

“THE ROLE OF IRAQI PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES IN PROMOTING POLITICAL AWARENESS AMONG STUDENTS”

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Abstract: This article explored the role of Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students. It explored this role through targeting the role of curricula, faculty member and student activities. The researcher adopted a descriptive analytical approach. He designed a questionnaire for gathering the needed data about the study’s topic. The population involves all the students enrolled in Iraqi public universities. The researcher selected a purposive sample consisting from 240 BA students from the department of political sciences at 4 universities in Iraq. Those universities are: (University of Kufa, University of Baghdad, University of Mosul and Al-Nahrain University). Questionnaire forms were passed to those students in an electronic manner. (229) forms were retrieved and considered valid for analysis. SPSS software was employed. The researcher found that Iraqi public universities play a major role in promoting political awareness among students. He found that curricula, faculty members and student activities in Iraqi public universities play a major role in promoting political awareness among students. He recommends carrying out student activities in Iraqi public universities that aim at promoting knowledge about political concepts.

Keywords: public universities, promoting, political awareness, Iraq.

Introduction

Zaller (1992) claims that political awareness refers to the degree to which one pays attention to politics. He adds that political awareness refers to the degree to which one understands what she or he has encountered... He adds that political awareness denotes cognitive or intellectual engagement with public affairs (Zaller, 1992). The researcher believes that parents, and media, religious and educational institutions must play a major role in promoting political awareness.

Educational institutions in society play a major role in promoting political awareness. In this regard, researchers have been providing increasing attention to the role of universities in promoting political awareness. That is because the number of national and international challenges has been increasing in all areas, including the political area. It is because the Arab Spring and the emergence of social media led to facing many problems and challenges. It's because there are many media channels that broadcast false news and distort the image of the stage in political aspects. Such problems made it necessary to activate the role of universities in promoting political awareness (Al-Shweihat, 2020).

Promoting political awareness by universities shall contribute to increasing the citizens' engagement in political activities and elections. It shall contribute in creating the desired public opinions about the contemporary political issues. It shall support the government's effort in addressing political issues and problems. It shall activate the role of the youth in addressing the political problems and challenges (Al-Shweihat, 2020).

Due to the significance of promoting political awareness, there are

several means that can be used by universities for promoting such awareness. Such means include: curricula, faculty members, student activities and student union (Al-Zboon and Ayoob, 2015). According to Al-Shar'ah et al. (2015), they include: the administration, educators, curricula and extra-curricular activities. According to Al-Shweihat (2020), they include: developing programs and plans. They include: using social media, and making clubs and radio stations. They include: allowing students to join political parties and developing centres in campus for holding political discussions and bringing public political figures to class. They include making analysis for political articles in class (Al-Shweihat, 2020).

Due to the significance of promoting political awareness, universities must promote a suitable political climate that contribute to promoting political awareness among students. Such a climate can be created through encouraging students to show financial or moral support to political parties. It can be created through encouraging students to engage in political conversations with other. It can be created through encouraging students to attend political meetings and joint political parties. It can be created through encouraging students to read political newspaper articles. (Al-Farra, 2017)

Universities can create such a climate through promoting knowledge among students about the political decisions issued by the authorities. It can be created through promoting knowledge among students about political national, regional and global issues. It can be created through promoting knowledge about the structure of the political authority in the state. It can be created through encouraging students to watch

political talk shows and allowing students to hold political conferences in campus. It can be created through encouraging students to engage in political campaigns and elections (Al-Farra, 2017).

Due to the significance of promoting political awareness, all educational institutions must exert effort to promote it. In addition, programs must be developed to ensuring that such awareness is promoted among people, especially youth. That's because young people are the ones responsible for developing society in all areas, including political areas. In this regard, the researcher believes that there is a great need for assessing the role of Iraqi educational institutions in promoting political awareness. Therefore, he explored the role of Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students.

1. **Objective:** This study explored the role of Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students
2. **Question:** This study answered this question: (What is the role of Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students?)
3. **Significance of the study:** This article is the first article that explored the role of Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students. It provide officials at Iraqi ministries with knowledge about the role of Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students. Such knowledge shall enable those officials to make plans for increasing the citizens' political awareness. It provides the developers of the

curricula of such universities with knowledge about the effectiveness of their curricula in promoting political awareness among students. It provides faculty members in those universities with knowledge about the things they must pay attention to in order to promote political awareness among students.

