

# Overview of the Education System in the Kingdom Of Saudi

## Arabia

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this article is to provide background of the education system in the Saudi Arabia. It includes a general overview of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia; this section describes the site of current study which includes its geography, economy, cultural and social life of Saudi Arabia. All these factors are related to this article because they influence both education policy and education practice in different ways. Economically, the fact that oil accounts for 90% of the country's gross domestic product (GDP) makes things such as science, engineering and technology mathematics important in the country's education strategy. Geographically, there are very different regions and needs in Saudi Arabia, a fact that makes it difficult to have a centrally-driven policy; we can see that in the Tatweer project, where they try to devolve more responsibility to the local region's schools. This is followed by the Educational System in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the education budget in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia from 2008 to 2014, the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Education Development Project (Tatweer), the use of technology in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, and learning challenges in Saudi Arabia.

**Keywords:-** Education system in Saudi, education budget, the use of technology, achievement in mathematics.

## I. GENERAL OVERVIEW OF THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA

Saudi Arabia (KSA) is a Middle East country located between the Red Sea and the Arabian Gulf, and sharing its northern borders with Jordan, Iraq, and Kuwait and its southern borders with Oman, Yemen, and the United Arab Emirate (UAE) see Figure (1). It also shares its eastern borders with Qatar (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2010). Riyadh, located in the middle of the Kingdom called Najd is the capital of KSA. Saudi Arabia

is made of five regions divided into thirteen zones. The Central Province is called Al- Wosttah while the Western Province is known as the Hijaz region and called "Algharbiah" as well as along the Red Sea where the holy cities of Makkah (Mecca) and Madinah (Medina) together with Jeddah, which is a port city, and Taif, which is the country's summer capital. The Eastern Province is known as the the Al-Sharghiyah region while the Southern and Northern Provinces are known as the Al-Janoob and Al-Shamal region respectively (Al-Zahrani, 2010).



Figure (1): Map of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

The weather varies from one region to another in Saudi Arabia because of its vast land (Alsharari, 2010). Its temperature is the same with what prevails in other Gulf States. In Jeddah, all year round the weather is often hot, with temperature sometimes reaching as high as 48 degrees centigrade, and humid. In Riyadh, the temperature remains higher in the summer, but with a lower degree of humidity. Saudi Arabia has a more moderate winter, but with occasional heavy rains, particularly in the highlands. The official language of Saudi Arabia is Arabic which prompted the interview questions used for this project to be prepared in Arabic language. Nonetheless, English is optionally utilised in the country as a minor language, especially in the health sector as well as in business and international matters (Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA), 2009). The population of Saudi Arabia was 27.5 million in 2010 with a yearly growth rate of 2.3% considered to be among the world's highest rates (Ministry of Economy and Planning, KSA, 2010). Accordingly, it is anticipated that the Saudi population will grow two-fold in the 50 years to come, which will increase the already high percentage of youth: 65% of Saudis are under 30 (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2010).

KSA's main source of revenue is hydrocarbons and its subsidiary products as oil accounts for 90% of the gross domestic product (GDP), of the country whose oil reserves are the highest at the world level - 26% of the global reserves (Ministry of Economy and Planning, 2010). In spite Saudi Arabia great wealth, the country is

starting to explore other natural resources such as natural gas together with minerals and precious metals to help increase its revenues (Royal Embassy, 2010). The system of government in KSA is a theocratic monarchy, and the royal family is ruling the kingdom according Sharia Islamic laws based on the teachings of the Moslem's Holy Quran. The dominant religion in the country is by far Islam with certain rights such as right to life, dignity, and education accorded to every citizen in accordance with the Sharia laws (Alhageel, 1996; Alsenbul, 1996).

KSA is unique and special for being as important site of Islam and for hosting two holy mosques, one located in in Makkah which every Muslim all over the world faces while performing the daily prayers five times a day. Also, Muslims who can afford it are encouraged to make the annual pilgrimage to Makkah at least once in a lifetime for the ritual Islamic practices of Omra and Haj that involve prayers in Makah. The statement of Cameron, Cowan, Holmes, Hurst, and McLean (1983) two decades ago is still true: Saudi Arabia represents the hub of Islam and it acts as the protector of the holy sites, and yet the impact of religion is not directly or evidently felt anywhere. In theory, the religion of Islam and the state are the same with Saudi Arabia's constitution based on the Quran. The country practices Sharia law which comprises in its totality, the Islamic religious and moral laws with the Hanbali School being the principal school that is being adhered to. However, other three major recognized and respected schools of Islam exist (Cameron et al., 1983).

