

The role that the Islamic Azad University's top managers and their aides play in managing the crisis of the decrease in the number of students attending this university

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Abstract: This research explores the role of the Islamic Azad University's top managers and their aides in managing the decrease in the number of students attending this university and the contributing factors. The design is descriptive and the method is scientific-comparative. The research community includes all the top managers and their aides among whom 398 are picked through the stratification method. The required data are collected through a semi-structured interview and a researcher-made questionnaire with the validity of 0/8. The collected data are analyzed by the T-test and the Friedman. The findings indicate that creating university majors regardless of the needs of the marketplace, admitting students with any levels of knowledge, the removal of the university entrance exam that has reduced the value of this university's degree, the high cost of the doctoral education (PhD), the public's view that the governmental (public) universities enjoy a higher scientific level, the students' preference to gain job security, and the lack of interaction between this university and the industry have the greatest impact on reducing the number of students attending the Islamic Azad University of Shahre-kord.

Keywords: crisis management, students reduction, the Islamic Azad University, Shahre-kord.

INTRODUCTION

The increasing dynamism of the environment inside and outside of the organization increases the number of opportunities and threats in the environment over time. The end result would be a great many crises and problems. Crisis of any kind would have a substantial impact on the fate of the organization. Thus, it is imperative to get to know the principles and correct methods of crisis management in case of grave crises and problems (Deming, 2000).

Crisis in an organization comes into existence either directly or under the influence of a foreign factor and disrupts the whole system. In either case, we can carry out our analysis systematically (Kahroodi and Jahanian, 1394:1). Hasty decision-making and lack of quick reaction both will have unhealthy results and wrong decisions and limited solutions could have grave consequences. So, through using the findings of crisis management and by its integration with the achievements of strategic management and control system management, the leading directors and managers try to avoid unpredictable and dangerous waves. It is always necessary to have a set of scientific plans and programs for dealing with the incoming social developments inside an organization and the directors and managers have to think about the possible future events and enhance their readiness to deal with the unforeseen events in the future. "Crisis management" is trying to secure the safety and health of an organization in times of great hardship (Coombs, 2007).

On the other hand, universities are the most important tools of cultural, economic, social and political development in every country. Stability of universities and higher education institutions brings about substantial social stability and social order; and the lack of social stability results from the higher education instability. Therefore, it is imperative that the officials' look at the university crises be different from that towards the crises of the environment outside of the universities. At this age, academic leadership enterprise is no longer confined to simply leading and running the everyday administrative affairs of the universities but their presidents and managers can put forward recommendations concerning the complex situations of the third millennium as well as the critical conditions of the universities (Mansouri, 1377:75). Undoubtedly, crisis management in universities as compared to other types of crisis is more subtle and precise and requires more responsibility and sensibility. At this time, one of the critical issues that universities and the Islamic Azad University in particular are facing with is the issue of the students; that is, in recent years, many universities and higher education institutions are experiencing the crisis of decline in the number of students enrollment. And if the solution to this problem is not found, they will have

more administrative problems and their future will be in jeopardy . Bearing in mind the reduction in the number of students along with the establishment of rival universities , higher enrollment by not-for-profit higher education institutions , scientific-applied institutions , Payame noor and other educational institutions , this study is to explore the role of the Islamic Azad University's administrators in dealing with the causes of the crisis of reduction in the number of students and the crisis management at Shahrekord Islamic Azad University . And in the end , a few suggestions will be made so as to stop the fall in the university enrollment .

