



The Current Parallel System in Higher Education in Kurdistan Region – Iraq

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to highlight the principles of *Parallel system* in higher education in Kurdistan region-Iraq, also to shade light on the role that *public finance* has on higher education in the mentioned region. The paper is divided into three segments, first, the literal meaning of *Parallel* and how it is focal significant has been utilized to accommodate its primary purpose in relation to education. The subsequent segment investigates the principles which the system is based on, while the third looks in depth at the impact of this modern approach on higher education in the region – Kurdistan. What is worth mentioning is the lack of previous studies in this area. Therefore, the research had an unorthodox method in analysing data, which was based on assumptions and predictions, this is due to the fact that the impact is yet to be seen or noticed, as the system – Parallel – is somewhat new, and the ultimate effects are yet to be felt or to be seen in due future, perhaps in the first quarter of the next decade, after a reasonable number of candidates in both disciplines humanitarian and scientific have completed their education. Thus, a set of questioners was introduced as a mean of quantitative research method to collect the relevant data, with the knowledge that the obtained answers will be based on personal views but from accredited sources. The paper also will investigate the stimulus effect that parallel system may have its impact on educational development and its impact on reducing financial deficit. In addition, this paper studies the possible reasons behind the adaptation of this system- Parallel, and recommendations will be submitted. Nevertheless, the same

Key words: *Parallel, Parallel system, Education, impact, Public finance.*

1. Introduction

In geometry the word parallel means position “of two or more straight lines being the same distance apart along all the length” (Cambridge Academic dictionary 4th addition). Also, the same academic source defines it in terms of similarity “something very similar to something else”. Perhaps, from the latter prospect, the central meaning of parallel education may have been derived. However, Parallel education first was defined in Australia as “the act of holding gender-separated or single gender classes within a co-educational setting. Learners may separate for some classes or subjects or may separate for academics, then converge for social or extra-curricular activities” (Anderson- Levitt, 2003; Jackson & Smith, 2000).

However, nowadays, the term Parallel is seen more widely in various fields, especially in education. While there is no solid evidence to suggest the origin of the term – Parallel education – and how the Kurdistan Ministry of Higher Education decided on the term, in the academic year 2010/ 2011, when the term first appeared. , the only assumption is that the term is derived from the second meaning of parallel, which is similarity.

Parallel system in higher education in Kurdistan was to some extent an answer to the growing number of higher education seekers, so that to increase the number of seats at universities and other academic institutions. Also, it can be compared to what has been the mainstream system of higher education in most countries where higher education is not free. Although the system is rather immature, yet it has been welcomed wholeheartedly and enthusiastically.

In 2010, when the system first was adopted by the council of Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research in Kurdistan, it caused some controversy, and a considerable number of candidates questioned the main purpose behind such system quoting “Iraqi constitution explicitly states every individuals right for free

education". Nevertheless, the very constitution does not refer the number or the capacity of academic institution in delivering. And the argument faded into obscurity.

Similar systems around the world have been successful in practice, higher education in England, for example, students applying to go to university are given the choice and opportunity to study wherever they wish so long as they reach the entry requirements of their university offer, including academic requirements and tuition fees,

which used to start from 1000 British pound a year, in 1998. However, as a result of the new devolved national administrations for Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland, there are now different arrangements for tuition fees in each of the nations.

Nevertheless, an area of contrast is the difference is the financial arrangements. In countries where higher education is somehow privately managed, All students are entitled to a tuition fee loan which covers the cost of course fees and maintenance loans (these are to support living costs of students) are granted on a household income basis; whereas in Kurdistan higher education is mainly free for students who come directly from high schools under national scoring system; excluding any costs of living, and they can continue their further higher education if they are to be entitled to seats that are allocated annually by the Ministry of Higher education.

In contrast, students who come through Parallel system do not have the financial arrangement privileged similar to the UK students, nor the advantage of free education of home students. Nevertheless, they are given an equal chance to peruse their academic dreams. Another point of favour is the reasonable low tuition fees in comparison to overseas

Without a doubt the flow of tuition fees has put universities and academic institutions in the UK in a strong financial passion, and as a result they have greater income to disposes. And it is evident that this system has reflected in the quality of education and the slandered that they have being following. According to a study by Centre for Global Higher Education (CGHE-2017), "tuition fees have led to substantial increases in funding per head, while enrolments have continued to rise, and the participation gap between rich and poor students has narrowed".

While it is early days to investigate the impact which parallel system had or may have in the future, and this is due to the fact that it is rather new approach, there are some clear indications of early signs of positive results, such as an increase of high academics in certain subjects, and the rising number of applicants since the system was lunched.

