and skills, because that will give accurate indications of the graduates and will help to establish a link to a more precise about the relationship of excellence strategies with the competitive advantages.

**IndexTerms**

Excellence in education, sustainable competitive advantage, Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology, Al-Azhar University in Gaza, institutions of higher education.

**I. INTRODUCTION**

This research aims to examine the role of the practice of excellence strategies in education in achieving sustainable competitive advantage for institutions of higher education. Many authors and researchers have discussed the distinct role of University, and the need to work away from the economic forces that affect the quality of activity in the commercial sector, for example:

(Gilbert, 2001; Pister, 1999; Scott, 1998)show a strong debate about the need for public sector support for the University to allow it to a specific degree to stay out of the competitive market. In any event, in this new era, the emergence of private universities, and the need to ensure the educational value and keep the support of the public sector pushed management of

universities and its various bodies to look for ways that through which to create the value, test, and hold it by the institutions (Elloumi, 2004).

For the higher education institutions to compete efficiently in the markets they need to be distinguished by its services to ensure internal and external customer satisfaction alike. The strong internal culture that valued enterprise customers can help improve the motivation of employees, have loyalty, reach to high level of performance and achieve creativity; to achieve a competitive institutional advantage (Khan&Matalay, 2009).

Higher education is always facing the challenge of continuous change, such as the one faced by the community, and this is due to the accelerated developments in the field of information and communication technology, the growth in the number of students and the increase in their diversity, and the move towards the knowledge society. Excellence in education is considered as dialectical concepts. There is a need to discussed it and put frameworks for it because this will help encourage excellence in higher education, the development of rewards systems for excellence, and to identify the implications of these initiatives on the education system (Raftery, 2006).

Based on the above, the investment in excellence in teaching becomes one of the modern and important trends in higher education to achieve a competitive advantage and sustainability - on the level of input and operations - and to ensure that the outputs become consistent with the specific standards including the competitive labor market. Hence this study was to look at the role of practice of the excellence strategies in education in achieving sustainable

competitive advantage for the higher educational institutions, the faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza as a model by searching the various programs included in those strategies, objectives, and the mechanism that leads from which to organizational excellence with the consideration of Applied dimensions at Al-Azhar University in Gaza. To achieve the main objective of the study: the first part of it will describe the problem of the study and its questions and define its objectives, scientific and practical significance, and its limitations, the second part describes the methodology and procedures followed in dealing with the problem of the study, the third part will answer the questions of the study through showing theoretical framework for the study, explain the variables, debate their interaction mechanisms, and applied dimensions of Al-Azhar University in Gaza, and finally will provide the results of the study and its recommendations.

## II. RESEARCH PROBLEM

Universities like other institutions are seeking to survive and grow in the market. They are working to develop general strategies and implementation to ensure that they achieve their goals. But universities have become increasingly facing new challenges, including financial challenges, domestic and international competition, and the pressures of the diverse and changing labor market requirements. Universities pursuit to work according to their missions and achieve their objectives and their quest to achieve competitive advantages and sustainability increases challenges complexities because of the legal and sectorial nature of higher education, and because they need to work according to a

relatively different foundations of what is available to the private sector, which is becoming increasingly difficult. Competition always makes production and services incompetent (Arouet, 2009).

Institutions of higher education in the Arab countries with the diversity in types and sizes seek to achieve excellence in order to ensure their growth and continuity especially in global and national competitive environment. Thus the subject of competitive advantages has earned considerable attention from researchers and writers so some of which considered it as a strategic goal of these institutions.

Hence, many universities began practicing excellence strategies in education, including the Al-Azhar University in Gaza, which is considered a pioneering experiment in the Arab world, in order to improve the quality of educational process and output of the system in order to reach for outstanding performance without increasing costs to a level of a negative impact on the efficiency of the institution.

### III. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This problem can be illustrated by the study through the following question:

**Q1:** Is there a role for the practice of excellence strategies in education to achieve sustainable competitive advantage for the institutions of higher education?

**The following sub-questions stem from main one:**

**Q1-1:** What is excellence in education? What are its fields? What are the programs and activities that are included in the Excellence strategies in Education?