4. **Limits:** Spatial limits: This study targets Iraqi public universities at four universities in Iraq. Thus, the sample was chosen from the political sciences departments at the following universities: (University of Kufa, University of Baghdad, University of Mosul and Al-Nahrain University). This study was carried out during the academic year (2020/2021) / 2nd semester.

5. **Definitions:** Political awareness: Zaller (1992) claims that political awareness refers to the degree to which one pays attention to politics. He adds that political awareness refers to the degree to which one understands what she or he has encountered... He adds that political awareness denotes cognitive or intellectual engagement with public affairs (Zaller, 1992).

-Iraqi public universities: This term refers to the universities in Iraq that are managed, supervised and supported by the Iraqi government.

6. **Theoretical framework:** According to Al-Qarallih (2017), curricula play a major role in promoting political awareness among students. For instance, they should distinguish between Jihad and terrorism and identify the significance of Jihad (i.e. defending homeland). They should promote knowledge about the significance of justice and equality. They should promote

citizenship values. They should emphasize the significance of dialogue and shed a light on the significance of women's engagement in various areas, including the political area (Al-Qarallih, 2017).

Curricula should promote knowledge about political concepts (e.g. ruling and authority). They must promote knowledge about the rights of minorities in society and the rights of captives in wars. They must encourage students to make constructive criticism for the ones in authority. They must encourage students to join political parties and promote awareness about the significance of intellectual freedom. They must promote awareness about the significance of democracy (Al-Qarallih, 2017). Universities must develop students' political identities. That can be done through promoting certain political knowledge and ideologies and promoting acceptance for the ones adopting different political knowledge and ideologies (Katalo, K. and Nawajah, 2018). According to Al-Shweihat (2020), universities promote political awareness through promoting democracy and citizenship. They promote political awareness through promoting knowledge about the state's political system and the political challenges facing the government. Such challenges may include: the Arab Spring (Al-Shweihat, 2020).

Universities must employ social media for promoting political awareness and knowledge about political figures. They must allow students to join political parties. They must create centres in the campus for holding discussions and symposiums for addressing

contemporary political issues. They must add political references to the library in the campus. They must develop programs and plan for promoting political awareness (Al-Shweihat, 2020)

7. **Empirical Studies:** Abu Sakoor (2009) investigated the role of Palestinian universities in the southern areas of the West Bank in promoting political awareness among the youth enrolled in them. He used a descriptive approach. He selected a random sample consisting from 1150 students. Those students were chosen from Hebron University, Palestine Polytechnic University, Al-Quds Open University, and Bethlehem University. Data was gathered from students through using a questionnaire. Several results were reached. For instance, Palestinian universities in the southern areas of the West Bank play a moderate role in promoting political awareness among the youth enrolled in them. In addition, they offer students opportunities to engage in political events and seek developing students' national identities. They seek promoting national belonging and democracy through the election for the membership in the student council. They offer courses about political sciences and seek promoting citizenship values. They seek promoting awareness about human rights. They offer students opportunities to engage in political symposiums. They hold political lectures and symposiums. They encourage students to have dialogue about political issues. They offer attention to the detainees and the families of martyrs. They encourage students to make initiatives to express political views.

Assaf (2013) explored the role of student unions in Palestinian

universities in promoting political awareness among students. He employed a descriptive analytical approach. He used a questionnaire consisting from 43 items. This questionnaire targets 4 areas. 308 students were sampled from Al-Aqsa University. Several results were reached. For instance, student unions in Palestinian universities play a minor role in promoting political awareness among students. They promote national belonging and hold activities for developing students' personalities. They allow students to express their political views. They hold activities for promoting knowledge about the contemporary political reality. They hold symposiums for addressing contemporary political issues.

Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015) explored the role of Jordanian universities in promoting political awareness among students. They targeted the following areas: curricula, faculty members, student activities and student union. They used a questionnaire for gathering the required data. 332 female and male students were sampled through the use of the simple random sampling method. They were chosen from University of Jordan, Al-Yarmouk University, Al-Balqa Applied University, and Mu'tah University. The researchers reached several results. For instance, Jordanian universities play a moderate role in promoting political awareness among students. That applies to all the areas jointly and separately. In terms of curricula, the curricula seek promoting citizenship values. They include many political concepts, such as: democracy, freedom, justice and tolerance. They shed a light on national issues. They include knowledge about political rights and

duties. They include much political knowledge. They encourage students to engage in the political life and activities. They offer a real image about the contemporary political reality of Jordan. They contribute to developing students' ability to make political decisions (Al-Zboon and Ayoob, 2015).

In terms of faculty members, they contribute to informing students about their political rights and duties. They promote political values within students. They promote political knowledge about political values among students. They encourage students to engage in election process. They seek promoting democracy. They seek holding discussions with students about political issues. They refrain from practicing discrimination against students due to their political views. They present their own analysis for political events. They offer students many opportunities to express their political views (Al-Zboon and Ayoob, 2015).

In terms of student activities, they seek promoting democracy and enrich students' knowledge about political concepts. They expand students' political knowledge In terms of unity, student union promotes knowledge about political rights and duties and allow students to express their political views. It expands students' political knowledge and encourage them to engage in elections. It promotes democracy and national unity (Al-Zboon and Ayoob, 2015).

Al-Khaza'leh & Lahiani (2021) investigated the role of Emirati universities in promoting political awareness among students.

They used a questionnaire to collect data from 980 students were sampled from Al-Ain University in UAE. They carried out interviews for collecting data from 10 faculty members at the latter university. Several results were reached. For instance, Emirati universities promote awareness about the significance of making constructive criticism for political activities. They encourage students to engage in political events. They encourage students to acquire knowledge about the Emirati laws and constitution. They develop students' national identity and encourage students to be proud with their national identity. They promote knowledge about political concepts. They promote respect for laws. However, they don't inform students about national achievements nor the political situation of the country (Al-Khaza'leh & Lahiani, 2021).

Al-Shar'ah et al. (2015) explored the role of Jordanian secondary schools in delivering political education to students. They targeted several areas which are: skill-related area, emotional area and cognitive area. 450 students were sampled from 15 schools Jordanian secondary schools. Through using a forty-two item questionnaire, several results were reached. For instance, Jordanian secondary schools play a moderate role in delivering political education to students (Al-Shar'ah et al, 2015).

In terms of the cognitive area, curricula offer much knowledge about political figures and the citizens' political rights and duties. They include many poems that promote national belonging. They include knowledge about the three types of authorities in the state. They

include knowledge about the laws, the constitution and the state's history in the political area. The school hold lectures for addressing political issues. The administration promotes knowledge about the citizens' political rights and duties (Al-Shar'ah et al., 2015)

In terms of the emotional area, curricula promote national belonging and encourage students to show compliance with the laws. The curricula encourage students to engage in political activities. The teachers promote awareness about the significance of one's role in supporting and developing the state in political area. The curricula encourage students to obey the ruler. The teachers serve as role models in terms of their national belonging (Al-Shar'ah et al., 2015)

In terms of the skills-related area, the targeted schools play a minor role in holding plays for addressing political issues. They play a minor role in holding visits for public institutions. They allow students to engage in the election of the student council. They play a minor role in celebrating national events. They do students to express their political views (Al-Shar'ah et al., 2015)

8. Methodology

8.1. **Approach:** The researcher adopted a descriptive analytical approach

8.2. **Population and sample:** The population involves all the students enrolled in Iraqi public universities. The researcher selected a purposive sample consisting from 240 BA students from the department of political sciences at 4 universities in Iraq. Those universities are: (University of Kufa, University of

Baghdad, University of Mosul and Al-Nahrain University). Questionnaire forms were passed to those students in an electronic manner. (229) forms were retrieved and considered valid for analysis.

