



منتدى الاستراتيجيات الأردني
JORDAN STRATEGY FORUM

Higher & Technical Education Sector

Jordan's Economic Vision Roadmap



منتدى الاستراتيجيات الأردني JORDAN STRATEGY FORUM

The Jordan Strategy Forum (JSF) is a not-for-profit organization, which represents a group of Jordanian private sector companies that are active in corporate and social responsibility (CSR) and in promoting Jordan's economic growth. JSF's members are active private sector institutions, who demonstrate a genuine will to be part of a dialogue on economic and social issues that concern Jordanian citizens. The Jordan Strategy Forum promotes a strong Jordanian private sector that is profitable, employs Jordanians, pays taxes and supports comprehensive economic growth in Jordan.

The JSF also offers a rare opportunity and space for the private sector to have evidence-based debate with the public sector and decision-makers with the aim to increase awareness, strengthening the future of the Jordanian economy and applying best practices.

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This is an expert opinion report based on discussions and focus group meetings held by the Jordan Strategy Forum (JSF). The overall objective of this effort is to analyze different sectors (14) of the Jordanian economy and their respective challenges, and come-up with practical solutions and initiatives to enhance their competitiveness. Throughout this exercise, the JSF facilitated the focus group meetings, and supported the work-stream managers with any needed research and logistics.

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1. Introduction

No one should underestimate the importance of **HIGHER EDUCATION per se**. Higher education drives economic growth and development, prosperity, and competitiveness.

1. Modern workplaces are in a continuous state of evolution. Well-trained and skilled graduates can better meet future challenges and opportunities.
2. Through innovations, higher education institutions can find effective solutions to issues that concern the performance (productivity) of economic sectors.
3. Good graduates have a better chance of finding suitable jobs in highly competitive job markets and in getting better-paid jobs.
4. Universities' collaboration with businesses results in many advances in life sciences, engineering, and in many other fields.
5. Universities build stronger societies, reduce, if not end poverty, and boost shared / inclusive prosperity.
6. "Economic studies have shown a positive relationship between education and economic growth, particularly those that take into account the quality of education" (International Bank for Reconstruction and Development / The World Bank).

Traditionally, learning at universities has always been in the classroom. Students sat down, listened, took notes, and interacted with their instructor / professor. Students also took their exams, within a set amount of time in a physical location. However, this does not mean that university education has always been on-campus only.

For so long, many higher education institutions have been providing **"DISTANCE EDUCATION"**, whereby students are not physically present at a school. Students used to receive their education materials through the post and the learnt course is finished through postal correspondence between the students and their instructors / institutions. **TECHNOLOGICAL ADVANCES**, however, have provided universities, all over the world, with alternatives (to on-campus and distance education). For example, a fully on-line degree means students will not have to travel at all for their studies. Blended learning, on the other hand, is a combination of learning at a distance and traditional on-campus learning. "The COVID-19 pandemic has caused the largest disruption of education in history, having already had a near universal impact on learners and teachers around the world, from pre-primary to secondary schools, technical and vocational education and training (TVET) institutions, universities, adult learning, and skills development establishments" (United Nations,2020).

As far as universities are concerned, the sudden closure of university campuses across many countries, including universities in Jordan, has necessitated a sudden delivery of a huge number of virtual courses. Naturally, this move must have faced several problems.

Following the closure of all the universities in Jordan (17 March 2020), it is also useful to note that by the end of the second semester, more than 90% of the courses were taught on-line, up from around 85% witnessed immediately after the first semester's closure (Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research).

The world will succeed in containing COVID-19, eventually. What is less clear, however, is the impact of the virus on societies in general, and on higher education in particular.

Covid-19 should prove to be a **“trigger event” for change. The pandemic should create opportunities and windfalls. COVID-19 should create a windfall in higher education in Jordan.**

The purpose of this effort, organized by the Jordan Strategy Forum (JSF), is to conduct Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, and Threats (SWOT) Analysis of the “higher education” sector in Jordan. Naturally, the objective of this exercise is to determine few strategic objectives for the sector, and outline a number of initiatives, whose objective is to develop the sector further during the next 8 to 10 years.