## **II. CULTURE AND SOCIAL LIFE**

The kingdom of Saudi Arabia operates a monarchy system of government with the constitution based on the Holy Book together with the Quran and Sharia Law. The king is the head of the executive and administrative bodies of the government made up of the Council of Ministers (Oyaid, 2009). Islam is the essential determining factor in Saudi culture. In fact, all social and cultural principles of life of the people are revolved around the Muslim religion and religious identity (Oyaid, 2009). In Saudi Arabia, religious morals ranging from personal relations to tribal and values in the extended family system all as counterpart of a complex system of interlocking commitments which is assigned by the Quran to all individual Muslims, take precedence of all other things (Oyaid, 2009).

The Moslem religion encompasses all the different details in the lives of the people and the places they live, with special emphasis on their education because Islam looks at education as a religious duty that is bound by all men and women to fulfil (Oyaid, 2009). As stated by Al-Salloom (1989), under Islam all Muslims – men and women – are obliged to learn. This obligation, whereby education is elevated to the level of a religious duty, forms the key pillar on which education in Saudi Arabia is based. It is the basis for the country's educational responsibilities, according to which the Saudi man or woman do their obligations towards themselves, their society and religion. Education in Saudi Arabia is thus inherently rooted in Islamic education which first began at mosques and was followed by the creation of schools and universities.

## **III. THE EDUCATIONAL SYSTEM IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA**

The Royal Embassy of Saudi Arabia (2010) makes an assertion that Saudi Arabia education system has undergone a dramatic evolution ever since the time of its inception 78 years ago. Presently, the construction of education facilities is experiencing a boom in the country and this has resulted in the construction of over twenty-five thousand schools with more being constructed as time passes by. Today, all tiers of the society have access to education and with the government providing free education for all citizens. The school curricula comprise of traditional Islamic religious education mixed with other fields which are usually based on what prevail in the United States. The school calendar is usually modelled to

follow the American system having academic period ranging from nine to ten months and interrupted by summer break and occasionally by some religious holidays that give everyone some time off (The World Factbook, 2010).

In the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, education is a made compulsory for children whose ages range from of 6 to 15 years and with most of them studying in state schools. However, many public educational institutions consisting of primary, intermediate and secondary schools have been established in recent years within the country especially in larger cities. Schooling from primary to secondary takes 12 years to finish after spending 6 years in primary school, three years in intermediate school, and three years in secondary school. The academic load in secondary school is divided into Islamic studies, science, and administrative studies. A student must have to accomplish all these three areas before he/she becomes eligible to enter a university (Alsonbol, Alshabanh, & Mordi, 2008). Genders are segregated in all public schools and enrolment in all levels of general education has seen a remarkable increase from a total of 400,400 to 4.3 million students during the period starting from 1967 to 2003 (Ministry of Economic and Planning, 1970, 2005).

Three agencies namely: the Ministry of Education and the General Establishment of Technical Education and Vocational Training as well as the Ministry of Higher Education take care of all education matters in Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, a number of ministries and public entities have control over particular kinds of institutions, for instance those run by the Ministry of Health and the Ministry of Defence (Al-Dossary, 2008).

In 1952, Saudi Arabia established the Ministry of Education and tasked it with the responsibility of providing free and right education to all students, and these include students with disabilities (Al-Dossary, 2008). The Ministry of Education is also responsible for the establishment of new schools and the maintenance of old ones, provision and development of curricular, the establishment of in-service training programmes for teachers, and provision of adult education literacy (Ministry of Education, 2008). The Ministry of Education is also tasked with the task running of special education services meant for students with disabilities (Al-Dossary, 2008). The ministry is also responsible for certifying eligibilities required to handle these services as well as offering and providing special education services that cater for students who have disabilities enabling them to

live and function safely and independently (Al-Mousa, Al-Sartawi, Al-Abduljbar, Al-Btal, & Al-Husain, 2006).

In 1980, the government of Saudi Arabia established the General Establishment of Technical Education and Vocational Training (Al-Dossary, 2008). This is the main government agency given the task of providing technical education and vocational training in the colleges of technology and vocational secondary schools, as well as vocational training centres. The agency also handles the supervision and training programmes which the government and other private agencies provide (Al-Dossary, 2008).

