

# **Harmonizing Education Outcomes with the Needs of the Saudi Labor Market Demand**

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## **Abstract**

*This paper focuses on the exploration of particular education outcomes in the context of Saudi Arabia and how those aspects can be harmonized with the needs of the Saudi labor market demand. Different arguments related to the emergence of education and training opportunities for the workforce of Saudi Arabia are presented and critically analyzed against major findings derived from the literature. A relevant conclusion presented in the paper refers to the statement that Saudi Arabia is on the right path of expanding its talented employee base in an attempt to improve its education system by making it adequately competitive as compared to major education systems around the world. The research methodology utilized in the study is quantitative by nature implying the researcher's focus on obtaining as objective and unbiased findings from participants as possible. The data collection method used by the researcher is questionnaires as they are identified as a reliable tool to derive adequate information from participants. The research methodology paradigm implemented in the current study refers to positivism. The main conclusion presented in the paper is associated with the belief of participants that the Saudi education system is efficient and reliable enough to accommodate the education and labor market needs of the local population.*

**Keywords:** *educational and training programs; professional realization; labor market; curricular standards; human capital; labor force; knowledge; harmonizing education outcomes; positivism; international partnerships; competitiveness*

## **Introduction**

The focus on harmonizing education outcomes with the needs of the Saudi labor market demand has become a major priority of the Saudi Arabian government. The country's officials have persistently engaged in the transformation of Saudi Arabia's oil wealth into human capacity, as the most reliable way to achieve the respective goals is through enhanced education opportunities and labor productivity of the local population. As a result, it is expected that the Saudi traditional society can be transformed efficiently to

reflect major trends of education and labor market demand. In addition, the results from this study might provide significant insights into the specificity of the domestic labor market from a global perspective.

### **Research Methodology Paradigm**

The current research indicates emphasis on the application of quantitative research methodology, as it is believed to be more coherent and data-led approach compared to the qualitative approach. The quantitative method is intended to support the author to acquire numerical and statistical data based on the points of view of participants. For example, the researcher in the current study wanted to distinguish how many of its participants approved or opposed the main research question and how extensively (on a statistical level) they approved it (Waters, 2011). Quantitative research methodology is capable to acquire a large amount of data that can facilitate the researcher to manage and transform the information into study reports for analysis and discussion. In addition, this type of research methodology predominantly exploits different techniques such as questionnaires and surveys with detailed sub-questions and answers that respondents need to mark from a prearranged choice. Answers are in general quantified in strengths of response such as agreed and disagreed, or tick numbers such as scale out of 10. Moreover, quantitative based research methodology is regarded to be flexible in terms of how it is executed such as by distributing questionnaires, virtual surveys, or even phone interviews. As it is mentioned above, the current study utilized this research methodology as it is imperative to guarantee that the study has a flexible and unbiased division of participants and that they have sufficient representation in numbers to provide a greater choice of reliable information for discussion (Treiman, 2009). To facilitate getting unbiased participants, specific individuals responsible for selecting participants generally provide financial incentives to influence participants such as free products or cash.

Descriptive based research analysis was applied in this research, as it supported the researcher to illustrate the basic characteristics of the findings in a research. Descriptive statistics is generally executed by reviewing the sample and evaluating it in a basic way. Together with basic graphics and statistics, it produces the groundwork of data findings. Descriptive research analysis is naturally diverse from inferential analysis. With descriptive analysis, the researcher merely examines what is or what the data exhibits. With inferential statistics, the author is focused on building the final conclusion that expand beyond the direct data alone (Treiman, 2009). For instance, the author may apply inferential statistics in an attempt to conclude from the research findings what the population might consider. In addition, the author might exploit inferential analysis to make evaluations of the possibility that an experimental difference between respondents is a trustworthy one or one that might have taken place by probability in this study (Creswell, 2013). As a result, some authors utilize inferential statistics method to build early conclusion from research findings to get a complete picture; while descriptive data method basically reviews what is going on in research findings. Descriptive research analysis is also applied to exhibit quantitative findings in a convenient way. Moreover, it has been argued that many studies sometimes may illustrate different actions, or they may study a large number of respondents on any measure. Descriptive statistics is intended to provide guidance to the current study to simplify large amounts of information in a rational manner.

Each descriptive assessment might help the researcher shorten research findings and examine them basically.

The main part of the respective research methodology refers to the collection of numerical data with the idea to explain a certain phenomenon as the issue identified in the present study. The importance of quantitative research mainly reflects in the generation of reliable and objective findings. The relationships between variables are clearly specified with the purpose to establish cause and effect issues which may have a relevant impact on the exploration of the overall research question (Creswell, 2013). Considering the fact that quantitative research methodology is selected in this study implies the necessity to use one of the most common forms of data collection, in particular questionnaires. The latter represent a reliable method of collecting a standardized set of information from significant numbers of participants, or in other words, the researcher focuses on the importance to collect the same information in the same manner. As a result, the utilization of factual questionnaires is emphasized in this study as it is important to pay attention to the importance of collecting descriptive information pertinent to the comparison of education outcomes with the needs of the Saudi labor market (Waters, 2011). Major advantages of questionnaires include the following aspects: generation of practical and reliable data; substantial information can be collected from a significant number of participants; the researcher can easily quantify the results of the questionnaires; and the analysis of data can be performed in a more scientific manner compared to qualitative research.