Statement of the Problem

In the traditional attitude towards the management of crisis , it is believed that the “ crisis management “ means “ putting out the fire “ ; that is , the crisis managers wait till the conditions deteriorate , and after everything is devastated , try to limit the impact of that devastation . But recently this attitude has changed . Based on its recent meaning , a set of practical plans and programs should always be available to face the possible future developments and the managers should think about the possible future events and be ready to deal with the unforeseen events . As a result , the crisis management stresses the necessity of regular predictions and preparedness to deal with these internal and external issues that seriously threaten our vital national interests and objectives (Klein & Dawar , 2004 : 203) . Crisis management is a fundamental part of the “ strategic management “ . Before the pursuit of any long-term goals , the crisis management is essential to ensure the continuous stability and success of an organization . Crisis management requires a disciplined and systematic approach that is based on consciousness , management sensitivity and a good understanding of the importance of careful planning and organizational readiness . Though the science of crisis management comes to the help of managers to solve the problems and difficulties of the inner or environmental crisis of the organization (Niaz Azari et al , 1393 : 719) . Therefore , the crisis management insists that , by taking advantage of individual and organizational experiences , first and foremost investigate and identify the causes of the crisis ; and second , in the case of any crisis , by creating a crisis headquarters , while planning , organizing , guarding and controlling the crisis , try to harness and finally solve the crisis (Taghipour , 1389 : 25) . Today , not only in Islamic Azad University but in state universities , the number of students is decreasing . The Islamic Azad University that was enjoying an increase in the number of its branches across the country , even in the far away provinces , in the last few years is facing the big problem of shortage of students and it is expected to take measures so that the current crisis could be resolved . The interesting point is that in the majority of Azad University's branches , students are picked regardless of their abilities , grades and conditions . Moreover , adopting policies such as sending a large number of SMS's , tv ads , using promotional banners on the public transport as well as inside metro stations , which in most cases because of their inappropriate content and place , harm the status of the university and its students along with founding countless Azad University centers in different cities that are nearing their closure is something of the kind and exacerbates the problem(News site – Tahlil Ghods Online , 1392 ; 9) . furthermore , one of the most important reasons for the decline in the number of students is the reduction in population growth and the increase in the number of such universities . To solve the problem , officials have to approve and introduce more graduate and post graduate courses (Imna News Agency , 1393 : 3) . So the question that remains is that what is the cause of decline in the number of students in Shahrekord Islamic Azad University and what the administrators have to do to resolve the current crisis .

Similar studies have been carried out in this field . In a similar research , Rabiee and Rezaghi Shirsavar (1389) have investigated the crisis management in Islamic Azad University units and maintain that from the view point of the university administrators and its faculty members , from among the multitude of educational – research – technological dimensions and managerial , socio-cultural and political strategies , socio-cultural dimensions have the least difference in the status quo and are desirable and the political aspects have the most significance of all ; in their research , Saeidi and Yar Ahmadi (1389) have explained and identified the concept of crisis , types of crisis , definitions of management , crisis management and its responsibilities and believe that , by using a database and a laboratory and preparing technological necessities and creating confidence in society and organizing the communication among people , a manager can plan operations at the time of crisis . In their research , Memarzadeh and Sarafrazi (1389) study the different steps of crisis management process in an organization and believe that in a critical situation , the culture of the organization changes and moves toward a creative and variable one . This in itself creates opportunities to maintain and sustain the life of the organization ; Kahroodi and Jahanian (1394) study the necessary strategies at the time of crisis in universities including strengthening the scientific , political and cultural associations and creating suitable political discourse ; Barnett (1997) discusses the political dimensions of crisis among college elite and students including regularization of political activities at universities and proper political treatment of the students ; according to Klein (2003) , nonproportional rise of tuition , low salaries and benefits and lack of appropriate employment opportunities for

graduates are among the economic factors that cause crisis ; Smith (2004) examines the socio-cultural aspects of crisis among college students and graduates ; in his research , Floyd (2005) studies the educational dimensions of the crisis and concludes that the great number of university applicants , low quality education , lack of enough physical space and accommodation for students , low quality food and unsuitable physical space , low quality teaching , shortage of faculty members and long hours of teaching , professors and faculty members with out-of-date knowledge , the way students are admitted and the dominant desire of the students to get diploma at any cost are among the dimensions that cause crisis .

The Research Questions

What is the role of educational and research factors influencing the students shortage crisis management in Islamic Azad University ?

What is the role of environmental factors influencing the students shortage crisis management in Islamic Azad University ?

What is the role of political factors influencing the students shortage crisis management in Islamic Azad University ?

What is the role of economic-financial factors influencing the students shortage crisis management in Islamic Azad University ?

What is the role of cultural factors influencing the students shortage crisis management in Islamic Azad University ?

What is the role of individual and personality factors influencing the students shortage crisis management in Islamic Azad University ?

What is the role of the university’s structural factors influencing the students shortage crisis management in Islamic Azad University ?

THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

In terms of purpose , the current study is practical and in terms of research design , it is descriptive ; and since it is going to determine the root causes of decline in the number of students in Islamic Azad University of Shahrekord and render guidelines for attracting more students , it is of an ex-post factor kind . The research community consists of all the vice-presidents , directors , faculty members , staff and the students of Islamic Azad University of Shahrekord . The sample includes 398 people . To collect data , a researcher- made questionnaire for the student shortage crisis at Azad University is used. The validity of the questionnaire is confirmed by a number of professionals and educational management professors . For its reliability , Cronbach’s Alpha is being used . The questionnaire’s reliability is 0.8 that , according to the existing sources , is relatively high .