Table (1): The gender and university of the respondents (percentages and frequencies)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage%
Gender	Male	125	54.5851
	Female	104	45.41
University	University of Baghdad	58	25.327
	University of Kufa	62	27.074
	Al-Nahrain University	65	28.384
	University of Mosul	44	19.213

N=229

8.3. Instrument

The researcher developed a questionnaire and adopted the five point Likert scale. The questionnaire consists from a cover page and three parts. The cover page presents the research title and name of the researcher. It collects data about the respondents' gender. It collects data about the respondent's name of the university. The first part of the questionnaire collects data about the role of the curricula in Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students. It

was developed based on the studies of Al-Qarallih (2017), Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015), Al-Shar'ah et al. (2015), and Abu Sakoor (2009)

The second part of the questionnaire collects data about the role of the faculty members in Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students. It was developed based on the studies of Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015) and Al-Farra (2017). The third part of the questionnaire collects data about the role of the student activities in Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students. It was developed based on the studies of Al-Khaza'leh & Lahiani (2021), Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015) and Abu Sakoor (2009)

8.4. Validity of the Instrument

After drafting the initial version of the instrument, this version was passed to two faculty members in Iraq. Those two faculty members hold PhD in political sciences and work at a university in Iraq. They were asked to evaluate the instrument based on language, and content. They recommended making changes to the format (font type and size).

8.5. Reliability of the Instrument

The Cronbach alpha values are presented below. Those values represent reliability:

Table (2): Cronbach alpha values

No.	Area	Cronbach alpha values
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1	Curricula	0.97
2	Faculty members	0.81
3	Student activities	0.86
	Overall	0.88

Based on such values, the questionnaire is a reliable instrument, because such values are greater than 0.70 as it's suggested by Salehi & Farhang (2019)

8.6. Analysis Criteria

SPSS software was employed. For classifying the means, the criteria displayed below were adopted:

Table: (3): The criteria used for the classification of means

Range	Level	Attitude
2.33 or less	Low	Negative
2.34-3.66	Moderate	Neutral
3.67 or more	High	Positive

*-Source: Aljbour (2020)

The five point Likert scale consists from 5 rating categories. Those categories are shown below

Table (4): The categories and scores of the five point Likert scale

Category	Score
Strongly agree	5
Agree	4
Neutral	3
Disagree	2
Strongly disagree	1

*Source: Aljbour (2020)

9. Discussion and Results

(What is the role of Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students?)

Statistical values are calculated for every area. They are shown below:

Table (5): Means and standard deviations of the areas targeted by the researcher

No.	Area	Mean	Std.	Rank	Level
1	Curricula	4.11	0.52	3	High
2	Faculty members	4.41	0.55	1	High
3	Student activities	4.22	0.44	2	High

	Overall	4.24	0.50	Positive	High
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The researcher found that Iraqi public universities play a major role in promoting political awareness among students. That's because the overall mean is 4.24. The latter result isn't consistent with the one reached by Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015). Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015) found that Jordanian universities play a moderate role in promoting political awareness among students. That applies to all the areas jointly and separately.

The latter result indicates that Iraqi public universities have effective policies and plans for promoting such awareness. It indicates that leaders in such universities have much awareness about the significance of promoting political awareness among students. For instance, promoting political awareness among students shall contribute to promoting belonging and fighting against terrorism. It shall contribute to encouraging citizens to defend their homeland in intellectual, political and military areas.

Faculty members play a major role in promoting political awareness among students, because the relevant mean is 4.41. This mean is ranked first. This result indicates that faculty members realize the significance of promoting political awareness among students. Student activities play a major role in promoting political awareness among students, because the relevant mean is 4.22. This mean is ranked second. It indicates that the ones responsible for student activities realize the significance of promoting political awareness among students. Curricula in Iraqi public universities play a major role in

promoting political awareness among students, because the relevant mean is 4.11. This mean is ranked third. It indicates that the developers of curricula in such universities realize the significance of promoting political awareness among students.

