



The Specifications of the Iranian Model of Faculty Recruitment in Iranian State Universities: the Pros and Cons

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Abstract

The present research aimed at investigating the specifications of the faculty recruitment model in Iran through library research and in a descriptive-analytic framework. First, the researchers investigated the current issues of faculty recruitment around the globe, considering the related criteria in the world-class accredited universities. Next, they considered the history of faculty recruitment in Iranian universities, and then the specifications of the latest recruitment model which started in 2008. This method, which is largely influenced by Iranian philosophical and government beliefs, has characteristics such as being highly centralized, nation-wide and centrally-controlled. In this method, the roles of a university's scientific departments and managerial boards, as well as the role of the decision-makers in the Iranian Ministry of Science, Technology and Research have meticulously been specified. In this method, which begins with a nation-wide call for recruits on the part of the Ministry of Science, Technology and Research, a clearly defined course is taken by the universities, and the final decision is made by the Ministry Science, Technology and Research. This paper delineates the pros and cons of the said method.

Key words: faculty recruitment, Iranian state universities.

Introduction

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The promotion and development of universities or colleges, as many experts believe (e.g. Camblin and Steger, 2000), relies on the promotion of their staff and faculty, and therefore, the promotion of the faculty is tantamount to the promotion and improved quality of the college. The vast demand and the necessity of recruiting and keeping the best faculty require an appropriate recruitment and employment procedure. Therefore, the best procedure could be presented based on the analysis of the current processes.

Accordingly, in order to keep up with the changes and developments in the community, all organizations in general and colleges in particular need to take proper measures to improve and promote their staff, faculty, equipment, technology, and their regulations and organizational culture, along with detecting weaknesses and strengths. This could in turn lead to the modification of recruitment and employment procedures and to more accurate planning, the necessity of which would be clarified in light of the fact that the survival and prosperity of any organization lies in its trained and skilled staff (Shahi Beik and Hashemi, 2007).

1.2 Review of the Related Literature

According to Steneck (1991), the issue of decisions on faculty started with policies of individual faculty members and that of the government's representative (since 1840). In the nineteenth century United States, the employment of university professors relied primarily on the opinion of the universities' board of trustees (American Association of University Professors (AAUP), cited in Wikipedia, 2014). In 1915, the American Association of University Professors announced that only faculty members can assess the qualification of another faculty member (AAUP, 2014).

Altbakh (cited in Majcher, 2008) that the measures and procedure of faculty recruitment and promotion has been influenced by changes in the conditions of scientific and academic market, including the increased academic competitions, budget constraints, the pressure for female and minority employment in the west, and the prevalence of neo-liberalization thoughts. In England, the traditional recruitment system was abolished in favor of such systematic changes (Shetak, 2000; Edvardz, 2006, cited in Majcher, 2008). In the Netherlands, faculty recruitment was transferred from the government to the universities, and the faculty members were no longer considered state-employed (Diwebert, 2000, cited in Majcher, 2008).

Majcher (2008) considers recruitment procedures in the United States, Germany and Hungary and comes up with three main principles for proper recruitment: the necessity of choosing the best candidates, choice of young independent individuals, and the (existence of) strategies that allow for fair competition. Robert (2008) who has codified recruitment basics for Loyola Marymount University points out five basic criteria for faculty recruitment: validity, objectivity, measurement consistency, rationality and confidentiality. Each of these has its aspects and dimensions. He also refers to two important ethical rules: treat all candidates equitably, and avoid exclusionary thinking.

All through the history, there have been differences in the recruitment procedures and criteria of universities. These differences are elucidated in a research project by Eurydice European Unit. In its comprehensive research, this organization considers six important aspects of faculty recruitment in European countries. This research found that during the

recent decades, the subject of faculty recruitment has been an important issue for all European countries, each attempting to recruit the best candidates through developing policies and strategies. These policies differed in some aspects. These six aspects, however, are as follows.

- 1) Who is responsible for faculty recruitment?
- 2) What are the main recruitment models?
- 3) How should the faculty be paid and promoted?
- 4) What is the job description like (including time and duty specifications)?
- 5) How should the faculty be evaluated and assessed?
- 6) How should the faculty members be managed? (Eurydice European Unit, 2008)

Diversity is another factor considered important in some international research projects. This diversity means that minorities should not be discriminated, and to this end, some mechanisms have been designed to prevent gender, ethnic and racial discriminations. This issue has been delineated in the works of many scholars including Babcock (2003), Bauer (2002), Biernat (1997), Heilman et al (2004), Katznelson (2006), Smith (2000) and Sommers (2006). The issue of diversity appears to be an important consideration in faculty recruitment in many universities of the globe, and stems from the diverse structure of the societies.