The Research Findings

Descriptive Findings

To describe the research data , some descriptive statistics values for research variables are presented in table (1) below .

Table 1. Descriptive findings of research variables scores

Factors	mean	standard deviation	minimum	maximum
Research & educational	3.51	0.642	1	5
Environmental	3.42	0.782	1	5
Political	3.67	0.697	1	5
Economic-financial	4.37	0.781	2	5
Cultural	3.66	0.778	1	5
Individual-personality	3.97	0.789	1	5
Structural	3.61	0.700	1	5

Inferential Findings

For inferential analysis of data and to test the research hypotheses , a single-sample T-test is used to determine the significance of difference between mean and the standard value ; and to rank the means for several components , Friedman test is used . The results of the research questions tests are as follows :

Question One : Educational and research factors influencing the student shortage crisis management

Table 2. Single-sample T-test for the scores of research and educational factors affecting the student shortage

Educational & research factors	M	T	Sig.	Impact
Non-functional curricula at Azad Uni. units	3.16	2.805	0.005	higher than average
Lack of long-distance education	3.08	1.341	0.181	average
Curricula's lack of tendency towards research	3.30	5.255	0.000	higher than average
Lack of effective links between Azad Uni. and industry for the benefit of students' internship	3.74	12.222	0.000	much projects and
Tendency towards quantity rather than quality	3.87	15.441	0.000	much
Lack of scientific criteria for student admission at different levels	3.59	9.703	0.000	higher than average
Lack of experienced professors with high knowledge	3.51	8.199	0.000	higher than average
Creating university majors with no regard to the needs and demands of market	3.97	17.044	0.000	much the job
Attracting students with low GPA,s	3.73	13.241	0.000	much
Students' belief that they are given low scores to stop them from being graduated	3.31	5.265	0.000	higher than average
Old and non-functional university majors	3.33	6.300	0.000	higher than average

According to the results of table (2) , the significance level values for all educational and research factors influencing the student shortage crisis except for the second factor are less than the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and the T-test statistics values are positive; thus , the impact of educational and research factors affecting the student shortage crisis at Shahrekord Azad University is higher than average and in some cases the estimation is much .

Question Two : Environmental factors affecting the student shortage crisis management

Table 3. Single-sample T-test of the scores of environmental factors influencing the student shortage

Environmental factors	M	T	Sig.	Impact
Reduction in space quality at Azad Uni.	3.32	5.529	0.000	higher than average
The long distance between some Azad Universities and the city centers	3.55	9.330	0.000	much
Azad University's degree not being recognized and accepted by other countries	3.53	8.210	0.000	higher than average
Continuation of operations of non-active or low-activity Azad Universities & their dispersion	3.39	7.873	0.000	higher than average
Shortage of necessary facilities at Azad Universities that are very far from large cities	3.49	8.875	0.000	higher than average

According to the results of table (3) , the significance level values for all the environmental factors affecting the student shortage crisis are less than the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and the T-test statistics values are positive ; thus , the impact of the environmental factors affecting the student shortage crisis at Shahrekord Islamic Azad University is higher than average and for the second factor the estimation is much .

Question Three : Political factors influencing the student shortage crisis management

According to the results of table (4) , the values of significance level for all political factors influencing the student shortage crisis is less than the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and the T-test statistics values are positive ; thus , the impact of political factors influencing the Shahrekord Islamic Azad University student shortage crisis is higher than average and in some cases estimation is much .