Also, there are several academic evidence favouring parallel system, this includes publication of greater number of academic research papers. In addition, English language requirement, which is a compulsory entity, has lead to a noticeable rise in the number of academics whom have shown a satisfactory academic level in English language. Yet the full extent of this system's impact can only be realized in the due future.

Considering financial circumstances which economic system in the region had and still endure, the only conclusion can be drawn is that these private academic institutions have been financially self-sufficient, as they have being generating income , otherwise they would not have been able to stand the economic downfall. Thus, public universities can replicate similar arrangements through the Parallel system to avoid any financial deficit.

Significance of the study

The importance of this paper lies in its core objective to establish bases on which future results can be measured in relation to the Parallel System in Higher Education in Kurdistan Region- Iraq, such as motivational factors and financial incentives for both education seekers and academic bodies. In addition, the future impacts benchmarks for future employment markets. The primary objective of this paper is to prove its hypothesis, and the secondary objective is for the paper to become a starting point for further study in Parallel System, as the researcher found no previous investigation in this particular field in relation to higher education in the researchers region – Kurdistan.

2. Literature review

The Parallel System

The Parallel system of education in Kurdistan first was introduced by Kurdistan Ministry of Higher Education, in 2010, to further support higher education seekers. And the system concluded the articles below:

Parallel system of education was exclusively applied for the year 2010-2011 to study the masters in the media and to study the bachelor's degree.

Scope were limited for universities by the allocation of (1-2) seats for the scientific disciplines.

The annual payment of the scientific sections was 5 million Dinars and two million Dinars for humanitarian disciplines, and paid at once, and an annual increase of 5%.

The applicant must have provided a legal document undertaking in which he mentions his pledge to bear the financial expenditure for education as in private contract.

Universities of (Sulaymanyah - Koya - Hawler Medical), the application for this type of education were open from 21 to 22 of the 11 / 2010 and scheduled to test competence 25.11.2010 and the declaration of the results were on 30/11/2010.

The applicant must have possessed a certificate of language and computer test, in the case of failure to perform tests at the précised time, applicant must have passed the tests in a certain period and otherwise, the offer in education would have been rejected, for language test, the applicant must have submitted the test results before the 1 - 12-2010 and otherwise would be accepted in higher education.

The conditions (years of service and age) was not required in this type of education, but regarding the grades, the scientific departments, which were asking for an examination in the specialty, shall not rated it, but if exam was not requested, in this case was taking the grade into account.(The Ministry of Higher Education – Kurdistan- 2010)

Nonetheless, long before the introduction of the system, private universities in Kurdistan had taken the lead of enrolling students for various majors; such as law, accountancy, and international relation studies and linguistic, all this in addition to a number of engineering departments. And universities such as Chihan, University Kurdistan Halwer and Ishik were the first of many to lead enrol students on private tuition fees. And these universities realized took initiatives in providing masters degrees in allocated fields; however, this was not an option only after the introduction of the Parallel system.

The Significance of the System

With the absence of solid evidence of the impact of parallel system on higher education in Kurdistan in general, it is best to scrutinise in depth how similar systems in other countries had an impact, since they have been in practice longer than in Kurdistan. Thus, we can consider the case in England.

A study was published in 2017, by the Centre for Global Higher Education (CGHE) has concluded that “tuition fees improved quality and equity in higher education from their introduction in 1998”. In addition, a new study co-authored by UCL Institute of Education stated that ‘England’s move to a high tuition fee system has led to increased quality, enrolments and equity in higher education. And the participation gap between rich and poor students has narrowed. The most notable trend taking place in the years since the introduction of fees has been the dramatic increase in investment in the sector, according to the study.

The evidence above can draw a picture of what to expect in coming years here in Kurdistan, if the number of applicants continue to rise, then the financial incentives can only be reinvested in education across all the stages. But it is early days to see how far the system has contributed in other educational field, and in fairness time allowance is must rather than necessity for the impacts to be seen.

How the system has changed since its introduction

It was apparent that the system was prone to some changes, and this was due to factors, such as English language competency test (IELTS – International English Language Testing System), which proved to be one of the major difficulties faced by applicants; specially for humanitarian studies, in which students had no previous exposure to English language; however, the other requirements were just matter of standardization. It was not until October 2019, the Ministry of Higher Education - Kurdistan voted in favour of allowing longer time for the candidates to obtain English language competency certificate. And the latter decision proved to be popular, as it released pressure, and resulted in students focusing on their core subjects. In addition, the expansion of the range and the scoops were imminent to follow, so it extended to include private universities, at least for masters degree in certain subjects.