Technical teaching and vocational training are primarily aimed at grooming and training people to perform various activities – in the fields of industry, agriculture and commerce – that are necessary for the country's economy. The technical education and vocational training provide Islamic values and general knowledge to those involved in helping them adopt the correct way of thinking and adjusting to the diverse environments. They also create the bases for the development of technical manpower that should easily handle any new development in technology, thus providing the right opportunity for any individual who wishes to learn a new provision or wants to continue training in order to reach the highest level within his physical and mental capability. The technical education and vocational training also help technicians to develop their skills and to continuously update their professional information, as well as to underline the importance and roles played by handicraft and vocational work in the progress and prosperity of the society. They also contribute to the decrease in the movement of the population to bigger cities by opening several vocation centres in every region of Saudi Arabia (Alkhteb, 1998).

In the year 1975, Saudi Arabia established the Ministry of Higher Education and charged it with the task of implementing the government's policies on higher education (Al-Dossary, 2008). Higher education is primarily aimed at entrenching the faithfulness of the learner towards Almighty God. Accordingly, the highest quality Islamic education is provided in order for the Saudis to be qualified to fulfil their obligation towards their country and contribute to its development, guided by the ideal principles of Islam. The objectives are also meant to lay out opportunities for gifted individuals to shine in their field in education, and to contribute in the field of research by playing a more positive role in those areas that contribute to world development in the fields of

arts and sciences. Other objectives include the finding of solutions to technological roadblocks plaguing society today; encouraging the translation into Arabic, sciences and other knowledge that are useful, as well as encouraging authors to write science books that would be of help for science, and enable the country play vital role in the development of human society and civilization anchored on Islamic tolerance. Others objectives still include the provision of training services for students as a way of developing themselves, as well as guiding the human race to tread on the right path and endeavour to save mankind from the tendency of immersing himself in material lust and unethical susceptibility (Abdul-Jauad, 1998; Al-Hougail, 1998; Ministry of Education, 2004).

In the year 2007, there were fourteen government universities and three private universities, as well as thirteen private colleges and ten community colleges, together with eighteen teachers' colleges, and one hundred and two girls' colleges existing in Saudi Arabia (Ministry of Higher Education, 2007). Also students studying in these universities are given monthly stipends. Saudi Arabia today has twenty-four government universities and eight private universities, together with twenty-one private colleges. The Ministry of Higher Education is tasked with the responsibility of providing support services to all these universities and colleges, as well as supervising and co-ordinating of all programmes of higher education. The ministry also supervises the government scholarship programmes for all citizens of Saudi Arabia studying abroad (Al-Hougail, 1998). Students who are awarded scholarship to study abroad are provided with allowances covering their tuition fees, board and lodging, and transportation. Those who take up science or technology are given extra amount. Male students awarded scholarship are encouraged to take along their wives and children by providing them with financial incentives (Metz, 1992), and this practice has continued to this day. The wives of these scholarship recipients may also pursue their own studies since there are possibilities of providing funds for them to undertake such studies (Metz, 1992).

#### **IV. EDUCATION BUDGET IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA FROM 2008 TO 2014**

This is demonstrated in the 2008 budget among others, where the total expenditure is placed at SR (105) billion. This includes allocation for technical and vocational training. New capital budget total SR (39) billion. Included in this capital budget is the King Abdullah

Project for Education Development which is costing SR 9 billion and the construction of 2074 new schools. There is also an ongoing construction of 4352 schools, and 2000 existing buildings undergoing rehabilitation. With regards to higher education, the new budget has provisions made for the University of Northern Boarder Region appropriations, the construction of a new university campus for girls in Riyadh, and the inaugurations of 41 new colleges. Also, the continuation of the scholarship programme in the field medicine and engineering as well as computer science, law, and accounting will take place next year. The new budget also calls for 7 new technical institutes to be opened for girls and the opening of 16 new vocational centres. Also, the plan to implement the National Plan for science and Technology costing SR 8 billion is currently being undertaken (Ministry of Finance, 2014).