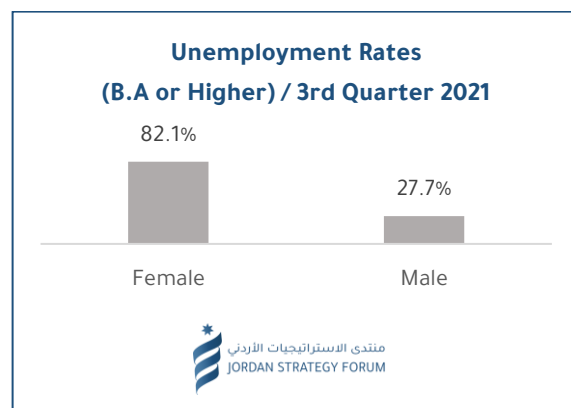
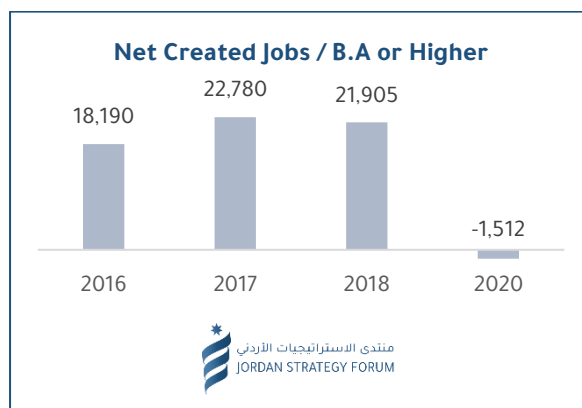
To realize the objectives of this exercise, naturally, the JSF needs the opinion of experts, whose sector-specific knowledge and experience are valuable. This is why the Forum has organized focus group meetings to discuss the overall objectives and plan for the exercise, fill the SWOT matrix results, agree on the overall objectives, and to recommend few initiatives.

The rest of this document is organized as follows. In section 2, we outline a number of observations about higher education in Jordan. In section 3, we present the SWOT results and main objectives. In section 4, we present the initiatives. Finally, in section 5, we conclude the report.

2. Performance of the sector in the past 5 years & COVID-19 impact

The contribution of universities towards Jordan's economic growth and development in general, and to human capital in particular, notwithstanding, this sector is large in terms of number of employees and number of students. Higher education in Jordan is also sizeable in its revenue and spending power.

1. At the beginning of the academic year 2020 / 2021, higher education in Jordan is composed of 10 public universities, 16 private universities, 2 universities established under special law, and 1 regional university, and 45 university and community colleges.
2. The dominant part of higher education in Jordan, public universities, has been, for so long, wrestling with financial pressure. Indeed, their 2019 cumulative debt stood at JD 108 million. This amount must have increased in 2020 and 2021.
3. The total number of university employees is equal to 31,770. About 36% of this number (11,394) are academic staff members.
4. The total number of enrolled students at all universities is equal to 332,413. Most of these students (85%) are enrolled in undergraduate programs. At the community colleges, this number is 34,374. In addition, it is useful to note that around 35,000 students are non-Jordanians who come from 106 different countries.
5. Based on the latest published figures by the Ministry of Higher Education & Scientific Research, during the academic years 2017-2018 and 2019-2020, a total of 56,466 and 55,170 students graduated with an undergraduate degree. Whilst these graduates obtained their degrees in almost all specializations offered by other universities across the globe, it is unfortunate to note that the numbers of net created jobs for persons with B.A. or higher degrees are much lower. **No wonder why the unemployment rate for males with a B.A or higher is equal to 27.7% and for females an astonishing 82.1%. If we add the number of Jordanians who graduate from Arab and Foreign universities, this equation becomes even more amazing.**



Based on the above-mentioned observations, one can pose a critically important question:

Should policy-makers work on downsizing universities in the country?

The answer to this question is no, and vehemently no. After all, Jordanians who graduate from Jordanian universities obtain their degrees in almost all specializations offered by other universities across the globe. Indeed, Jordanians who graduate from foreign universities also obtain their degrees in almost all specializations offered by other universities across the globe.

Relevant stakeholders should concentrate their efforts on “improving the quality of university education”. Let university education be the choice of students’ parents and their children.

Before the onslaught of COVID-19, Jordan’s higher education, at large, was traditional in every sense of the word. Undergraduate, as well as graduate students, sat down, listened, took notes, interacted with their instructors / professors, and took their exams within a set amount of time in a physical location. The fact that university education in Jordan has been traditional, this fact only, should encourage all relevant higher education stakeholders to look into the future, and prepare for a post-pandemic higher education world.