Another issue considered by many universities around the world is the types and methods of recruitment. Many universities, including Illinois University, have defined different statuses or forms of employment in the codification of their (recruitment) policies. In terms of tenured or contract (non-tenured) employment, there has been a great deal of debate including the necessity of quick tenured employment put forward by Searle (1971), the possible contradiction between the university authorities evaluating the faculty and the faculty members' freedom of action (Meltdown, 2005), unethical acts such as publication of non-scientific articles and some individuals' hypocritical behavior aimed at getting the consent of the universities (Shaefer, 2001), and the opposite views held by some people indicating that tenured employment would make the faculty less hard-working and is, therefore, a mistake (McPherson and Schapiro, 1999).

Such criticism has resulted in the reduced number of tenured employments. For instance, according to a report by the US Educational Statistics Office, tenured employment has dropped from %56 in 1975 to %31.9 in 2005 (AAUP, cited in Wikipedia, 2014).

Batterbury (2008) suggests a system which preserves both the professors' entitlement to tenure employment and the universities' right to make the required modifications. He suggests a permanent but non-tenured employment where the professors enjoy job security, and on the other hand, the university is authorized to prosecute in case of any malpractice.

Majcher's (2008) research indicated that the changes in the conditions of academic and scientific market have posed some challenges for the concepts relate to academic and scientific developments in recruitment and employment. This is indicative of some problematic issues in faculty recruitment and employment which need to be detected and resolved. To this end, some models need to be put forward for academic development, recruitment and employment of faculty members. Such models and mechanisms utilize some potential sources and prevent problematic practices. Germany and Hungary have recently created some changes in this regard.

Method

To accomplish the goals of this research, a descriptive-analytic library research method was conducted.

Faculty Recruitment in Iran

In Iran, there have been numerous changes in the history of faculty recruitment. In early years of Dar-al-Funun's establishment in 1941, several foreign professors were brought for the purpose of teaching. In the following years, no special criteria were established for the choice of professors. People renowned for their knowledge were invited to teach at universities. Next, following the establishment of Ministry of Knowledge, this ministry was assigned with the responsibility of faculty recruitment (1934), and later, with the detachment of universities from the Ministry of Knowledge, in 1942, the universities assumed the responsibility of faculty recruitment. In 1963, the Auditing Board was legally authorized and assumed the responsibility of faculty recruitment till the Islamic Revolution in 1979 (Rahimi, 1998).

Just after the Revolution, there were little changes in this area. In 1981, the set of 'Employment Regulations for Universities and Higher-education Institutes' was passed which decreed that faculty members be recruited by the 'Central Board for Faculty Supply and Recruitment' through the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. This procedure continued to be implemented with minor modifications in the coming years, with the faculty recruitment board playing the central role while the universities also cooperated (Ebrahimi, 2006).

In the decade 2000-2010, following the criticism aimed at the recruitment procedure (on grounds of being prone to much favoritism and miscarriage of justice) as well as the state's efforts towards the Islamification of universities, the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution reconsidered the faculty recruitment issue and passed and enforced new regulations (Regulations for Supreme Board of Recruitment, passed in meeting 608, held on July the 10th, 2007).

This enactment sought two main goals:

- Creating a unified procedure in faculty recruitment,
- Recruitment of sophisticated and efficacious faculty who believe in the causes of the Islamic Revolution.

Based on these regulations, the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution decreed the establishment of three boards and assigned them with the responsibility of faculty recruitment:

- Supreme Board of Faculty recruitment for Universities and Higher-education Institutes,
- Central Faculty Recruitment Board for the two Ministries of Science, Research and Technology, and of Health, Treatment and Medical Education,
- The Executive Board for Faculty Recruitment of Universities and Higher-education Institutes.

In this division, the Supreme Board is on top of the related affairs, and deals with the major policy-makings for faculty recruitment. At the next level is the central board for the two ministries (*Science, Research and Technology*, and *Health, Treatment and Medical Education*). Further down are the executive board for recruitment which has a branch in all universities. All these board function under the executive center of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. The goals, authorities, duties and members of each of these three boards are well defined, and for the purpose of brevity, they are not included herein.

The executive center of the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology has announced its goal of establishment as follows.

- Creating a unity in the faculty recruitment procedure,
- Observing justice in faculty recruitment,
- Promotion of the position and value of faculty members,
- Instigation of scientific advancement through assessment checklists of academic skills of the faculty in their job promotion,
- Betterment, facilitation and expedition of faculty recruitment procedure in light of modern and up-to-date approaches (Mardani et al, 2013).

In order to explicate this mechanism further, it will be expressed in terms of four basic aspects of human resources in the following.

4.1 Manpower Planning

Based on the recent regulations of the Supreme Council as well as the comprehensive scientific agenda passed in 2012, this issue is assigned to the Supreme Council and Ministry of Science, Research and Technology based on the following reasons. The Ministry of Science, Research and Technology is responsible for the costs of Iranian universities and payment of faculty salaries; therefore, it needs to be involved in this regard. Another point is urging the universities to accept and move along the routes considered as required by the Supreme Council and Ministry of Science, Research and Technology.

This law has not been fully enforced; currently, recruitment plans are primarily made in the universities and then, having received the permit from the ministry, they issue a call for recruits.