In the year 2009, the total expenditure to be made is SR 122.1 (US \$32.6) billion. This includes technical and vocational training. Also, the King Abdullah Project for Education Development costing SR 9 billion and the Education Development Holding Company created and approved recently have continued to be implemented. The new projects being undertaken are the construction of 1500 new schools with an additional 3240 currently under construction while 2000 existing school buildings are currently undergoing rehabilitation. With regards to higher education, the new budget made provisions in the appropriation for a new female university campus to be constructed at Princess Norah University in Riyadh and the construction of a Medical City for King Saud University while there will still be a continuation of the scholarship programme next year. There is also the ongoing National Plan for Science and Technology costing SR 8.0 (US \$ 2.1) billion (Ministry of Finance, 2014).

In the year 2010, the total expenditure is placed at SR 137.6 (\$36.7) billion which represents more than 25% of the total appropriation for the FY 2010, an increase of 13% over the appropriation of the FY 2009. Included is the King Abdullah Initiative for Education Development costing SR 9.0 billion and which is being implemented through the Education Development Holding Company of the Public Investment Fund (PIF). Again, the new projects being undertaken are the construction of 1200 new schools with an additional 3112 currently under construction and the completion of more than 770 schools started in the FY2009 while 2000 existing school buildings are currently undergoing rehabilitation. With regards to higher education, the new budget made

provisions in the appropriation, for the construction of four new campuses meant for the newly established universities. Also, the scholarship programme will continue to function next year, but this time, it will focus more on technical trainers (Ministry of Finance, 2014).

The total expenditure earmarked for 2011 amounts to SR 150 (US \$40) billions which represents 26% of the appropriation of FY 2011. This amounts to an 8% increase over that of FY 2010 appropriation. Also included is the continuation of the implementation of King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project (Tatweer) costing SR 9.0 billion being undertaken through the Education Development Holding Company of the Public Investment Fund (PIF). There are also new projects, which include the construction of 610 new schools, additional 3200 currently under construction, and the completion of more than 600 schools which started in the FY 2009. There are also 2000 existing school buildings currently undergoing rehabilitation. In the case of higher education, the new budget made provisions in the appropriation for the completion of the constructions of the campuses of the new universities which include the construction of the faculty housing projects. Also the first and second phases of the scholarship programme will continue next year (Ministry of Finance, 2014).

The total expenditure for 2012 amounts to SR 168.6 (US \$45) billions. This represents 24% of the appropriation of FY 2011 amounting to an increase of 13% above the FY 2011 appropriation. Again, King Abdullah Bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project (Tatweer) costing SR 9.0 billion being undertaken through the Education Development Holding Company of the Public Investment Fund (PIF) has continued to be implemented. Additionally, there are new projects involving the construction of 742 new schools, and another 2900 under construction at present while more than 900 schools that started in the FY 2011 are being completed, and 2000 existing school buildings currently undergoing rehabilitation.

In the case of higher education, the new budget made provisions in the appropriation for the establishment of electronic university and for the inauguration of 40 new colleges, and for the completion of the constructions of the campuses of the new universities which include the construction of the faculty housing projects. Also the first and second phases of the scholarship programme will continue next year. So far, the number of students

studying on scholarship grants overseas has surpassed 120000 (Ministry of Finance, 2014).

The total expenditure for 2013 amounts to SR 204 (US \$54.4) billions. This represents 25% of the appropriation of FY 2013 amounting to an increase of 21% above the FY 2012 appropriation. There are also new projects that include the construction of 539 new schools at a cost of SR 3.9 (\$1.0) billion. This is in addition to the 1900 schools that are currently under construction, and the completion of more than 750 schools that started in the FY 2012. All these helped in the reduction of leased schools to 22%. This reduction is more than 33000 school compared to the 41% three years before. The budget includes appropriation for constructions that would help increase the number of school classrooms. It would also help rehabilitate 2000 existing school buildings to ensure that safety measures are improved.

In the case of higher education, the new budget made provisions in the appropriation for the Saudi Electronic University and the inaugurations of 15 new colleges, as well as the completion of the constructions of the campuses of the new universities that include the construction of the faculty housing projects and the construction of three new university hospitals. The scholarship programme recorded the number of students studying on scholarship overseas to be over 120000. This number excludes dependents who also receive support from the government. All these expenditures amount to over SR 21.6 (\$5.8) billion. There are additional new projects that include the construction of new technical colleges and institutes, which cost of SR 3.5 (\$0.9) billion. It also includes appropriations for the inaugurations of new colleges and institutes (Ministry of Finance, 2014).