Question Four : Economic-financial factors influencing the student shortage crisis management

Table 4 . Single-sample T-test of the scores of the political factors influencing the student shortage

Political factors	M	T	Sig.	Impact
Not publicizing the Azad University's achievements in the media	3.43	7.855	0.000	higher than average
Lack of Ministry of Science cooperation to develop Azad University's majors	3.59	10.396	0.000	higher than average
Difference in the value of State and Azad Uni. diploma	3.83	13.562	0.000	much
The long and bumpy road of adding uni. majors that has turned into favors	3.59	11.368	0.000	higher than average
Lack of interdisciplinary education	3.64	12.814	0.000	higher than average
Omission of Azad Uni admission exam and consequently devaluation of its diploma	3.86	14.160	0.000	much
Ministry of Science and Research reluctance to provide Azad University students with facilities	3.75	13.882	0.000	much
Admitting students at any condition and with any scientific level	3.89	15.794	0.000	much

Table 5 .Single-sample T-test of the scores of economic-financial factors affecting the student shortage

Economic-financial factors	M	T	Sig.	Impact
Rise in Azad Uni. tuition fees	4.38	26.851	0.000	much
Fall in families' financial status	4.26	24.641	0.000	much
High inflation and economic problems	4.37	31.815	0.000	very much
High cost of doctoral graduate	4.46	33.847	0.000	very much

According to the results of table (5) , the significance level values of all economic-financial factors affecting the student shortage are less than the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and the T-test statistics values are positive ; thus , the impact of economic-financial factors influencing the student shortage at Shahrekord Islamic Azad University is estimated much .

Question Five : Cultural factors influencing the student shortage crisis management

Table 6. Single-sample T-test of the scores of cultural factors affecting the student shortage

Cultural factors	M	T	Sig.	Impact
Families wrong belief that Azad University is seeking money	3.91	16.164	0.000	much
Qualitative comparison of Azad Uni. and State university	3.92	16.376	0.000	much
The belief that State universities in comparison with Azad Uni. have a higher academic level	4.14	25.503	0.000	higher than average
Presumably high rate of employment among State university graduates than Azad Uni.	3.93	17.292	0.000	much
Failure to observe proper Islamic hijab based on the religious values patterns	3.14	2.046	0.041	higher than average
The parents and families' attitude that the more you get educated , the less religious you become	3.06	0.933	0.352	average

According to the results of table (6) , the significance level values for all cultural factors influencing the student shortage except for the last two items are less than the significant level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and the T-test statistics values are positive ; thus , the impact of cultural factors affecting the Shahrekord Islamic Azad University student shortage is higher than average and in some cases the estimation is much .

Question Six ; Individual-personality factors influencing the student shortage crisis management

Table 7 . Single-sample T-test of individual-personality factors affecting the student shortage

Individual-personality factors	M	T	Sig.	Impact
Doctoral graduate students interview stress and the lack of justice in evaluation	3.85	16.124	0.000	much
Students' preference for job security than continuation of their education	4.07	20.906	0.000	much
The students' belief that their MAs and Ph D.s won't be accepted by State universities	3.98	19.909	0.000	much

According to the results of table (7) , the significance level values of all individual-personality factors affecting the student shortage are less than the significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$ and the T-test statistics values are positive ; thus , the impact of individual-personality factors affecting the Shahrekord Azad University student shortage is estimated much .

Question Seven : Structural factors influencing the student shortage crisis management

Table 8 . Single-sample T-test of the scores of structural factors affecting the student shortage

Structural factors	M	T	Sig.	Impact
Lack of effective field publicity	3.52	9.278	0.000	higher than average
Lack of enough motivation among the staff and directors for effective advertising	3.57	10.692	0.000	higher than average
Lack of interaction between Azad Uni. and industry to secure jobs for graduates	4	19.592	0.000	much
Lack of planning for commercialization of science at Azad University	3.76	14.715	0.000	much
Lack of hospitals , labs , workshops for some majors	3.65	10.645	0.000	higher than average
Lack of proper publicity that could safeguard the university dignity	3.59	10.065	0.000	higher than average
Lack of resourceful directors in some units to create change and improve the conditions	3.75	13.328	0.000	much

According to the results of table (8) , the significance level values of all structural factors influencing the student shortage are less than the significance level value of $\alpha = 0.05$ and the T-test statistics values are positive ; thus , the impact of structural factors affecting the Shahrekord Islamic Azad University is higher than average and in some cases the estimation is much .

To investigate and prioritize the factors influencing the student shortage in the selected sample , Friedman test is used and the results are presented in the table below .

Table 9. Friedman test of factors influencing the student shortage in the selected sample

Factors affecting the student shortage in the selected sample	χ^2 (test statistics)	Sig.	Results
528.597	0.000	significant difference	

Factors	M	Ranking
Research & educational	3.18	6
Environmental	2.94	7
Political	3.83	3
Economic-financial	5.96	1
Cultural	3.76	4
Individual-personality	4.80	2
Structural	3.54	5

According to the table (9) , the significance level values of Friedman test for the investigation of the components are less than the significance level value of $\alpha = 0.05$; thus , the values of factors affecting the student shortage in the selected sample are not the same . Moreover , the results indicate that in the selected sample , the " economic-financial " factors have the greatest impact while the " environmental " factors have the least impact .