Furthermore, English language requirement was not the only area which had to be altered to further strengthen the foundation for more long term feasibility, at least from the perspective of governing bodies, allocating more seats and expanding scoops were also due to be widen, as a result the number of candidates rose significantly. Data obtained from British Council, Person and ETS, the three major international English language test

providers, show that in the last three years more than 2000 tests were taken in the region-Kurdistan, this can

draw a clear indication that the system has had a positive impact on increasing the number of applicants, but not the actual accepted candidates. However, the Ministry of Higher Education did not benefit directly from the financial incentives of these tests; with exception to some language service providers.

As for the role of the Parallel system in programming disciplines has remained the same as the formal. The system does not distinguish between candidates / students. Thus the quality and standard did not experience any downgrade if not an upgrade.

This paper has four main hypotheses to establish.

1. The Parallel system can be considered as a motivational factor for higher education in Kurdistan Region.
2. The Parallel system has a positive impact on educational development.
3. The Parallel system plays a role in avoiding financial deficits.
4. The parallel system can result in future implications.

3. Research Methodology

For this particular purpose, this paper followed Descriptive Research Problem Method, in which to establish answers to the main objective for core this paper from three perspective points: motivational factors, financial factors and future implications. And how the Parallel System can provide impeded answers for academic principles and financial incentives; in other words, the research looks at the needs, objectives, methods, and evaluation of the Parallel system.

Data Collection

For Data collection, this paper used quantitative methods. Quantitative method was based on collecting numerical data, which was analysed using mathematically based method (questionnaire) that was presented in a set of box ticking, and later the data was utilised.

4. Findings and Discussion

The financial implication for students and its Fairness

The above changes were highly welcomed by candidates, but one common area which this research was able to point out, and it is worth a clear review is the cost, and more suitable mechanism to enable students arrange their financial circumstances. The latter requests came directly from the students who have completed or are in the process of completing their degrees.

On the subject of fairness, when the candidates questioned the was a mix responses, just over 40% of the interviewed students said that the system is fair, quoting that the system has made it possible for them to pursue their dreams; meanwhile just under 60% argued in favour of free education, referring to the Iraqi constitution which states that “ it is every individual’s right to have access to free education, as long as the hold an Iraqi citizenship’

The Parallel system and its impact on stimulating education.

To shade light on this particular point of interest, the research survey’s first question focused on the motivation role of the Parallel system, A hundred academic from various fields were present with a question; if the Parallel system had encouraged students to seek further education, and the responses were rather unexpected. As it shows in (figure 1); 85 interviewees opted strongly agree, 10 agree, but only 5 disagreed. This finding can only indicate the positive impact which the Parallel system has had. And evidence for the latter finding is the increase of the number of the students in all three degrees BA, MA and PhD, in addition to annual allocated seats.

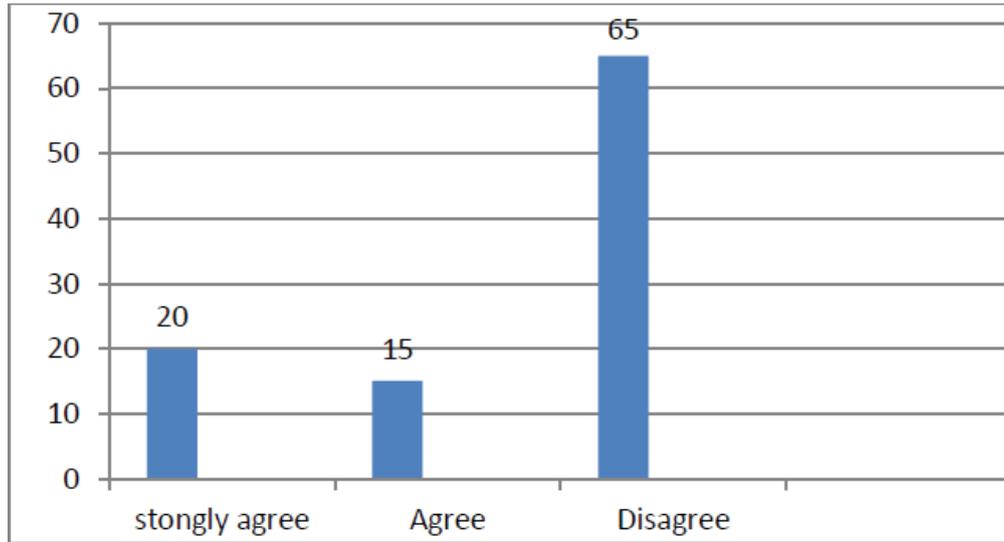


Figure 1: the graph above illustrates the interviewees' responses to whether the Parallel system was a motivational factor in the rise of higher education