The total expenditure for 2014 amounts to approximately SR 210 (US \$56) billions, which represents 25% of the appropriation of FY 2014 amounting to an increase of 3% above the appropriation of FY 2013. In the appropriation of the new budget are new projects that call for the construction of 465 new school buildings, which would cost approximately SR 3 (US \$0.8) billions. These are in addition to the 1544 school buildings that are currently under construction, and the more than 494 schools already completed in the FY 2012. The budget also includes, in addition, appropriation that would help increase the number of classrooms constructed and the rehabilitation of existing school buildings numbering approximately 1500.

Regarding higher education, the new budget has appropriations that include the completion of the rehabilitation started for colleges for girls in many universities as well as for the inaugurations of 8 new colleges and the completion of the new universities' campuses that include housing meant for faculty members as well as other facilities. Regarding the scholarship programme, a record number of 185,000 students are studying on scholarships grants overseas. These include the dependents of the scholarship awardees that are also studying overseas and are being supported by the government. The expenditures for all these amount to over SR 22 (US 5.9) billions. There are also appropriations made for the construction of new vocational and technical colleges and institutes amounting to approximately SR 5.2 (US \$1.39), and additional appropriation for existing projects that cost approximately SR 500 (US \$133.3) millions (Ministry of Finance, 2014).

It will be noticed that a dramatic increase from 105 to 210 billion in expenditures occurred between 2008 and 2014. This is because the Saudi Arabian government is constantly making efforts to improve its education and its planning process in development. A conclusion can be made based on the government's efforts and expenditures made during the past several years as previously explained.

## **V. KING ABDULLAH BIN ABDULAZIZ EDUCATION DEVELOPMENT PROJECT (TATWEER)**

Saudi Arabia is a very good example of a third world country that takes the education of its citizens which is based on the concepts of the Islamic cultures very seriously. These facts have been demonstrated in the budget outlays already presented in the above section. The general objective is to have an efficient and effective education system, which meets the religious goals and the economic and social needs of the country. It will also help reduce the illiteracy rate of the adult population of Saudi Arabian citizens (Alhogail, 2003).

In the beginning of 2007, the King Abdullah bin Abdulaziz Public Education Development Project (Tatweer) was inaugurated by the Saudi Council of Ministers to counter the continuous criticisms levelled against the Saudi school curricula, and to answer the calls of the stakeholders to overhaul the entire school system (Kamal, 2012). The key criticisms of the Saudi school curriculum include the fact that some aspects are missing

from the traditional curriculum, such as creative and practical work. In the traditional view, the teacher feeds the students with the required information from the textbook and then sets the questions for the next examination from the previous one (Alkahtani, 2015). Testing does not include any questions or items designed to show creativity or thinking. The teacher's job is to get the students to listen and to transfer the information from the blackboard to their files, and ultimately to their test or exam paper. The traditional curriculum does not help to raise the students' level of thinking, nor encourage them to be critical, creative, or to express their opinions and explain matters which would develop their reasoning and problem-solving skills, through making presentations to their fellow students (Alkahtani, 2015).

Tatweer, an Arabic term that means "just reform" takes cognisance of the prior weak reform programmes. The aim of Tatweer, this time, is to see that a comprehensive educational development programme is put in place in public schools operating within the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (Hakami, 2010). Such aims call for embarking on projects that would improve the education system in Saudi Arabia through greater utilisation of modern technology, development of school curricula, requalification of teachers, and the reforming of the school system (Kamal, 2012). The General Manager of Tatweer Dr. Ali Al-Hakamihad further stated that the goal of Tatweer is to make students become proficient in the areas of mathematics, science, and computer science skills. Such programme would encourage students to learn more in order to gain better communication skills as well as become more flexible and innovative in the teaching environment (Chicago forum: Private sector to help reform Saudi education system, 2012). The Tatweer programme has a projected budget of \$ 2.4 billion and is projected to function for a duration of six years from 2007 to 2013 (Kamal, 2012). The project functions independent of the Ministry of Education and is directly being supervised by the king which further enhances its strong authority and independence (Kamal, 2012).

Traditionally, the education system in Saudi Arabia was extremely centralised, but Tatweer's key goal is to decentralise this system by delegating more powers to schools and educational departments (Hakami, 2010). The focus of Tatweer is particularly on the needs of the learners and the adoption of the learner-centred approach. Tatweer differs from previous reform initiatives, in that it initiated a complete overhaul of the education system in Saudi Arabia. In addition to the improvement of curricula, other education-related aspects are involved, for instance

the enhancement of the standard of education, professional improvement, and the enhancement of the school environment with a view to encouraging learning (Hakami, 2010).