Higher education institutions in Jordan must prepare for the post-pandemic world, adopt a more flexible model while safeguarding high quality, equitable, and inclusive learning environment to, not only survive financially, but also serve the desperate need of the national economy for well-trained individuals. Universities in Jordan should come out of their comfort zone, and soon.

No one disagrees with the fact that a university degree still counts. However, no one should disagree with the fact that the world is moving, albeit slowly, towards a new reality. The focus of university education should be the acquiring skills and not just degrees.

According to the World Economic Forum (WEF), **critical thinking and analysis, as well as problem solving**, have stayed at the top of the agenda with year-on-year consistency (WEF).

Top 15 skills for 2025	
1. Analytical thinking & innovation	2. Resilience, stress tolerance & flexibility
3. Active learning & learning strategies	4. Reasoning, problem - solving & ideation
5. Complex problem - solving	6. Emotional intelligence
7. Critical thinking & analysis.	8. Troubleshooting & user experience.
9. Creativity, originality & initiative	10. Service orientation
11. Leadership and social influence	12. Systems analysis & evaluation
13. Technology use, monitoring & control	14. Resilience, stress tolerance & flexibility
15. Technology design & programming	16. Persuasion & negotiation

Source: The Future of Jobs Report WEF (October 2020).

If policy-makers succeed in adopting a well-structured hybrid business model, and improves the quality of education, higher education in Jordan will only grow in size (employment, income, and spending). Higher education will become more viable, financially. Last, but not least, higher education in Jordan will only enhance and increase its contribution towards the growth and development process of the country for years, if not generations, to come. We should not allow this opportunity for change go to waste. It should be a windfall.

3. Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, & Threats (SWOT)

Analysis

In terms of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats of the higher education sector in Jordan, the team members see the followings:

1. Strengths:

1. Accessibility to higher education and technical and vocational training in response to the growing demand.
2. Success stories of universities that offer quality education exist. Many these models can be replicated.
3. Ability to attract international students.
4. Higher education council accreditation commission.

2. Weaknesses:

1. Restrictive and insufficient budgets lead to poor quality and inability to integrate new and innovative technologies, programs and teaching methods.
2. High student to teaching staff ratio, and overstaffing in administration.
3. Weak institutional performance in most higher education institutions and absence of executive plans, with KPIs and assessments. In addition, there is a lack of transparency and accountability and these reflect poor governance, and lack of university autonomy.
4. Outdated curricula and traditional teaching methods.
5. Poor support facilities.
6. Lack of prioritization to integrate essential components including innovation, research, entrepreneurship, and technical education and training.
7. Poor TVET governance, institutional structure (multiple umbrellas), brand, private sector partnerships, and quality of programs.
8. Feeling of social injustice and lack of equity among students.
9. Cultural related challenges.
10. Unjustified expansion of higher education institutions in terms of specialization and location.

3. Opportunities:

1. Good chance to advance quality of education through blended / hybrid learning.
2. High focus and attention on progress of digitization and advancement of the e-government initiative.
3. Political will to support quality education, and the availability of a comprehensive HRD strategy to advance higher education.

4. High focus and attention on entrepreneurs, and on the advancement of the entrepreneurship ecosystem.
5. Potential strategic partnerships with the private sector and regional and international donors, to integrate digital technologies and innovation within higher education, and to invest in the advancement of Vocational and Technical education.
6. Governance allows flexibility in adapting.

4. Threats

1. Instability due to constant changes in laws, policies, and management.
2. Budget allocation for higher education.
3. Competition from, and growth of major educational institutions in neighboring countries and their affiliations to major western universities.
4. High unemployment rates among university graduates.
5. Intellectual and academic brain drain.

4. Strategic Objectives:

Based on the results of the SWOT analysis, the team members envisage the following objectives:

1. Reform the technical career path by revisiting governance, structure, programs, partnerships, and market requirements.
2. Enhance the quality of competency-based education through restructuring academic programs, revamping curricula, modernizing learning and teaching methods, and provision of exploratory and technology enabled spaces.
3. Strengthen the accreditation system and total quality management, and ensure proper implementation at the national and institutional levels.
4. Invest in faculty professional development towards 21st century competencies.
5. Expand effective and innovative hybrid learning, while enhancing expertise in developing digital content across institutions.
6. Attract investment and funding from the private sector and international donors to integrate digital technologies and digital competencies.
7. Restructure university financing while applying innovative solutions addressing financial challenges.
8. Enhance governance of higher education institutions by revisiting the legal and institutional structure.