Table (6): The role of Iraqi public universities in promoting political awareness among students

No.	Statement	Mean	Std.	Attitude	Level
A	Curricula				
1	University curricula identify the differences between terrorism and Jihad	4.96	0.66	Positive	High
2	University curricula promote citizenship values	4.87	0.52	Positive	High
3	University curricula promote knowledge about political concepts (e.g. ruling and authority).	4.91	0.43	Positive	High
4	University curricula encourage students to make constructive criticism for the ones in authority	2.21	0.27	Negative	Low
5	University curricula encourage students to join political parties	2.19	0.91	Negative	Low
6	University curricula promote	4.64	0.55	Positive	High

	awareness about the significance of democracy				
7	University curricula promote knowledge about political rights and duties.	4.77	0.21	Positive	High
8	University curricula encourage students to engage in the election	4.85	0.33	Positive	High
9	University curricula offer knowledge about laws	3.64	0.82	Neutral	Moderate
	Overall	4.11	0.52	Positive	High
B.	Faculty members				
10	Faculty members promote knowledge about citizens' political rights and duties	4.73	0.29	Positive	High
12	Faculty members encourage students to engage in election	3.61	0.69	Neutral	Moderate
13	Faculty members promote democracy among students	4.52	0.73	Positive	High
14	Faculty members hold discussions with students about political issues	4.44	0.58	Positive	High
15	Faculty members promote knowledge about laws	4.57	0.79	Positive	High

16	Faculty members offer students many opportunities to express their political views	4.82	0.95	Positive	High
17	Faculty members present their own analysis for political events	4.97	0.24	Positive	High
18	Faculty members encourage students to read political newspaper articles	3.65	0.17	Neutral	Moderate
	Overall	4.41	0.55	Positive	High
C.	Student activities				
19	Student activities contribute to promoting democracy	4.83	0.58	Positive	High
20	Student activities promote knowledge about political concepts	1.81	0.64	Negative	Low
21	Student activities promote knowledge about political rights and duties	4.79	0.51	Positive	High
22	Student activities allow students to express their political views	4.52	0.26	Positive	High
23	Student activities encourage students to engage in elections	4.75	0.33	Positive	High
24	Student activities promote national	4.63	0.37	Positive	High

	unity				
	Overall	4.22	0.44	Positive	High

*Source: This instrument was developed by the researcher himself based on the following articles: Al-Qarallih (2017), Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015), Al-Shar’ah et al. (2015), Al-Farra (2017), Abu Sakoor (2009), Al-Khaza’leh & Lahiani (2021)

In terms of curricula at Iraqi public universities, they identify the differences between terrorism and Jihad. That’s because the mean of statement 1 is 4.96. This indicates that the developers of such curricula realize that they are capable of fighting against terrorism through promoting awareness about the meaning of Jihad. The researcher found that such curricula contribute to promoting citizenship values, because the mean of statement 2 is 4.87. Such values may include: loyalty and belonging. The latter result is consistent with the one reached by Abu Sakoor (2009). It indicates that the developers of such curricula realize that promoting such values shall contribute to improving the bond between students and their homeland. It shall contribute to increasing students’ attachment to their homeland.

The researcher found that such curricula contribute to promoting awareness about the significance of democracy, because the mean of statement 6 is 4.64. This result indicates that the curricula developers want students to accept different political opinions. The researcher found that such curricula contribute to promoting knowledge about political rights and duties, because the mean of statement 7 is 4.77. This result is consistent with the one reached by Al-Shar’ah et al.

(2015). It indicates that the developers of curricula are keen on promoting such knowledge, because such knowledge shall enable students to comply fully with the laws and prevent others from infringing their rights.

The researcher found that such curricula contribute to encouraging students to engage in the election, because the mean of statement 8 is 4.85. This result is consistent with the one reached by Al-Shar'ah et al. It indicates that the developers of curricula realize that encouraging students to engage in election shall contribute to activating the role of students in the political area. In addition, it indicates that the developers of curricula realize that encouraging students to engage in election shall contribute to making political reforms. However, the researcher found that such curricula don't encourage students to make constructive criticism for the ones in authority, because the mean of statement 4 is 2.21. This result may be attributed to the fact that making such criticism requires having much expertise in the political field that BA students don't have.