## **VI. THE USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN THE KINGDOM OF SAUDI ARABIA**

In 1954, the audio-visual section (which involves TV and radio) started to be incorporated into the education system in Saudi Arabia. (Kensara, 1987). This section was further developed and reorganised in 1964 to become known as the Department of Educational Aids and the Science Laboratories (Abuazma, 1991). Starting from 1970s, the KSA began focusing on technology especially in the field of education (Abuazma, 1991).

Therefore, a lot of plans have been put in place in these last few years for the promotion, development, and coordination of efforts with regards to lifelong learning to teach students with the aid of technology. For instant, to honour the agreement reached between the KSA Ministry of Education and the Indiana University Foundation, the Indiana University came up with a comprehensive plan that would develop audio visual technologies in the form of television and radio in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (An Operational Plan for a National Educational Technology Program, 1975). The aim of designing this plan was to coordinate the educational technology for future policies and objectives of the government. Such objectives are the following:

- 1- Launching a National Centre for educational technology for the purpose of developing, producing, and distributing classroom teaching aids, researching on curriculum, and the testing of equipment and programme.
- 2- Start the trial phase of the educational television project;
- 3- Initiate simplified language-laboratory system to be used in the teaching of English language at the secondary school level.
- 4- Create an experimental audio system for the teaching of Arabic language at the elementary school level.
- 5- Design an integrated classroom facility to handle both theory and practical learning and introduce in secondary schools on a pilot basis.
- 6- Inaugurate an experimental schools where equipment and educational approaches can be tested.

- 7- Introduce the use of mobile and prefabricated classrooms for the school expansion programme (The Ministry of Planning, 1976).

The government threw its support to these objectives since it was lucky to enjoy enormous financial wealth as a result of high oil prices in the world market (Abuazma, 1991). The government came with its full and total support since it has realised that oil will not flow forever, and that the cornerstone of development for any nation lies in education. It is with this regard that the Saudi government made a bold decision to earmark some amount coming from the oil revenues for these objectives (Abuazma, 1991).

Moving to the use of computer, first introduced at the Ministry of Education, computer became a useful tool for storing and processing information regarding students, faculty, and administration related records (Alshumaim & Alhassan, 2010). Back then, computers were utilised to help with multiple activities related to teaching approaches; for example, they were used to aid in the preparation of courses and the creation of documents, as well as the production of books and management. This is in addition to other activities connected with education. Computers were also increasingly utilised in hard sciences, with the aim of assisting scientific experiments (Alshumaim & Alhassan, 2010).

More recently, the Ministry of Education began an expanded programme whereby primary schools were equipped with computer laboratories. However, this expanded programme was discontinued because there were not enough teachers to handle the computer related subjects (Alshumaim & Alhassan, 2010).

After the introduction of the computer, two tenders have been given by the Ministry of Education (MoE) in Saudi Arabia to SMART Technologies to provide a total number of 9,000 interactive electronic whiteboards and relevant software. At the level of the Middle East, this represents the biggest single sale of interactive whiteboards so far. What will be supplied by SMART include 9,000 SMART boards as well as licences for collaborative learning software related to SMART Notebook (Sutton, 2013). The deployment of the materials would be led by Saudi official distributor Obeikan Education and the materials would be sent to 6,500 public school classrooms as well as to 2,500 computer laboratories. The implementation of the programme would include the training of schoolteacher and the development of professionals in the field of

computer science. The Ministry of Education is planning to provide interactive whiteboards in 50,000 classrooms in the next three years (Sutton, 2013).

As discovered by Abu Ras (1979), the percentage of teachers at elementary schools in Saudi Arabia who were au fait with the use and operation of a variety of modern equipment was less than 3%. Truly, the educators who could utilise teaching materials that were not costly – such as charts, overhead projectors, and graphs – in the class were less than 30%. Al-Hussain (1983) indicated that the technique of lecturing was the only one employed in education at schools in Saudi Arabia. The government of Saudi Arabia, nonetheless, has one key goal in relation to its education policy: training individuals as fast as possible in using facilities and equipment available in the country. Mallakh (1982) reiterated that

*Eighty-three percent of the total financial resources allocated to the development of human capital will be spent on the expansion of facilities at all four levels of the Saudi Arabian educational system: elementary, intermediate, secondary, and graduate (p.185).*