5. The Initiatives

First Initiative: Reform the technical career path by revisiting governance, structure, programs, partnerships, and market requirements.

Objectives:

Reform the technical career path by revisiting governance, structure, programs, partnerships, and market requirements.

Enhance quality of competency-based education through revamping curricula, modern learning and teaching methods, and providing exploratory and technology enabled spaces.

Description: Technical education is very important, in light of the high unemployment rates among Bachelor degree holders (over education), and those with lower than secondary qualifications (under-skilling).

There are a number of good examples in Jordan in technical education such as HTU and LTUC.

Reference may be taken from the British BTEC (Business & Technology Education Council) technical qualifications at Levels 4 and 5 (according to the UK qualification framework). Establish technical institutes within existing universities whereby universities. Initially, Tafila Technical Universities and Jordan University of Science and Technology were intended to provide technical education. As such, technical qualifications and pathways to employment are made available within the existing infrastructures (such as HTU in Jordan and IUT in France).

1. The roles and responsibilities of the various bodies involved to be clarified to avoid duplication and confusion (governance and legislation)
2. A rigorous quality assurance model is required for effective technical education (curricula).
3. Government funding to technical training providers should be linked to measurable and verifiable employment outcomes (financial).
4. Rollout apprenticeships on a national scale and provide legal and social support for apprentices according to the National Framework for Quality Apprenticeships under the auspices of TVSDC.
5. Awareness sessions for employers to ensure that employees with technical degrees are not paid less compared to their degree-holding peers.
6. Levels 4 and 5 are crucial levels. However, they are dominated by Balqa Applied University, which is not providing the necessary skills and therefore, legislative changes are required.

Expected Outcome:

1. Greater involvement of employers through apprenticeships.
2. Clearer scoping and alignment between MoE, MoHE, and MoL.
3. More donor funding secured towards.
4. Improve attractiveness of higher education.

Initiative Owner: Ministry of Higher Education

Enabler:

1. Private Sector.
2. Ministry of Labor.
3. Technical and Vocational Skills Development Commission.
4. VTC.
5. AQACHEI.

Second Initiative: Using Hybrid Learning to Improve Higher Education Quality Outcomes**Objective:**

1. Expand effective and innovative hybrid learning, while enhancing expertise in developing digital content across institutions.
2. Invest in faculty professional development towards 21st century competencies.

Description: The decision made in July 2020 by the Council of Higher Education regarding the Policy Paper on Distance Learning must be revisited. The Paper included an action plan as follows:

1. Inject courses from international platforms such as edX and Coursera. These courses may be taken by learners for an extra fee or within the course fees. These courses may be equalized for credit hours from the existing study plans.
2. Faculty take online Instructional Design courses on edX and Coursera (<https://www.coursera.org/learn/instructional-design-foundations-applications>) and (<https://www.edx.org/micromasters/usmx-umgc-instructional-design-technology>)
3. Universities then create MOOCs that are developed in partnership with Edraak. These MOOCs may be used by other universities in Jordan, promoting collaboration among higher education institutions.
4. AQACHEI may introduce a quality framework and regulations for online learning.

Expected Outcome:

1. Improve quality of on-campus education and research by enriching it with hybrid learning.
2. Increase collaboration with industrial and international partners.

3. Improve access to quality higher education.
4. Enable universities to provide quality-learning journeys for all learners.

Initiative Owner: Ministry of Higher Education

Enabler:

1. AQACHEI
2. Universities
3. Donor community

Third Initiative: Improving governance and enhancing autonomy of Jordanian universities.

Objectives:

1. Enhance governance of higher education institutions by revisiting the legal and institutional structure.
2. Strengthen the accreditation system, total quality management, and ensure proper implementation at the national and institutional levels.

