

The Implementation of Occupational Health and Safety Management in Schools in Libya:

Chapter 2

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Chapter Two: Theoretical Foundation of Health and Safety in Schools

2.1. The Concept of Safety

As mentioned above, an adequate level of safety means that a person is protected from potential hazards and cannot be the cause of them. Safety can be analyzed from the perspectives of physical, psychological, and organizational factors and can be assured by actions aiming at establishing a safe climate within an educational institution. In a state of safety, all accidents that may lead to potential harm are considered and controlled to preserve individuals' health and well-being. From the perspective of OHS, the concept of safety may involve the position in which effective prevention and control measures are implemented, the risk of accidents and poor health state is minimized, and a safe learning and working environment for students and teachers is established. The population's safety is the core goal of OHS regulations and a significant concern of respective committees.

2.2. Definitions of Occupational Safety

Occupational safety is associated with the elimination of injuries in illnesses in the workplace. The laws that consider occupational safety include the Occupational Safety and Health Act that was established in 1970 (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, "About OSHA"). The primary institution protecting the safety of individuals under this act is the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), which requires the Secretary of Labor to establish and constitute OHS regulations that prevent harm for employees and their families. The latest regulations include Occupational Health and Safety Assessment Series (OHSAS) 18001, which is the former global benchmark for OHS and International Organization for Standardization (ISO) 45001, based on the principles of OHSAS but is a distinct standard. The certification of OHSAS 18001 will be terminated in March 2021 while

ISO 45001 will be incorporated gradually within the following three years. (“ISO 45001 Safety and Health”). Both standards are voluntary; they apply to any companies or organizations wanting to enhance health and safety measures, as well as minimize possible risks.

It is possible to say that the level of occupational safety in educational institutions determines the degree to which employees and students are protected from potential hazards and injuries. Schools’ authorities should not underestimate the significance of this factor in establishing safe working and learning environments, as well as enhancing students’ performance. Occupational safety can also be identified as measures taken to mitigate possible health risks in the workplace. OHS regulations are utilized for addressing potential threats and suggesting strategies for their elimination.

2.3. Safety Objectives

Safety objectives can be divided into two categories, including the goals of OHSAS and ISO, as well as educational institutions’ aims related to safety. The primary objectives of OHSAS 18001 and ISO 45001 are to improve OHS performance, as well as ensure compliance with legal requirements and fulfillment of OHS implementation. Schools’ safety objectives may include:

- Following OHS regulations and legal requirements to ensure a safe environment for students and staff members;
- Enforcing state laws related to health and safety;
- Investigate potential causes of hazards and health risks, including internal and external factors affecting them;
- Educating teachers and students on safety and precautionary measures to minimize the risks of injuries;

- Decreasing the adverse health outcomes among learners caused by the poor environment, sanitation facilities, and hygiene;
- Increasing students' access to safe water and food supplies;
- Developing an effective response plan for each type of potential hazards in cooperation with local emergency services;
- Collaborating with state authorities and governmental agencies to ensure the correct implementation of OHS measures.

It is necessary to mention that these goals imply that safety should be one of the primary concerns of educational institutions. Schools should update their safety and health policies regularly and adjust their OHS approaches to current needs. It means that if a school is primarily affected by the political situation in the country, its safety objectives should be related to this issue. At the same time, Libyan educational primary and secondary educational institutions should take a multifaceted approach to safety as there are many acute problems to consider.

2.4. The Concept of Occupational Safety and Health Management

The primary purpose of OHS regulations is to improve the health and safety measures of each work activity. They aim at preventing occupational risks that can affect employees' lives severely. There are three approaches to implementing OHS into education; they include the curriculum, workplace, and holistic ones (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work 9). The first one implies that all school subjects can be involved in OHS teaching. The workplace approach refers to individuals at the beginning of their career or students. The third approach considers the mental, physical, and social well-being of employees and students. The principles of OHS ensure that companies have ethical and legal responsibilities to establish a safe environment. Thus, OHS regulations are connected with other areas, such as public health, occupational medicine, psychology, and industrial engineering.