## **VII. LEARNING AND SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN SAUDI ARABIA**

The term “learning difficulties” is not clearly defined in Saudi Arabia. The term “learning disabilities” is employed by specialists in the area of learning disabilities to refer to those school children with learning difficulties in relation to certain school subjects and with ‘apparently’ mediocre intelligence and an underlying deficit, and supposed to be a result of central nervous system dysfunction (Al-Hano, 2006, p.176). According to Hussain (2007), about 5-10% of students in Saudi Arabia have learning difficulties. This percentage, nonetheless, may not represent the real situation, given that there are no adequate instruments of evaluation. At schools in Saudi Arabia, it is the duty of regular classroom teachers to refer students for a check (Hussain, 2007). Students identified as having learning difficulties are then assisted by professionals in the area of learning disabilities. Learning disabilities are treated as disabilities of a minor nature; and students with learning disabilities receive their education within the general education environment with normally developing peers. However, additional assistance (for instance, a resource room) is supplied when needed (Al-Ajmi, 2006).

The first institution to provide a programme for student teachers interested in majoring in learning difficulties was King Saud University, in 1991. A Learning Difficulties Day – on 3 May 2009 – was introduced by the Ministry of Education, together with a “I Know My Difficulties” campaign. In 2010, the campaign was “Yes, I Can Learn”, and the following year it was “Learn About My Difficulties So We Can Defeat Them.” All schools were obliged join these campaigns which were designed to teach Saudis about learning-related difficulties. The goal of efforts to enhance awareness is to end the negative view held by society towards learning-related difficulties (Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, 2011).

The Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia (2001) assessment procedures are identical to those of Canada. These are the procedures:

- It is important that parents give their consent before diagnosing a child’s condition, and before making any decision.
- Parents should participate in preparing, evaluating and tracking the educational plan of an individual child.
- Parents or the student's guardians are encouraged to pay visit to the institute or the school to become familiar with the recommended programme for the child.
- All student’s and his family’s information must be kept confidential.
- All information given to parents regarding their child must be in simple language in order that everything should be understood clearly.
- A student’s family has the right to demand for a re-diagnosis if they doubt the accuracy of the initial diagnosis (Ministry of Education of Saudi Arabia, 2001).

## **VIII. LOW SAUDI STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT IN MATHEMATICS**

To efficiently assess the quality of the education system in Saudi Arabia, one way is to draw a comparison between the performance of Saudi students and that of other Gulf states and world countries (Hussain, 2007). One comparative gauge of student achievement was obtained by Saudi Arabia in 2003 after the participation in the Trends in International Mathematics and Science Study (TIMSS) (Hussain, 2007). Saudi Arabia has not

partaken in other international student achievement-related quantitative research studies, for instance the The Program for International Student Assessment (PISA) and the Progress in International Reading Literacy Study (PIRLS). Therefore, the country does not have any other comparative sources to assess the development of students, as compared with their peers around the world (Hussain, 2007).

Both Bahrain and Qatar partook in the TIMSS, in 2003 and 2007, respectively. Although these two Gulf states are considerably smaller in size than Saudi Arabia, there is a shared ethnic and Islamic cultural background between their populations and that of Saudi Arabia, and they also allocate huge parts of their budgets to education. In the relation to how Qatari students perform, no data are obtainable yet; however, 8th form Bahraini students score a total average of 401 points in mathematics; their Saudi peers, 332 points (TIMSS, 2003). Accordingly, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia are in the bottom in terms of mathematics’ scores; students in Saudi Arabia only outperform their South African and Ghanaian peers. Saudi Arabia and Bahrain thus have mathematics scores that are considerably below the global average score of 466 points (TIMSS, 2003).

## **IX. SUMMARY**

This article focused on the presentation of an overview of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with regard to its population and economy, as well as its religion, culture, and the condition of its education system. Also, the allocations given to education in the Saudi Arabia’s national budget, which have continuously increased year to year, have been enormous. These are indications that the government is giving its full support to the education sector as a way of keeping up with other developed nations. Also the King Abdullah Bin Abdul Aziz Public Education Development Project (Tatweer) is put into action with the aim of improving the education situation in Saudi Arabia through greater use of modern technology. Despite the Saudi government’s effort to give adequate support to its students especially those encountering difficulties, the last section demonstrates that Saudi students achieve less in comparison with students of other Gulf States.

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