The Parallel system and educational development

Another area which this paper sought to find answer to was whether the system can play a positive role in further developing education in the region. Interestingly, there was an atmosphere of confidence among interviewees, as the majority expected to see a positive return of the financial input by candidates, and that there are no reason for otherwise. Pointing to the fact that despite the absence of solid evidence at present time, which is mostly due to the early phases of the system, expectations are high. As it is evident from (figure 2) that over all the vast majority of academics is positive about the role of parallel system and it can reflect productively on future educational developments.

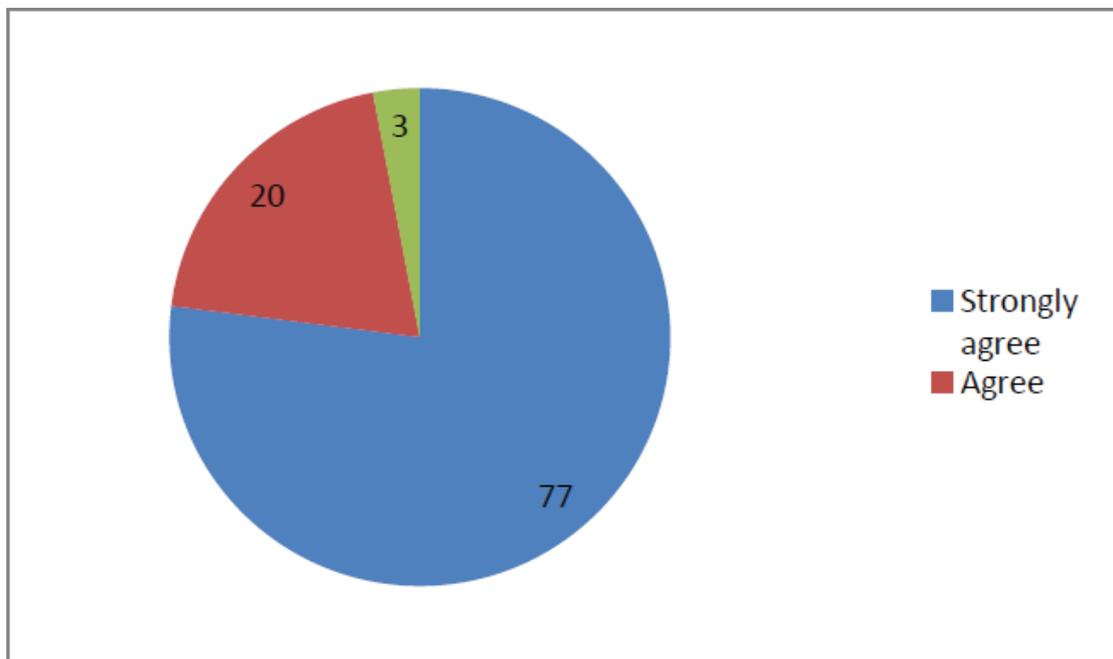


Figure 2: Depicts interviewees' perceptions of the positive impact of the Parallel system on educational development.

However, for developments to take place, the most crucial element besides funds is time. Nevertheless, foundations be early evidence to support the earlier finding, such as allocating greater number of research

supervisors.

The impact of the Parallel system on avoiding financial deficits

No one would argue with the fact that public funding can be a subject to limitation, and while the shape of economic formula in the region (Kurdistan) is heading towards privatisation, financial input by the public can go a long way. Because academic institutions can start practising financial independency, as a result they will have greater financial control, in basic words their income would outweigh their outgoing, and consequently these institutions will most certainly avoid financial deficits. To support the latter view, the research also included a more relevant question “Would Parallel system lead to financial independency for academic institutions.” The answer came from 25 leading economists at Salahadin University, and they almost unanimously opted to strongly agree that if for the academic bodies to have financial input from the public, they will in short term become financially independent, and any financial deficit is just a matter of mismanagement rather financial capability. Figure 3 reflects the strong confidence in the role of the Parallel system in avoiding financial deficits.