**Q1-2:** What is a sustainable competitive advantage for institutions of higher education? What are its dimensions?

### IV. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

- Identify strategies for excellence in education and its importance for universities.
- Link Strategies of excellence in education with a sustainable competitive advantage for universities.
- Highlight the importance of developing excellence strategies in education and implementation through the presentation of the experience of the Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University in Gaza for the benefit of other university leaders from this experience, and thus contributing to provide indications of strategic decisions aimed at achieving competitive advantage, and sustainability of higher education institutions.
- Clarify the factors to achieve competitive advantage and to study how the university's ability to carry out its activities effectively and at a lower cost than competitors through good use of most value to students and institutions of the community relative to other universities.

### V. RESEARCH IMPORTANCE

1. This study is important because it is considered the first that highlight the theme of excellence in education. There is a growing expectation is that all higher education institutions will work to promote a culture of

excellence in education "as an essential activity.

2. Researchers believe that there is a need to strengthen the culture of higher education that promotes creativity, which is trying to improve education, to contribute to the development of curricula and technological developments interests and not vice versa.
3. This creativity needs to be rewarded in proportion, to be included within the benchmark for excellence in education, to be encouraged. Excellence in Education practices is essential and fundamental for higher educational institutions that include the presence of the teacher to always improve student learning (Raftery, 2006).
4. This research may help identify necessary improvement on the level of institutional performance, employee, and student in higher education institutions in general and the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza in particular.
5. This research may contribute to a culture of excellence in education linked to sustainable competitive advantages.

## VI. RESEARCH LIMITS

**Place Limitation:** the study was conducted in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza as a unique model in the development of excellence strategies in education and their implementation.

**Time limitation:** Study depended on collection of published secondary data mainly and on interviews with specialists at the faculty during the year (2017).

**Subject Limitation (Academic):** the study was limited in subject on the attempt to explain sustainable competitive advantages for higher educational institutions to search for excellence strategies in education, given the importance of strategies in shaping the development of the higher education sector's efforts, but as the embodiment of a great effort for an extended time frame, different names including quality.

## VII. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

The study used the exploratory and descriptive method, thus the researchers studied the mechanism that affect which distinguished teaching strategies achieve sustainable competitive advantage for universities by reviewing the literature available about the concept of sustainable competitive advantage to provide a deep explanation of this concept, and the concept of excellence in education, and described these analyzed variables relationship to each other, taken in the experience of Al-Azhar University in Gaza, a case study using the method of case study based on availability at the university data, which includes paper and electronic university publications, and data collected by conducting a number of interviews, with the departments and managers of centers related to the subject of study namely: Center for excellence in Education, and the unit of the success of the graduates, and the unit of quality and assurance.

### A. Answer to study questions

**Q1 Answer:** Is there a role for the practice of excellence in education strategies to achieve sustainable competitive advantage for institutions of higher education?

**Q1-1 Answer:** What is excellence in education? What are its fields? What are the programs and activities that included in the Excellence strategies in Education?

The Faculties and universities have traditional long-term biography for academic and teaching quality. In this direction higher education is considered the golden standard, the model that the other sectors look at for excellence. But increasingly these days, there are competing views about what is excellence in higher education? There are at least three options for visible phenomenon radically different (Volkwein, 2006).

**The first model:** the so-called perspective of resources and reputation, which focuses on the importance of institutional rank, academic programs, achievements of the faculty members, credited programs, the availability of other financial and material resources, students' evaluations, test results, levels of scientific research, and subsidies donors.

**The second model:** the model is based on the customers called Client central model and reflects the second view, focuses on the student experience, the quality of teaching practices, availability of faculty and academic programs, levels of teaching fees, the availability of information, evaluations of graduates and employers, the hope is student satisfaction about academic programs, and other services and facilities.

**The third model:** a strategic investment model focuses on return of investment, cost-benefit analysis, cost control, regulations and compliance, measures of productivity involving revenues admission, and retention of students, the length of time needed for the student to get a degree, and expenses of each student (Volkwein.2006).

The first model is a favorite at many academic bodies, and is considered an important traditionally from an external perspective, because it involves credits although this pattern in changing phase. Often students, parents, alumni and employers focus on the second model, the model that focuses on the customer. Government Officials and members of the supreme council of the university's prefer strategic investment model.

University managements are struggling for a compromise between these trends; comprehend the implications and consequences for all three models (Volkwein, 2006).

Each model has a value, it is not exclusively for itself, and in fact it seems that most of the institutions, departments, successful programs to find ways to deal with the three models combined. Surely, it is considered reasonable develop special high standards for students, faculty, programs, departments or academic fields, institutional evaluation for the organization's relations with the founders, and the use of strategic resources and return on investment. To succeed in the pursuit of those goals, there is a need to develop a comprehensive understanding and more widely adopted for excellence in learning and teaching. Excellence leads us to achieve excellence in all that we do (Ruben, 2004).