As mentioned above, the main concept and the primary objective of OHS management is prevention. The following principles aiming at preventing accidents, injuries, distress, and diseases within OHS can be outlined (“Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970”):

1. Appropriate company guidelines or codes of conduct should be established to ensure safety.
2. Management and personnel policies should encourage individuals to assume responsibility.
3. OHS services should be integrated into the organization’s policies.
4. It is necessary to ensure that employees participate in OHS measures.
5. Developed guidelines and regulations should be implemented systematically.
6. Risk reduction strategies that consider safety factors and address health potentials should be developed.

OHS principles are associated with legal requirements on safety and health. They state that all individuals, including employees and students, should be protected against potential risks (“Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970”). In addition, the law requires workplace authorities or leadership staff to hold responsibility for eliminating possible risk factors. The necessary information about potential adverse outcomes and their mitigation should be shared. Moreover, employees play a significant role in implementing OHS principles too. They are expected to advocate for health and safety at the workplace and support measures taken to improve the school environment for students.

2.5. Importance of Occupational Health and Safety

It is evident that OHS culture is highly significant in school settings due to the following reasons. First, it can improve the school climate, enhance staff’s motivation, and reduce retention among teachers and other personnel. Second, OHS culture can reduce

possible costs associated with high sick leave rates, recruitment, and replacement. Third, it aims at meeting community expectations related to the health and safety of students. In addition, OHS regulations ensure that schools meet legal obligations to provide a safe environment for students and staff. Finally, they mitigate possible health and safety risks.

The lack of OHS implementation in schools is associated with several problems within an educational institution. First, it may be related to poor leadership skills and communication among schools' authorities and teachers, as well as lack of control over work demands (WorkSafe Victoria 12). Second, as mentioned below, the lack of OHS leads to injuries and illnesses, as well as other adverse health outcomes. For instance, poor OHS measures may result in emotional exhaustion and psychological distress among employees, a low level of engagement, and a low level of performance at work. Thus, OHS regulations and their implementation within school settings are highly significant for establishing a safe learning and teaching environment and preventing potential hazards.

2.6. Procedures for Occupational Safety

The procedures for occupational safety in schools can be related to the organization of classrooms and school buildings, the clear establishment of staff's roles in case of hazards, and the allocation of sources. For instance, educational institutions' authorities should ensure that all staff members are aware of existing hazards and regulations related to their mitigation, and that their roles are defined clearly. The establishment of procedures for occupational safety can involve the following steps. First, it is vital to define an action and identify potential risks and hazards associated with it. Second, possible preventive measures should be outlined. It is also vital to analyze the frequency of injuries and accidents, their severity, and problems associated with infrequently performed actions (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety). Thus, the major parts of procedures for occupational safety are analysis and prevention, which will be discussed in detail below.

2.7. Responsibility for Occupational Safety

The institutions, departments, and individuals responsible for occupational safety within an educational institution include the OHS department, occupational safety committees and supervisors, as well as teachers, management personnel. Health and safety of students and staff should be considered the joint responsibility of all schools' employees and superior bodies of all levels. It is possible to define responsibilities for occupational safety within educational institutions as individuals' obligations to establish a safe environment and mitigate potential risks and threats to students' and personnel's health state. Schools' authorities should delegate their tasks of ensuring that the learning process is safe for all of its participants while holding accountability for potential adverse outcomes.

To ensure that the principles of occupational safety are incorporated, educational institutions should follow several steps. First, they should make certain that all employees know what their responsibilities are and establish clear communication about them. Second, schools' authorities should provide sufficient power to all members of staff, as it is vital for carrying out OHS measures. Finally, educational institutions should ensure that all employees have enough skills, capacities, abilities, and competencies to follow OHS regulations. These steps can help schools to mitigate the causes of health and safety hazards presented below and establish effective occupational safety programs that are also addressed in this chapter.