CONCLUSION

This study explores the role of presidents, vice presidents and heads of Azad University in the student shortage crisis management and provides the necessary techniques to attract students; thus, the following hypotheses are investigated.

With regard to the first question, the results indicate that in the selected sample, "creating university majors regardless of the needs and demands of the job market" and "Azad University tendency towards quantity rather than quality of its students" have the greatest impact and "non-functional curricula at Azad University units" has the least impact; and it is in line with the results of Rabiee & Rezghi Shirsavar's research results that there is a significant relationship between educational and research dimensions and the Azad University crisis management (1389). Floyd (2005), in line with the results of this research, concludes that "reduction in educational quality, reduction in teaching quality, lack of enough faculty members and the professors' out of date knowledge" are among the critical factors affecting the admission of students at Azad University. The results of the environmental factors affecting the shortage of students indicate that in the selected sample "the long distance between some Azad Universities and some large cities" has the greatest impact and "the native employees favoritism and discrimination between the students and professors" has the least impact. The results of the political factors influencing the student shortage indicate that in the selected sample "admitting students at any condition with any grade" and the omission of admission exam that has damaged the value of Azad University diploma "have the greatest impact and "lack of publicity for Azad University achievements" has the least impact; and this accords partially with the results of the research by Rabiee and Rezghi Shirsavar (1389) and Kahroodi & Jahanian (1394) that there is a significant relationship between the political factors and the crisis management at Azad University; it also accords partially with the results of Barnett's research (1997), that is, the political factors affecting the student shortage crisis including "the lack of transparent and regularized political activities at Azad University". The results of the economic-financial factors affecting the student shortage indicate that in the selected sample "the high cost of doctoral graduate" has the greatest impact and "the falling financial status of families" has the least impact; and it is in close accord with the research results of Ebrahimpour et al. (1393) that there is a significant relationship between the socio-economic dimensions (at three low, medium and high economic and social levels) and the students' interest in higher education; and also with the results of Klein's research on the economic factors affecting the student shortage crisis at Azad University.

The results of cultural factors affecting the student shortage indicate that in the selected sample "the belief that State universities have a higher scientific level than Azad University" has the greatest impact and "the families and parents' belief that the more education you get, the less religious you become" has the least impact; and it accords with the research results of Memarzadeh & Sarfarazi (1389) that the organizational culture influences the crisis management processes of any organization. The results of individual-personality factors affecting the student shortage indicate that in the selected sample "students' preference to gain job security for their future life" has the greatest impact and "doctoral graduate students' stress at interviews and the lack of justice in interview evaluation" has the least impact; and it is in line with the research results of Ebrahimpour et al. (1393) and Kahroodi & Jahanian (1394), that is, the students' educational motivation and hope for employment. The structural factors influencing the student shortage indicate that in the selected sample "lack of interaction and cooperation between Azad University and industry to create jobs for the graduates" has the greatest impact and "the separation of students based on their gender in some Azad University units" has the least impact; and it accords with the research results of Rabiee & Rezghi Shirsavar (1389), that is, the provision of research, laboratory and office facilities and equipment at Azad University to manage the crisis. In addition, it is in line with the research results of Saeedi & Yarmohammadi (1389) and Barnett (1997) on the structural and managerial dimensions of crisis in universities and directors' lack of familiarity with management crisis. Accordingly, on the basis of the results of this research, the following suggestions (recommendations) are made:

Presidents, vice-presidents and directors of Azad University have to try and create university majors with regard to the needs and demands of the job market.

Presidents, vice-presidents and directors of Azad University have to try to improve the educational, research and student quality.

They have to increase the interaction and cooperation between Azad University and industry so as to create suitable job opportunities for students.

They have to try to create knowledge-oriented businesses and invite Shahrekord Azad University students to work.

The presidents and directors of Azad University along with the Ministry of Science and Azad University Central Organization have to apply for and create interdisciplinary majors.

They have to provide financial assistance to the students and install their debts and provide them with the Ministry of Science and with the Students Welfare Fund's loans .

They have to make sure that justice has been observed in doctoral graduate interview evaluation so as to reduce stress .

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