The efforts of excellence require integrated paths for assessment, planning, and continuous improvement also (Ruben, 2007). Most colleges and universities have procedures for academic planning and development review. Such activities can be managed in many institutions through different offices, but may be a function not integrated well. For example, assessment and planning activities that occur at the

institutional level may not be clearly linked with the activities carried out at the level of the program or department. The criteria and methods used in other administrative and service areas may differ from those used in the areas of student life or academic fields. Most universities and colleges can benefit from having a unified framework and a common language to guide the evaluation and planning process and development at all levels and through all the various programs and departments. Among other benefits, the unified model of this kind will promote the exchange of good ideas and increase the adoption of effective practices across the enterprise.

The aim to achieve excellence in education practices can be developed to apply to the good performance of teachers with outstanding performance in teaching. The natural question here is, what is the meaning of good teacher and outstanding teacher? If

answer is possible, the question that then appears, how can excellence be identified in education? Is it possible that all the teachers also be distinct in teaching?

The modern debate in the United Kingdom, for example, are assuming that excellence in education is vital and important for all teachers in Higher Education (2005 Nicholls).

In spite of the increasing emergence of the concept in recent theoretical literature on the subject, this discrepancy partly reflects the different views and expectations of the concerned parties about the overall achievement of Excellence in Education (McAlpine et al., 2005).

The following are the four main models presented by (Skelton, 2005) about excellence in higher education, the traditional, per formative, psychological, and cash as illustrated in the following table:

**Table 1:** Summary of trends in teaching excellence in higher education

	<b>Traditional</b>	<b>Performative</b>	<b>Psychologized</b>	<b>Critical</b>
Who for?	Social elite	Meritocracy	Individuals	Informed
Where located?	Disciplinary knowledge	Rules and regulations	Teacher& student relationship	Material conditions
Epistemology?	Pursuit of truth	Knowledge that works	Subjective interpretation	Social critique
Indicative method?	Lecture	Work-based learning	Group work	Participatory dialogue
Teacher's role?	Subject expert	Enforcer of	Psycho-diagnostician	Critical
Purpose?	Cultural	System efficiency	Effective learning	Emancipation

As seen from the above table that the understanding of excellence in higher

education varies widely, and this confirms the extent of the difference made in the concept of excellence in education.

At the international level it seems clear (nationally and internationally) that understanding performance for excellence in education seems to prevail; while on the practical level, it seems that there is a great theoretical literature about the psychological status of excellence process.

The Japanese auto industry has embodied work ethic through continuous improvement, it has been used by (Kane et al., 2004) that Excellence in education suggest the process of continuous self-improvement and is not subject to the same end of the measuring process.

Thus, the lecturers should constantly improve their methods of teaching, and work hard to promote their abilities (Raftery, 2006). Most of the universities that valued themselves do not want to be without a center or a unit responsible for Excellence in Teaching and Learning (Badley, 1999). Such center in charge usually promotes excellence in education through activities such as the dissemination of good practices, provision of training courses, workshops, the appointment of consultants when needed and contribute to the expertise of specialized projects, there must be provision for a system excellence rewards in higher educational institutions promotional role in the definition of excellence, which can be submitted through the institution or through the higher educational system in the country. The main objective of it is the promotion of excellence in education (Raftery, 2006), although the provision of rewards in higher education institutions, regardless of their type, can be a bit complicated, multi-faceted operation, judgmental, requires the participation of

members of the Committee in most cases (badri& Abdulla, 2004). One should not forget the role of the efforts of excellence in education and promoting creativity. In a survey of the creators found by (Hannan, 2005) that the prevailing view that there are still obstacles preventing the lecturers who want to experiment.

It is an important matter to excellence in education, not only at the individual level (at the level of the teacher), but also on the institutional level. The support of the Institution for Excellence in education facilitate this distinction, it is not direct, and this is by providing an atmosphere appropriate for work, incentives, and support for the growth of this distinction (Skelton, 2005). In a survey conducted in Australian universities in 1994, it examined the extent of the development of universities to determine the standards of good teaching, the mechanisms used to encourage the teaching, learning and whether he had taken into account in the education and university education promotions procedures (Ramsden & Martin, 1996). These standards are part of the multilateral principles and procedures that have been identified in the theoretical literature, and by which they can provide support for excellence in education, including (Skelton, 2005):

- Provide resources (including time for teachers).
- That the ratio of students to teachers should be low.
- Good infrastructure and equipment ... etc.
- Operations and administrative policies to support teaching and learning.
- Awards for education.
- Providing funding for businesses that contribute to the development of learning and teaching.