Description:

Amend the following laws: Higher Education Law, Jordanian Universities Law. The clauses related to the number of members of the Board of Trustees and the mechanism for selecting them should be re-examined to avoid the existing overlap between the powers of the Boards of Trustees and the various councils to reduce bureaucracy in decision-making, and activate the role of accountability for university leaders and councils. In addition, the Law of the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Authority of Higher Education Institutions Law should be re-examined. The objective is to focus on qualitative standards of education and not quantity, (number of students and faculty member).

Shaping the future of a knowledge-driven society requires solid autonomous and well-governed universities with missions of learning and teaching, research, innovation and culture in service to society.

The COVID-19 pandemic has presented unprecedented challenges and difficult time where presidents and their academic and administrative colleagues have needed their judgment and foresight that a well-functioning board of trustees can provide.

The Board of trustees must have expertise in governance in addition to the capabilities required to provide oversight and guidance to their institutions. It should be also well equipped to deal with the different challenges and issues of universities in timely manner. Therefore, the membership / composition, processes, and structures of the board of trustees are vital for good governance. Moreover, the diversity in board composition in

Jordan is another critical area of concern in a male dominated culture of the higher education.

In summary, Jordanian universities lack autonomy and good governance, Hence, there is a pressing need to revise and rectify the related regulations to improve good governance in autonomous universities through effective board composition, size, diversity and structure in addition to clear roles and responsibilities between the council of higher education, board of trustees and university leadership.

Improving good governance in universities will enhance the universities efforts to achieve their missions, execute their core functions, and efficiently respond to students' education needs and emerging trends and challenges including the serious financial problems of the public universities as well as enhance gender equity at all levels of governance and leadership

To enhance efficiency and sustainability, the Board of trustees must advocate for autonomous universities, also find, and apply innovative solutions to restructure university financing as well as influence financial policies of higher education to solve the critical financial problems.

Expected Outcome:

Reducing overlaps in legislation and defining responsibilities.

Improving the quality of higher education for the benefit of the economy and the reputation of higher education.

Initiative Owner: Council of Higher Education & AQACHEI.

Enabler: Ministry of Higher Education, Ministry of Finance, Council of Ministers, and Parliament.

Fourth Initiative: Identify innovative, strategic and practical solutions to mitigate the financial problems of public universities

Objective:

A. Restructure university financing through the application of innovative solutions that address financial challenges.

Description:

Identify strategic and innovative solutions that enable universities to reset their financial trajectory and drive excellence in teaching and research in a sustainable manner.

Initiative Owner:

1. MOHE
2. Universities

3. Boards of trustees (presidents and members)
4. Presidents and all governing levels

Enabler:

1. Council of Ministers
2. Ministry of Finance
3. Ministry of Planning

Fifth Initiative: Development of faculty development programs / centers to strengthen the teaching and learning skills and competencies of faculty members for better student learning outcomes.

Objective:

- A. Invest in faculty professional development towards 21st century competencies.

Description: To enhance faculty development for the 21st Century by upgrading the qualifications of all faculty members for high quality teaching, learning, innovation and better student learning outcomes.

Initiative Owner:

1. Ministry of Higher Education and scientific research.
2. Universities (Public and Private).

Enabler:

1. Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions.
2. The Ministry of Digital Economy and Entrepreneurship.

Sixth Initiative: Accreditation and Quality Assurance of schools (K-12) in addition to Higher Education Institutions.

Objectives:

- A. Strengthen the accreditation system, total quality management, and ensure proper implementation at the national and institutional levels.
- B. Enhance quality of competency-based education through revamping curricula, modern learning and teaching methods, and providing exploratory and technology enabled spaces.

Initiative Objective: To Improve and strengthen the quality of kindergarten, primary and secondary education (K-12) in the Kingdom

Description:

To Improve and strengthen the quality of Kindergarten, primary and secondary education (K-12) in the Kingdom and ensure the quality of its outcomes using standards of measurement that comply with international standards.

Amend the Law of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions No. (20) For the year 2007 and its amendments in 2018 to include Kindergarten, primary and secondary education (K-12) in addition to the higher education Institutions.

An accreditation is an affirmation that a school provides a high-quality level of education that meets the expectation of public and the recognition of the educational community.

- Development of the standards and indicators for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of schools (K-12)
- Establish/Strengthen quality assurance departments/programs in the universities and develop action plans
- Establish quality assurance programs in the K-12 and develop action plans
- Enhance quality of competency-based education through revamping curricula, modern learning and teaching methods, and providing exploratory and technology enabled spaces.
- The policy for the first 5-10 years will be a voluntary accreditation for K-12 institutions
- Start with 10 schools as a pilot phase.