This system enjoys some pros and cons. Pros include development of a unified approach with large-scale policies of the country, prevention of possible insularity of academic circles stemming from narrow view of some faculty members, and the possibility of fairer distribution of financial resources. Cons include dissatisfaction of academic circles and bodies, inaccurate assessment of a university's needs and negligence of local need of universities.

4.2 Recruitment

This stage of faculty employment is done biannually through a nation-wide call for recruits issued by the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology. First, on the announcement of the Ministry, the universities are required to upload their needs (in terms of faculty) to the website of the Ministry before an announced deadline. Next, within a month, candidates from all over the country have to refer to the website of the Ministry and register (uploading the required qualifications and documents) and select up to three priorities based on universities' needs announcements.

This stage has its pros and cons, too. Pros include development of a unified procedure, and rapid, accurate and fair notification to all candidates, shorter and less costly registration, obviation of the need to refer to the websites of several universities and fill out long repeated forms and document for each university. Cons include a single main problem arising from the large amount of the data from all universities and candidates to be handled. Recently, this problem has been diminishing due to the advancements in this field.

4.3 Selection

In the third stage, after the registration of candidates' applications in the Ministry's website, selection is done around two main criteria.

Selection based on intelligence issues: In this stage, general inquiries are done by the Ministry from the three sources of intelligence in Iran. Some inquiry is also conducted in the candidates' local or native (former) work place.

Along the first stage (intelligence inquiry), the candidate's electronic file is sent to the target university to be assessed in terms of general and academic qualifications. In this stage, the recruitment executive board of the university is to make the decision (Members of this board have to be approved of by the Supreme Council. Moreover, the Supreme Council, a governmental body, can intervene in the recruitment process and prevent the recruitment of candidates who oppose the state.) The members of this board are confidential, but three members are predefined: the chancellor of the university, the head of the Leader's Representative Institute in the university, and a faculty member who chairs the recruitment. This board develops some committees to assess general and academic qualifications of the candidates, and these committees announce their assessments to the board. According to the regulations of the Supreme Council of Recruitment, universities are authorized to relegate academic assessment to faculties or department within or out of the university. These departments merely serve as consultants for the executive board. Therefore, unlike the practice common in most universities overseas where faculty members and departments play the main role, in this system, they are merely consultants. This issue has provoked some criticism. However, in most cases, universities base their decision on the opinions of the academic assessment committees.

This system, like any other system, has its pros and cons. Pros include the control exerted on all selections, universities' compliance with the government's policies, and reduced possibility of formation of interest groups within universities. One of the downsides lies in the multi-layered recruitment and selection procedure. This problem is an executive one and can be resolved. Next, the imposition of governmental approach constrains academic and scientific freedom. Moreover, there is always the possibility of formation of interest groups in the recruitment executive boards, in the Ministry and in the Supreme Council.

4.4 Employment

In the last stage, in case the different inquiries yield the desired results and the university assesses a candidate as academically approved, the file is sent to the Ministry for the issuance of the final (employment) statement. The role of the Ministry at this stage is only that of supervision and %95 of cases are approved of. This is, however, just the beginning of the employment procedure; the issued employment statement is temporary and valid for two years. The case should be re-assessed in terms of general and academic qualifications after the first two years.

The pros of this stage include the final control on the part of the Ministry and the possibility of the re-assessment after two years for a better decision to be made. Cons include the lengthy procedure of assessment and employment (which is an executive issue and can be resolved), and the possibility of losing competent professors after the initial two-year contract to other (better) domestic or even foreign universities.

In a nutshell, the Ministry's recruitment executive board summarizes the outcome of the new method as follows.

- Clarification of recruitment procedures and stages,
- Standardization and homogenization of recruitment procedure,
- Reduction and thwarting of personal views and tastes in recruitment,
- Development of regulatory and support systems to deal with complaints,

- Provision of a proper bed for the active contribution and presence of overseas alumni,
- Facilitation of the recruitment of the elite,
- Finding and detecting talented candidates, and committed and skilled professors,
- And some other cases (Mardani et al, 2013)

Conclusion

The issue of faculty recruitment along with its key role in the advancement and development of universities has led to movements on the part of universities in the globe towards the codification of appropriate standards for recruitment. This is reflected in the recruitment manuals published in recent years. Local and indigenous differences would lead to differences in the large-scale policies of different countries. In Iranian educational system, due to the financial dependence of universities on the governmental budget, private universities like Harvard cannot be suitable models. Therefore, the codification of the best procedure has to include due consideration of specific conditions of the country and those of each university. The current centralized procedure has some executive problems (e.g. lengthiness) arising from shortage of adequate workforce, which can be resolved. Moreover, there are some inherent problems as mentioned earlier. On the other hand, there are some privileges that could be accomplished only in case of a centralized procedure. However, the detailed study of the pros and cons of the current recruitment system is beyond the scope and goal of the present work which aims at its introduction and explanation.

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