- A corporate culture that appreciates and encourages learning and education.
- Practices and policies that support the exchange of ideas.
- Provide specialized training areas supportive of Excellence.
- Be of excellence in the value of education in the process of progress and functional upgrade.

Many of the higher education institutions now adopt a policy or strategy for learning and education. As it is in Britain and Northern Ireland the development of learning and teaching strategies has increased in 1998. Financial support was allocated for excellence in this area. In the year 2000 for every English institution became a clear educational strategy. The strategy included several aspects, including staff development, continuing professional development for experienced staff, the exploitation of information and communication technology, and rewarding for excellence in teaching and encouragement it (Skelton, 2005).

There are a number of studies that dealt with the experiences of universities in academic excellence, including: Shyam study and others (Chiam et al., 2011) about excellence in higher education, the study focused on the experience of Malaysia Open University. It highlighted the importance distance education and its advantages in the light of technological development and the Internet. This type of development allowed learning for all at a reasonable cost compared with traditional education. Researchers discussed the role played by this development in higher education to make higher education in Malaysia more democratic. The study also exposed to ways of providing learning through the Internet using Virtual Learning Environment.

According to any of the scenarios that can be talked about, finding global elite universities such as Harvard, Stanford, Cambridge does not happen on the eve of the night, the issue is not related to money, creating a culture of excellence and achieve outputs of high quality requires many years of hard work, as there are requirements at the national level and at the enterprise level where, leadership of the institution, visions, objectives, the practice of excellence in research and teaching, the mechanisms for achieving the global dimension of the university, to provide support for how to measure success, and indicators of education outcomes are all important requirements at the institutional level (Salmi, 2009).

In this regard, Al-Azhar University in Gaza has been working on developing the academic and administrative quality for several years. This reflected the introduction of the post of vice-president for Planning, Development, and Quality. The work was focused on the development and improvement in all aspects of administrative and academic process at the university. On the academic level efforts has been focused on organized assessment of academic performance of faculty members at the university, evaluating academic programs, courses, the performance of students (learning outcomes). The process has taken officially in the assessment and development of academic programs at the university. The process begins with national standards to the university, faculty, department, the program, course, student, and then teacher.

To achieve these goals, the university has worked on developing a range of programs that include a wide range of activities aimed at university academics and administrators of the staff, including: workshops, seminars for new and existing members of the academic and administrative staff, and

worked on the integration of technology in education, providing appropriate opportunities to participate in conferences to enrich the academic experience at the university. The University also offers opportunities for training in the use of electronic sources and offers consulting, pose academic exchange programs, in order to help reach for excellence, and puts in the hands of academics many sources, resources and educational links.

It should be noted here that the existence of differences between the countries for excellence in higher education, including (Rostan&Vaira, 2011):

1. Financing of Excellence (resources, plans, logic, and software).
2. Ways to exercise excellence in teaching and learning.
3. Ways to build excellence in the sector of higher education system (reward particular institution or network of institutions)

**Q1-2 answer:** What is a sustainable competitive advantage for institutions of higher education? What are its dimensions?

The competitive advantage is to be the best competitors in one or more dimensions of strategic performance (cost, flexibility, creativity ...) with mounting competition and growing new entrants manners and their new products at strayed globalization without guarantee for any competitive advantage to last long unless it is continuously developed to achieve sustainable competitive advantage. The basic rule for performing above average in the long term is sustainable competitive advantage (i.e. the extent to

which the institution has sustainable competitive advantage), so can the institution that holds a lot of strengths and vulnerability to competitors. There are two basic types of competitive advantage which the institution can possess: low cost, and differentiation. The core of any strengths or weaknesses that an enterprise can own is in the final analysis function in their impact on the cost or differentiation.

Porter states (Porter, 1985) that the Corporation's position in the industry is determined by whether the profitability is higher or lower than the average industry profitability. An institution that can position may well earn high rates despite the inadequacy of the structure of the industry and the fact that the profitability of the industry rate moderate.

Cost and differentiation stems from industry structure. They are produced from the organization's ability to keep up with the five powers (new entrants, buyers, substitutes, suppliers, competitors) better than its competitors.