Implementing Responsibility: Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions.

Partners and Stakeholders:

- Ministry of education
- K-12 schools/institutions
- Ministry of social development
- Ministry of Higher Education and scientific research

Private Sector Role:

- Membership in the Accreditation and Quality Assurance Members of the taskforce group to amend/modify the Law of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions No. (20) For the year 2007 and its amendments in 2018.
- Private K-12 institutions
- Members of the taskforce group to set the standards and indicators for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of schools (K-12)
- Private universities and schools can absorb some excess demand; however, private university enrollment is capped to a limited number of students.

Enabler: Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions has the experience for higher edition.

Expected Outcome: High quality level of education (K-12 educational programs, services, activities, and/or resources) that meets the expectation of public and the recognition of the educational community. Validation of the school's/program's quality and credibility.

Key Performance Indicators (KPI's):

- Law of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Education Institutions
- Standards and indicators for Accreditation and Quality Assurance of schools (K-12)
- Quality assurance departments/programs in the universities and schools are in place with action plans
- Standards of competency-based education
- Quality Curricula, modern learning and teaching methods
- Levels of student achievement and performance
- Efficiency Productivity Effectiveness
- (Evidence of Achievement: Examinations, Performances and Student Work)
- Ratio of students to faculty

Past Attempts & Lessons Learned: A draft to amend the Law of Accreditation and Quality Assurance of Higher Education Institutions No. (20) for the year 2007 and its amendments in 2018 was submitted from the AQACHEI to the Prime minister on Sep/13/2020.

6. Summary and Conclusions

No one can and should underestimate the importance of higher education. Higher education drives economic growth and development, prosperity, and competitiveness. Indeed, modern workplaces are in a continuous state of evolution. Well-trained and skilled graduates can better meet future challenges and opportunities. In addition, universities build stronger societies, reduce, if not end poverty, and boost shared / inclusive prosperity.

Within the context of the socio-economic implications of higher education, it has become common knowledge that higher education in general, and universities in particular, suffer from a myriad of pressing challenges. These include, for example, poor governance, poor management, and poor finance, especially, public universities. In addition, for so long, a large proportion of university graduates have not been able to find suitable employment opportunities.

The unemployment challenge in Jordan is definitely a serious issue. However, the hitherto existing high unemployment rates in general, and unemployment rate among the educated in particular, are not the result of the number of Jordanians seeking university education. It is due to the national economy's inability to generate sufficient numbers of employment opportunities. The supply of educated labor is greater than demand for educated labor.

Relevant stakeholders should concentrate their efforts on the real factors that affect growth, including the **Quality of Higher Education, and to let education and training be the choice of households and their children.**

Relative to the above observations, in this effort, the JSF, with the help of experts in the field of higher education in Jordan, has carried-out a SWOT analysis of higher education. Based on the agreed results in terms of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats, the team members outlined a number of long-term objectives for the higher education sector.

At the forefront of these objectives is to enhance the governance of higher education institutions, and improve the quality of competency-based education through restructuring academic programs, revamping curricula, modernizing learning and teaching methods, and to provide exploratory and technology enabled spaces. In addition, the team members of this sector stressed on the importance of adopting an effective and innovative hybrid learning environment for students.

1. Based on the long-term strategic objectives, and to move towards realizing them, a total of five initiatives are recommended.
2. Reform the technical career path by revisiting governance, structure, programs, partnerships, and market requirements.
3. Use hybrid learning to improve the quality of higher education outcomes.
4. Improve governance and enhance autonomy of Jordanian universities.
5. Identify innovative, strategic and practical solutions to mitigate the financial problems of public universities.
6. Develop faculty development programs / centers to strengthen the teaching and learning skills, and competencies of faculty members to improve the learning outcomes of students.

The world will succeed in containing COVID-19, eventually. What is less clear, however, is the impact of the virus on societies in general, and on higher education in particular. Covid-19 should prove to be a “trigger event” for change. COVID-19 should create a windfall in higher education in Jordan. If relevant stakeholders take the proper lessons from COVID-19 and the resultant university closures during 2020, adopt the strategic initiatives, and succeed in their implementation on the ground, the experience of the virus would not go to waste.



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