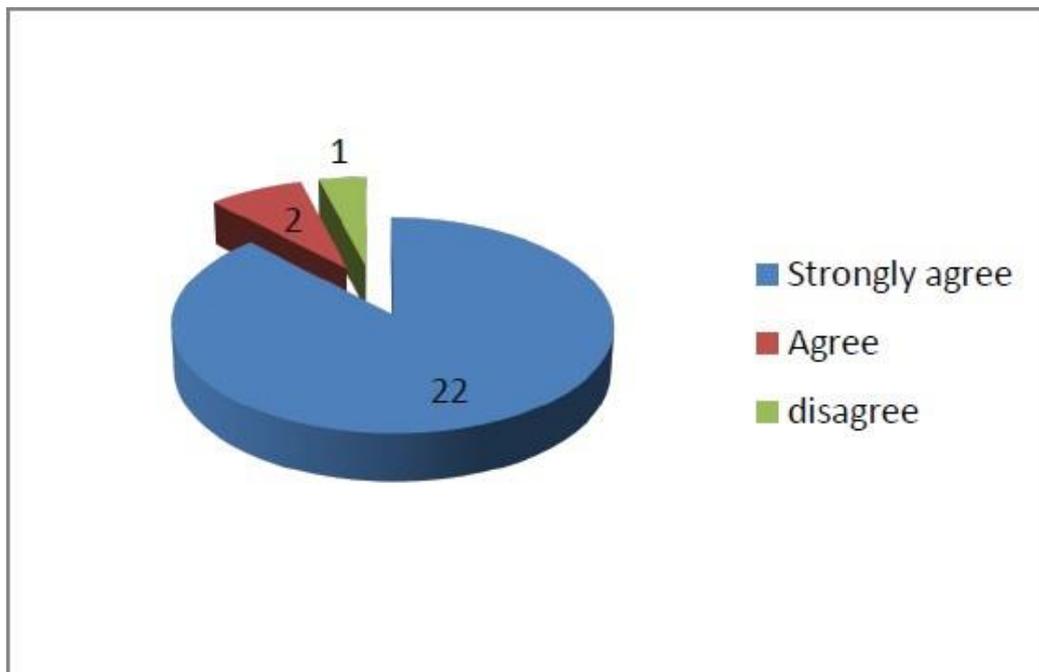


Figure 3: demonstrates the interviewees responses to the possibility of avoiding financial deficits with help of the Parallel system.

5. Conclusion

The term Parallel system can be identified as unique, especially in higher education, as Kurdistan is the only region which uses it in the context of higher education. The system is similar to what is worldwide known as – Tuition Fees. It was introduced in 2010 by the Ministry of Higher Education in Kurdistan to pave the way for greater number of students to further their education, and to assist education in the country as a whole. It is not yet clear how this system will evolve to support education in the region, yet there are early signs of acceptable outcomes. The conclusions which can be drawn from this paper are; first, the system has to a degree motivated students to continue their pursue which they had lost hope in achieving them. The second is that the system can contribute in the future educational developments, with some sceptical cautions about employment market. Third, the financial incentives are strongly seen as means to avoid financial deficits, and further drifting from the central decisions in relation to financial affairs for academic institutions. However, the system is prone to financial implications if the current mechanism of operation continues, as there are lots of red tapes and no logical communication has been established, perhaps the last point is cultural disadvantage rather than unique issue to the system. The Parallel system will remain the subject of discussion for many years to come, and there

will be modifications to its formula, but the core objective of this system will remain which is driving the wheel of education forward.

The Future Implications

In addition to what this paper has found are the future concerns in relation to employment market. A great number of candidates whom took part in the survey have experienced a level of uncertainty about their chances in finding suitable employment where they can put their knowledge in to practice, and that the job market will become very competitive.

Limitation

From the start, this paper faced difficulties in collecting data; this was due to the bureaucratic system in most public departments, which acted as an obstacle to further depriving the researcher in obtaining information. The second difficulty was the lack of centralization and communication between various departments, as a result it was somewhat impossible to find one logical answer to questions. Third barrier was inability to obtain information, as the region has not yet signed to the international treaty of Freedom of Information act “a piece of legislation that grants public access to documents or other data in the possession of a government agency or public authority, unless the information falls into a category that is specifically excluded from the terms of the legislation”. In addition, the term Parallel System is quite unique in relation to higher education, and it was discovered that the Ministry of Higher Education in Kurdistan is the only authority worldwide to have used the term Parallel System in the context of higher education, perhaps the only similarities to other systems around the world is– Tuition Fees, this factor limited the research due to lack of previous studies in direct relation to the term Parallel System in Higher Education. Perhaps, the most important hardship was the immaturity of the system, which made it rather very hard to find a convincing answer to the research questions, thus predictabilities are dominant feature of this paper.

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