The blending of key types of competitive advantages (low cost, differentiation) with a field of activities that institution are looking to be achieved which leads to three main strategies to reach above average performance in the industry, and those strategies are: Cost leadership, Differentiation, and Focus. Focus strategy include two-dimensions, focusing on Cost focus, and Differentiation focus.

The table 1 shows the basic competitive strategies:

**Table 1:** The basic competitive strategies of Porter.

Competitive Scope	Competitive Advantage	
	Low Cost	Differentiation
Broad Target	Cost Leadership	Differentiation
Narrow Target	Cost Focus	Differentiation Focus

Source: Porter, M.E. 1998

Every strategy of the basic strategies include a radically different path to achieve competitive advantage, marketing strategy blends the kind of competitive advantage with the desired area of the Strategic target, which represents theater in which the competitive advantage is achieved. The aim of both strategies: cost leadership and differentiation to achieve a competitive advantage in a wide range of industry quotas, while the focus strategies aim to achieve cost advantage (focus on cost) or differentiation (focus on differentiation) to focus on special market share with the aim to serve its needs better than any other competitor.

The specific actions required to implement all the basic competitive strategy vary widely from industry to another. While the selection of the basic strategy and its implementation is not easy, it represents logical paths in order to achieve a competitive advantage that should be probed in any industry.

The idea behind the concept of the basic strategies is that competitive advantage lies in the heart of any strategy, and achieving

competitive advantage requires the organization to choose; if the organization wanted to get a competitive advantage, it must choose the type of competitive advantage that are looking to get and the area in which it will get it on. The institution is "everything to everyone" is a recipe for strategic mediocrity and performance below average, because it often means that the institution does not have a competitive advantage at.

(Akan et al., 2006) state that there are still many gaps in the understanding of Porter's theory prevents managers from the implementation of these basic strategies, it is not specified process steps (tactics) associated with those strategies, and any of those steps will be accompanied by high levels of Organizational performance. Hence, Akan and others pointed out that there is a set of practical steps that have been identified as interpretation of Organizational competitive performance, which are represented at the same time a conceptual representation of all basic Porter competitive strategies with reference to a statistical function in the performance indicators, which is described in table 2.

**Table 2:** Some process indicators associated with the exercise of fundamental competitive strategies.

Differentiation strategy	Cost leadership strategy	Focus strategy with low cost	Focus strategy with Differentiation
Creativity in Technology and marketing techniques.	Reduce distribution costs	Render a distinctive service to the customer.	Introducing special Products.
Promoting creative abilities and innovation.		Improving operational efficiency.	goods or service production for market share with high price
Building a large market portion		Control products quality.	
		Intensive training for individuals who work in the front row in the	

**Source:** Akan, O., Allen, R.S., Helms, M.M., &Spralls, S.A. (2006)

*B. What mechanism that affect which excellence strategies in education in achieving sustainable competitive advantages for the universities?*

Achieving competitive advantage in the field of education is by creating a perception or impression among targeted learners that what is provided by the course, the program, or university offered in a unique way with high quality. The content here is an important feature of higher education institutions, and important in terms of image and quality. This perception allows the institution to get a higher tuition fees and so can perform better than competitors on the level of revenues without reducing costs substantially (Elloumi, 2004). Because there is a great difficulty faced by universities in judging the quality of its output, it desperately needs to be to focus on the

quality of inputs, processes, and this will ensure a minimum performance or the expected output quality.

Universities in the United States, for example, can reduce costs but the challenge is whether it is possible to maintain the required quality of the output of education level, raise prices, and stay in the market, enter new markets, introduce new products, or provide a combination of these strategies, the number is limited institutions of the geographical expansion, but many colleges and universities are now conducting a strategic structural shift on how to use modern information technology to implement those strategies. Thus, the adoption of excellence on information technology and benefit from excellence in learning and teaching contribute to the

competitive advantage of the University's strategy. The integration of the Internet in the overall strategy of the institution makes this powerful new technology driving force of competitive advantage (Porter, 2001).

A number of researchers have pointed out that successful and sustainable competitive advantage should be based on differentiation as a strategic option, (Grant, 1990; Teece et al., 1990), which means providing a product or service that others cannot easily imitate. Based on the foregoing by these researchers the cost-competitive strategy is a destructive escalation of what is known as a policy of price-fixing that lead to damage to the institution and general industry or disappearance process (Arouet, 2009).