2.8. Causes of Health and Safety Hazards in Schools

Various causes of health and safety hazards can be outlined. First, many of them are associated with hygiene. As mentioned above, many Libyan schoolers do not have access to adequate sanitation facilities (National Centre for Disease Control 3). This problem can worsen their health state and well-being, leading to the spread of diseases among students (Akpakli et al.). Second, Libyan schools face the challenge of poor water supply, as only 70% of them have access to water (National Centre for Disease Control 3). This issue can also lead

to the development of illnesses and decreased productivity. Thus, children are at significant risk if no OHS measures are implemented.

Besides the illnesses associated with poor hygiene and water supply, two types of typical injuries in schools can be outlined. They include psychological conditions, as well as injuries that occur in the process of manual handling, trips, and falls (WorkSafe Victoria 9). In the school environment, the second category is particularly significant as students are often involved in moving heavy or large equipment and similar tasks. Other examples of hazardous manual handling are hanging heavy objects at a height or sitting on damaged chairs. Notably, even completing computer-based or written tasks that last more than 30 minutes or more than two hours total per day can result in an injury (WorkSafe Victoria 10). Health outcomes that may result from poor manual handling include back injuries, chronic pain, soft-tissue injuries, muscle strains, and abdominal hernias (WorkSafe Victoria 9). These facts suggest that many educational institutions practice potentially dangerous activities regularly, which proves the significance of OHS measures in mitigating possible risks for students and teachers.

2.9. Occupational Safety Programs

Occupational safety programs are clearly established plans aimed at preventing possible hazards, accidents, and related risks. The elements of occupational safety programs may include the establishment of health and safety regulations and rules, discussing the value of individual responsibility, promotion of OHS measures, and the development of emergency procedures. In addition, such programs should incorporate training, employee orientation, and workplace inspections.

It is evident that occupational safety programs should consider and incorporate measures aimed at addressing even minor aspects of OHS issues that may be considered unlikely to cause harm. For instance, they should involve employee training in case a staff member is transferred to a new position (“Occupational Safety and Health Act of 1970”). In

addition, such programs should include periodic and annual educational sessions ensuring that personnel have necessary knowledge and skills. Occupational safety programs should address and consider the following issues:

- I. School authorities' and employees' responsibilities and roles, including the organizational and legal ones;
- II. Strategies for hazard identification and control, as well as incident investigation;
- III. Risk assessment measures;
- IV. First aid skills and emergency procedures;
- V. Communication skills;
- VI. Planned inspections and medical surveillance programs (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety).

2.10. Procedures Followed by the Occupational Health and Safety Department

The OHS department may incorporate the following procedures to implement effective OHS measures. The first one may be the publication of written documents stating that health and safety are among the primary values of the educational institution (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, "Management Leadership"). The department should communicate the need for implementing OHS regulations to all employees and other stakeholders, as well as stressing the significance of safety measures in all school policies. The organization's OHS policy statement may include the information about the objectives of occupational safety programs, basic OHS philosophy and values, as well as the data on accountable individuals or departments (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety). It is necessary to mention that the objectives and values of the program should be measurable and realistic to ensure positive results of its implementation.

The second procedure the department can do is to assign tasks to particular people. It is vital to discuss the general responsibilities of all employees and underline the actions each of them should perform in case of hazards. In addition, it is necessary to set timeframes for the implementation of OHS measures (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, “Management Leadership”). The third procedure the OHS department should perform is allocating resources necessary for pursuing program goals and addressing its potential outcomes. These processes may include the estimation of potential investments and the integration of OHS regulations into budgeting and planning processes. The resources may depend on the size of a school, the types of hazards present (such as water scarcity or poor sanitation), and the level of program development. Educational institutions may be in need of various types of resources, including financial aids, equipment, hygiene supplies, online databases, and OHS experts (Occupational Safety and Health Administration, “Management Leadership”).