The researcher found that such curricula don't encourage students to join political parties, because the mean of statement 5 is 2.19. This result may be attributed to the fact that some political parties mustn't be joined, because they seek promoting extremist ideas. In terms of faculty members, the researcher found that faculty members in Iraqi public universities promote knowledge about citizens' political rights and duties, because the mean of statement 10 is 4.73. This result indicates that those faculty members want their students to comply with the laws and fulfil their duties towards their homeland. It is

consistent with the one reached by Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015).

The researcher found that such faculty members hold discussions with students about political issues, because the mean of statement 14 is 4.44. This result may be attributed to the fact that such faculty members realize that such discussions shall develop students' ability to engage in political discussion and support their argument with political proofs. It is consistent with the one reached by Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015). The researcher found that such faculty members promote knowledge about laws, because the mean of statement 15 is 4.57. That's because students won't be capable of complying with the laws in case they don't know them. In addition, the latter result indicates that those faculty members want to have an Iraqi society that has a high level of public order. The researcher found that such faculty members offer students many opportunities to express their political views, because the mean of statement 16 is 4.82. This result is consistent with the one reached by Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015). It may be attributed to the fact that those faculty members want student to have much courage in expressing their political views.

The researcher found that such faculty members present their own analysis for political events, because the mean of statement 17 is 4.97. This result is consistent with the one reached by Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015). It may be attributed to the fact that those faculty members want to develop students' ability to make political analysis and interpretations for the contemporary political events and the ones that occurred in the past. However, the researcher found that such faculty members play a moderate role in encouraging students to read political

newspaper articles, because the mean of statement 18 is 3.65. That may be attributed to the fact that some faculty members presume that students in the political science department are keen on reading the political newspaper articles.

The researcher found that such faculty members play a moderate role in encouraging students to engage in the election, because the mean of statement 12 is 3.61. This result isn't consistent with the one reached by Al-Zboon and Ayoob (2015). It may be attributed to having faculty members who believe that such engagement is optional and thus, there isn't any need for encouraging students to do that.

In terms of student activities, the researcher found that student activities in Iraqi public universities contribute to promoting democracy, because the mean of statement 19 is 4.83. This result may be attributed to the interest of the ones responsible for such activities in creating a democratic society in which all people respect others' political opinions and ideologies. The researcher found that such student activities promote knowledge about political rights and duties because the mean of statement 21 is 4.79. That indicates that the ones responsible for such activities want to form a society which members fulfil their political duties and prevent others from infringing their political rights.

The researcher found that such student activities allow students to express their political views, because the mean of statement 22 is 4.52. This result is consistent with the one reached by Abu Sakoor (2009). It indicates that the ones responsible for such activities want to encourage students to express their views about political issues in

order to avoid feeling suppressed. The researcher found that such student activities encourage students to engage in elections, because the mean of statement 23 is 4.75. That indicates that the ones responsible for such activities want students to engage in political activities and have a voice in the political life.

The researcher found that such student activities promote national unity, because the mean of statement 24 is 4.63. However, the researcher found that such student activities don't promote knowledge about political concepts, because the mean of statement 20 is 1.81. This result is consistent with the one found by Al-Khaza'leh & Lahiani (2021). It may be attributed to the lack of knowledge of the ones responsible for such activities about such concepts.

10. Conclusion

The researcher found that Iraqi public universities play a major role in promoting political awareness among students. He found that curricula, faculty members and student activities in Iraqi public universities play a major role in promoting political awareness among students. In terms of curricula, they identify the differences between terrorism and Jihad and promote citizenship values. They promote knowledge about political concepts (e.g. ruling and authority). They promote awareness about the significance of democracy. They promote knowledge about political rights and duties and encourage students to engage in the election.

In terms of faculty members, they promote democracy among students. They hold discussions with students about political issues.

They promote knowledge about laws. They offer students many opportunities to express their political views. They present their own analysis for political events. They promote knowledge about citizens' political rights and duties. In terms of student activities, they promote knowledge about political rights and duties and allow students to express their political views. They encourage students to engage in elections and promote national unity.

11. Recommendations:

The researcher recommends:

- Carrying out student activities in Iraqi public universities that aim at promoting knowledge about political concepts
- Encouraging faculty members to encourage students to read political newspaper articles
- Encouraging faculty members to encourage students to engage in election
- Developing university curricula that encourage students to join political parties

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