If the public universities offer a typical product only, that means they wasted competitive potential (human resources), it is not necessary for differentiation but also necessary for the survival of public education as a whole. Therefore, the rhetoric

about making the universities efficiently profitable cannot be supported from the viewpoint of the development of service and excellence. Based on previous ideas, making the universities efficient means go to a broad strategy to reduce costs instead of investing in Differentiation.

And it embodied the competitive advantages of higher education institutions through a number of indicators that interfere with performance indicators, according to a crystallized Hang et al (Huang et al., 2010) Include three main levels comprising: Student, Employee, and Enterprise.

With an emphasis on the competitive advantage stems for specific institution of higher education institutions of the effective and efficient use of tangible and intangible resources that are needed to support the teaching and learning processes. The following table shows those indicators:

**Table3:** Performance indicators for higher education institutions.

Indicator	Indicator Content
<b>Student performance</b>	The employment rate of recent graduates, students who complete their graduate studies ratio, the rate of success in licensing / profession tests, knowledge and abilities, profession of graduates.
<b>Employee Performance</b>	The performance of the teaching staff, the performance of teachers in scientific research, the performance at the level of applied research, practical experience and skills in teaching of academic staff.
<b>Performance at the institutional level</b>	Corporate culture, graduates assessment, excellence and uniqueness of the institution, community service, the development of the overall education, curriculum development, the reputation of the institution, asset management and facilities available, cooperation with private institutions, evaluating the organization, the industry assessment of graduates.

What is the benefit of competitive advantage?

1. You Must be careful on the existence of a competitive

- advantage and look at the capabilities and resources that we have, or that can be built, or bought even and know how use it to get a competitive advantage.
2. You must be careful on the continuity of the competitive advantage as long as possible and create other features to replace features that are about to lose influence
  3. You need to try to exploit the external changes to create competitive opportunities, or at least to cope with the competitive advantage to others
  4. You must concentrate your best to increase your capabilities and resources associated with the current and future competitive advantage
  5. You need to determine the strategy you are pursuing of the main ones as general trend so that you can exploit the resources and investigative capacity
  6. You should know the general methods that lead to cost reduction or excellence.

Through the published data on the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology in Al-Azhar University in Gaza, and in-depth interviews conducted by researchers with decision-makers in the Faculty

of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, it is the first Palestinian Engineering specialized Faculties operating in the areas of quality. The Faculty includes (1318) students, 35.2% of them were female, distributed in five disciplines at the bachelor level (Computer Science and Information Systems, Software Engineering, Mechatronics Engineering, and Computer & Communication Engineering), and one at the master level (Computing & Information Systems). The faculty of Engineering and Information Technology is considered the most respected faculty of Engineering in Palestine in addition to the educational services it provides, a variety of services to the local Palestinian community through graduation projects designed by engineering students in various fields including the fields of information technology, the areas of energy, persons with special needs, and community service. Medical Engineering Equipment discipline was recently added. The following table shows some of the statistical indicators of the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology in Al-Azhar University in Gaza as one of the faculty of Al-Azhar University, which is one of the leading Palestinian higher education among the Palestinian universities:

**Table 4:** statistical indicators for the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza in 2017

Number of new students		Number of registered students		Number of graduates		Number of employees	
Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male
275	105	854	464	697	430	4	53
380		1318		1127		57	

**Source:** Deanship of the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza (2017)

Here is what distinguishes this Faculty and the sustainable competitive advantage it has which is not easy to imitate on the three levels: students, teachers, and university. The following is a summary of the most important accomplishments of the faculty of awards and achievements:

Table 5: awards obtained by the Faculty during the past a few years

Year	Awards and achievements of the Faculty
2016	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Winner - Conference of Excellence</b> Project (the escalator for people with special needs) by the graduates Rawia Hassan Timraz, and Nadia Al Rayes from the Faculty of Engineering and IT in Al-Azhar University in Gaza, which won the first place in the (Conference of Excellence) held in the city of Ramallah, where they were honored by President Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah. The project was under the supervision of Dr. AymanAyad, a faculty member at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology in Al-Azhar University in Gaza.
2015	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Winner- Conference of Excellence</b> Project (special seat for quadriplegia patients) by the graduate Nisma El-Samouni and Alaa Al-Khatib from the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, which won the first place in the (Conference of Excellence). The project was under the supervision of Dr. AymanAyad, a faculty member in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology in Al-Azhar University.
2015	<b>1<sup>st</sup> Winner - Excellence and Creativity Contest</b> Project (Device reads brain waves) by the graduate Esra Omar Maghari and Jehan Al-Shaer from the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University-Gaza, which won the first place in the (excellence and creativity contest) and the project was under the supervision of Dr. Fawzi Abu Jarad, a faculty member at the Faculty of Engineering and Information