2.11. Functions of the Occupational Safety Committees

Occupational safety committees are crucial for enhancing working conditions and establishing safe learning environments in educational institutions. They provide discussion platforms for employees and schools’ authorities that allow them to collaborate in resolving OHS issues. The primary purpose of such committees is to prevent potential illnesses and injuries, enhance individuals’ awareness about the significance of OHS measures, and offer strategies that can increase the level of safety in the workplace (Workplace Health and Safety Committees). Occupational safety committees may have the following functions:

- I. Hazard identification and control. Under this role, committees analyze accident reports, employees’ compensation records, and review the data on injuries and illnesses. They also perform regular inspections to identify potential threats to students’ and staff members’ health and outline existing problems (Workplace Health and Safety Committees). In addition,

occupational safety committees can evaluate corrective measures suggested by safety supervisors, eliminate unsafe operations temporarily or permanently, and review the information on new procedures before they are implemented.

II. Information and education (Workplace Health and Safety Committees). Under this function, committees develop training programs for staff members, respond to employees' potential concerns, discuss their activities with occupational safety supervisors, and establish reporting procedures for incidents and illnesses.

III. Accident investigations (Workplace Health and Safety Committees). Occupational safety committees are expected to review incident reports, develop procedures for analyzing them, and investigate the causes of accidents.

IV. OHS planning. Under this function, committees recommend the implementation of OHS practices based on existing needs, establish report reviewing processes, evaluate programs aimed at preventing injuries and illnesses, analyze potential equipment purchases, and monitor organizations' progress in minimizing potential hazards.

2.12. Responsibility of the Occupational Safety Supervisor

Safety supervisors' role is significant as they ensure that OHS measures are implemented correctly and result in the elimination of potential safety and health hazards, as well as the improvement in students' and educators' well-being. Their responsibilities include advising employees on OHS issues, coordinating the incorporation of OHS measures within the organization, organizing training sessions for staff members, and conducting investigations on existing challenges related to health and safety (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety). In addition, supervisors are expected to collect data and statistics on OHS activities. For instance, they should record changes in the quality of sanitation facilities and students' exposure to unsafe manual handling and other potentially dangerous activities. Moreover, supervisors should ensure that equipment is maintained

properly and that only authorized and trained members of staff can operate it. Finally, it is vital for supervisors to minimize unsafe actions and conditions by correcting personnel if some procedures are performed inappropriately.

Another significant responsibility of the occupational safety supervisor is reporting injuries, illnesses, deaths, and the cases of hazards timely. It is vital to disclose information not only about serious incidents but also about minor ones that do not involve the loss of consciousness and medical treatment. Supervisors should inspect their areas constantly and analyze potential threats to students' and employees' safety. Finally, they can attend joint OHS committee meetings and provide reports on the performance of educational institutions from the perspective of OHS measures.

2.13. Prevention

As mentioned above, prevention is the main concept and the primary objective of OHS management. There are several ways to control and prevent such accidents and hazardous manual handling within OHS regulations. For instance, schools can place the necessary equipment in all needed areas or classrooms permanently. They may also reduce the utilization of heavy materials and substitute it with smaller size and weight ones. To avoid risks associated with hanging, staff should use stepladders. To prevent injuries related to written and computer-based tasks, height adjusters for computers and monitors should be provided, as well as suitable desks and adjustable chairs. Finally, damaged chairs should be removed, replaced, or tagged. It is necessary to mention that schools should strive to eliminate problems associated with poor hygiene and sanitation, as these issues can cause severe health outcomes and can be considered primary safety concerns.

Shraki's report shows that the design of schools' building can also serve as a preventive measure. For instance, the author notes that the entrances should not face main streets to ensure the safety of children; students, visitors, and teachers should have separate

entrances, and the corridors should be designed to avoid students' collisions (Shraki). In addition, all emergency exits should have clear signs to ensure that schoolers can reach them in the shortest time in case of a hazard. It is also evident that clear OHS guidelines are significant for effective prevention of possible hazards. The occupational safety committee should take necessary actions to ensure that there are no threats to students and employees' safety by analyzing existing working and learning conditions regularly. All of the measures taken to mitigate potential risks should be reported and discussed.

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