	Technology at the University of Al-Azhar.
2014	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Winner – EXPOTECH 2014Palestine</b>                  Project (Triple wagon wheels to move things on the stairs) by the graduates: Amal Abu Meilq and GhadaMansi from the Faculty of Engineering and IT- AzharUniversity in Gaza, which won the first place in the exhibition EXPOTECH Palestine, and the project was under the supervision of Dr. Mohammed Abu Heybah and Dr. Mazen Abu Amr, a member of the faculty of Engineering and information technology at the University of Al-Azhar in Gaza.</p>
2013	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Winner – UCAS 2013 University College</b>                  Project (Automatic vending machine) by the graduates: Ahmed Zarid, KaramAyad, and Hassan Abu Hawilah from the Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, which won the first place in the UCAS hosted by the University College in Gaza, the project was under the supervision of Dr. Ahmed Issa, a member of the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar the University in Gaza.</p>
2013	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Winner – Islamic University</b>                  Project (Safe protection system of computers) protection system was applied for the first time in Gaza Strip by the graduates: WalaaWahbah and Muhammad Wahbah from the Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University, which won the first place within the (Islamic University Competition). The project was under the supervision of Dr. Ahmed Yahya Mahmoud faculty member at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza.</p>
2013	<p><b>3<sup>rd</sup> Winner – UCAS 2013University College</b>                  Project (Automatic stick for guiding blind people) by the graduates: Dalia Fogo, Dina Salah, and WahbahAwaja from the Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, which finished third in UCAS competition of the University College, and the project was under the supervision of Dr. Ahmed Issa, a member of the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza.</p>
2012	<p><b>1<sup>st</sup> Winner – Made in Palestine 2012Palestine</b>                  Project (Water quality monitoring embedded system through pipes) by the graduates: Karem Abu Odeh, Anis Abu Hamad, Bakr al-Wawi from the Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University in Gaza, which won the first place in a competition (Made in Palestine) for students category and the project was under the supervision of Dr. Ahmed Issa, a member of the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza.</p>
2012	<b>1<sup>st</sup> on Palestine and 5<sup>th</sup> on Arab Universities Winners – ACTSAU 2012</b>

	<p><b>Saudi Arabia</b> Project (Smart screen display using the phenomenon of optic deception) by the graduates: Said Omar Sharafi from the Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University, which won the first place on Palestine and the fifth in the Arab world in the competition (ACTSAU), and the project was under the supervision of Dr. Mohammed's Aqel a member in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University.</p>
2011	<p><b>3<sup>rd</sup> Winner – Made in Palestine 2011 Palestine</b> Project (Machine for correcting test papers automatically) by graduates: Khalid to Lafi and Fadi Abu Saada from the Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University, which finished third in the competition (Made in Palestine) for students category and the project was under the supervision of Dr. Mohammed's Aqel a member in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza.</p>
2011	<p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> Winner – Made in Palestine 2011 Palestine</b> Project (Control the robot wirelessly through accelerometer sensor and Nokia N95) by graduate: Sami Roqa from the Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University, which finished second in the contest (Made in Palestine) provided by the Foundation Al Nayzak. The project was under the supervision of Dr. Mohammed Aqela member at the faculty of Engineering and information technology in Al-Azhar University in Gaza.</p>
2010	<p><b>2<sup>nd</sup> Winner – Made in Palestine 2010 Palestine</b> Project (Electronic prayer timings panel), which finished second in the contest (Made in Palestine) for the category of professionals by Dr. Mohamed Aqel a member at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza.</p>
2008	<p><b>Prof. Samy Salim Abu Naser</b>, a member in the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at Al-Azhar University in Gaza the winner of Excellence Award (Al-Aamdesst Excellence Award) - for faculty members of all Palestinian universities.</p>
2007	<p><b>Dr Ahmed Isaa</b>, a faculty member at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at the University of Al-Azhar, Winner (first prize), NIDays 2007 Paper Contest, worldwide virtual Instrumentation Conference, National Instruments, International, UK.</p>
2007	<p><b>Dr Mazen Abu Amro</b>, a faculty member at the Faculty of Engineering and Information Technology at the University of Al-Azhar, the best thesis in ocean engineering for the year 2007 - Germany</p>

The Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University in Gaza is characterized by the field of scientific research in quantity and quality, as they motivate students and help them prepare and publishing scientific research in the most important refereed international journals. It also provides a incentive system to support scientific research for faculty and staff in the Faculty.

The Faculty is working to refine and develop students' skills to prepare them for the labor market, the faculty has worked to provide practical training for students and graduates to help them get a job. Many students got prestigious jobs locally, regionally and internationally. The Faculty always receives information from the employer who pays tribute to the skills of the students and their potential at all levels. The management of the faculty considers that a priority, it has worked and is still, to open up prospects for cooperation with the private sector and public institutions to provide job opportunities for students and provide opportunities for graduate students, the faculty signed cooperation agreements with international universities. The faculty management also help students to overcome the problems they face in the labor market, brought about significant improvements in academic programs and scientific centers in order to ensure compatibility with the requirements of the times and the labor market at all levels. Despite the scarcity of potential adverse external conditions the faculty was able to reach excellence.

It is clear from data of the Faculty of Engineering and IT at Al-Azhar University in Gaza that the assessment and the ongoing quality improvement that culminated with excellence strategies in education as it involves programs and activities of clear-cut efforts have directly helped to bring about positive results of the above-mentioned and so on three levels (student, employee, Organization) which means the faculty achieved competitive advantage sustained excellence at the faculty level in the Palestinian universities to the fact that those benefits are considered qualities difficult for higher education institutions to emulate in the medium and long term, these features also give the faculty a leading position on the Arab and international levels, especially if they were taken into account of the circumstances surrounding the operations of the faculty and its evolution.

But there remain areas of improving on three levels, including increasing work on the development of competencies of students in professional skills through academic plans to ensure the inclusion of students process for all, provided that they are based on inputs minutes from the labor market, and communicates this requirement to carry out studies to determine those requirements systematically and scientifically.

There is also a need to continue to build efficient direction of teachers expected and required of students, considering that education is a continuous process that does not stop at a certain point, but at the institutional level, there is a need to deepen relations with the institutions that employ graduates.

## VII. RESEARCH RESULTS

1. The degree of the practice of excellence strategies in education may be the body of the slogans raised about the performance excellence and gave it a real institutional dimension. If you follow these strategies and implement them at the academic level, the process has contributed to change the basis of competition with colleges, with more than

the traditional method to the modern style of the student depends on academic hub of the operation.

2. That provide students with unique learning experience to support their success, and supports members of the academic staff, to be able to performance in accordance with the desired quality and the provision of supporting diversity, creativity, and designing educational activities that promote creativity and critical thinking among all parties to the educational process, the school environment standards, being president of engines contribute to the formation of excellence in education and make the institution a central role in community development.
3. There is a strong correlation between the degree of exercise of excellence strategies in education and the achievement of higher education institutions and sustainable competitive advantage and these include the overall result of a number of important sub results that is required in the case study of Al-Azhar University in Gaza, as follows:
  - The students considered the academic axis in the operation of the development process of the skills of workers, particularly academic staff in the university helps to distinguish students and increase the employment rate at graduation.
  - The existence of consistency in development efforts and quality improvement for all three levels (student, employee, and the university), and this contributes to the Faculty excellence.
  - The Faculty managed to achieve competitive advantages by offering the characteristics of services without prejudice to the efficiency, and this alone is a great success because improving properties of service requires large investments, which negatively affect the continued institutional development.

Based on the results reached by the study, the followings are recommended:

1. There is a need to increase efforts to implement programs of excellence, and the allocation of adequate time, and reward outstanding efforts as well.
2. There is a need for colleges seeking to achieve competitive advantage and sustainability, using the general philosophies of competitive advantage, but strategically the content is different from what is in the private commercial sector, reflects the college's mission and objectives, which depends on making improvements and excellence in processes that ensure the safety of its outputs.
3. The need to find a balance between the work of teaching and research work of the faculty members in colleges, this has important implications regarding the criteria used in the evaluation process of excellence.
4. Adopt strategies of excellence in the education policy of the university level as a basis in the processes of change and development in higher education institutions.
5. Support a common understanding of the efforts of excellence to create a general culture appreciates excellence in colleges and universities. This underlines the need for transparent, fair rewards systems, to encourage innovation in education.
6. The need to conduct a comprehensive survey on the graduates of colleges and universities include the areas of employment and skills, because that will give accurate indications of the graduates will help to establish a link to a more precise about excellence strategies with competitive advantages relationship.

7. The need to guide and support staff participation in excellence programs so that they are participating within specific mandatory standards.

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