The research model that was used as part of the research methodology refers to positivism. It has been identified that positivism is closely related to epistemology which is usually described as philosophy of knowing and determining a specific approach of generating knowledge. A major principle of positivism utilized in the study refers to the use of quantifiable observations that are further transformed to statistical analysis. From this perspective, knowledge is understood as derived from human experience (Creswell, 2013). The observable elements are considered in the process of their interaction, but the researcher is independent from the study itself. Thus, science is perceived as a relevant ground for the emergence of positivism because scientific assumptions are identified as deterministic and mechanistic by nature.

## **Findings**

Based on the questionnaires administered to the sample of 350 professionals working in the education sector of Saudi Arabia, significant findings were obtained. A high response rate was demonstrated, as the majority of participants returned the questionnaires fully completed. Approximately 45% of the respondents indicated that the Saudi education system is competitive and well-developed to address the complex needs of the local population (Al Agili, 2015). In addition, it has been identified that those respondents felt confident enough to reply to the questions included in the questionnaire because they possessed sufficient knowledge of the education sector in Saudi Arabia. Another 10% of participants pointed out that the Saudi education system has been ignored not only internationally but also domestically. As a result, they considered such an aspect a significant drawback of the Saudi education sector. Yet approximately 20% of the sample indicated that the role schooling plays in Saudi Arabia's economic and social development is immense. The fact that a properly organized system of education in Saudi Arabia did

not exist until the period of the 1920's is indicative of the challenges encountered by the country's education sector, as demonstrated in the research findings of this study (Alwagait, Shahzad, & Alim, 2015).

Based on the results obtained from questionnaires, it was concluded that government-sponsored schools in Saudi Arabia extensively expanded over time to reflect the necessity of including essential values and principles of modern education, with the perspective to include talented students in the nation's labor force. Yet it has been identified in the current study that a substantial amount of Saudi teachers did not possess adequate qualifications, which represents another challenge that should be properly addressed within the education sector of the country (Koch, 2014). However, it cannot be denied, according to the answers of the education professionals participating in this study, that education has been progressively expanding in the Kingdom. This led to the development of a mass schooling system which was characterized as adequately institutionalized. Satisfying the needs of the Saudi society was the leading aspect of local educators, as they persistently paid attention to implement effective strategies to harmonize education outcomes with the needs of the Saudi labor market (Weber, 2011). The Saudi education system is intended to contribute to the economic growth of the nation.

Another finding derived from participants' answers related to the gap between education system and labor market in Saudi Arabia. Most participants confirmed the importance to align education and labor market needs as they argued that such an aspect is associated with workforce development. Both systems should co-exist to meet the goals of sustainable development of the country. The transformed education system in the Middle Eastern region adds to the skill gap emerging between young job seekers and society based on knowledge principles (Rice, 2003). The increasing unemployment rate, as indicated in the present study, puts additional pressure on Saudi Arabian educators to prepare students to fit in the local labor market. In Saudi Arabia, female unemployment is higher than male unemployment, which poses the question of social and gender inequality in education (Moser, Swain, & Alkhabbaz, 2015). Some participants in the study pointed out the need to adopt drastic measures to improve both education and labor policies existing in Saudi Arabia.

The limited female participation in the country's workforce has been recognized as a significant problem that local education authorities need to tackle. Research findings show that such limited participation of women in the workforce of Saudi Arabia is based on the country's cultural practices and social structure (Andrews, & Playfoot, 2015). Women are discouraged from seeking employment opportunities not only in Saudi Arabia but also in the entire region of the Middle East. This applies to both public and private sectors. Despite the government's effort to create more employment opportunities for women, the reality is different because of the current low rate of employment of Saudi Arabian women.

A problem found in this study is youth unemployment for citizens of Saudi Arabia. This issue is complicated with the competitive imbalance between nationals and expatriates. Therefore, some participants expressed their hope that the government would tackle the problem of youth unemployment by helping more Saudi nationals enter the private sector (Rajkhan, 2014). The achievement of workforce nationalization may help the country harmonize education outcomes with the needs of the Saudi labor market.

Another problem indicated in the study refers to the existence of co-education programs for males and females in Saudi Arabia. Workforce shortage is experienced in disciplines like engineering, science and technology, and information technology. According to most participants in the current study, this prevents the country from developing its full potential in the education system and labor market alike. The promotion of women education has been seen as an essential measure to build a knowledge-based economy of Saudi Arabia (Havril, 2015). Changes in the curriculum may additionally strengthen the country's education system, as illustrated in the answers of most participants.

Furthermore, this study indicated that expatriate teachers in Saudi Arabia prefer to work in private institutions, which leads to a modest pupil-teacher ratio. Participants expressed the need for improvement of the teaching faculty in the country, which is perceived as a way to harmonize education outcomes with the needs of the Saudi labor market. Any improvement in the education sector is dependent on teacher quality, presenting the need to recruit competent and qualified teachers (Lynch, 2014). Responses to skills mismatch in the country should relate to the development of academic skills and life skills of Saudi students. Participants also argued that the Saudi labor market can be improved through engaging employers in quality assurance (Datnow, Hubbard, & Mehan, 2002). They were focused on building an efficient relationship between higher education institutions in Saudi Arabia and local employers. The result would be a better harmonized education system, which is aligned with the Saudi labor market needs. The adoption of a model of industry-university collaboration may lead to long-term improvements of the Saudi education system (Jackson, 2009).

### **Suggestions**

Suggestions for building a better aligned education system with the labor market needs in Saudi Arabia can be validated by the country's Ministry of Labor. A recommendation that may be considered is the strategy of localization of different sectors and professions. Although the Ministry of Labor has established various initiatives to address the problem of unemployment in Saudi Arabia, it can further participate in involving more Saudi nationals in the private sector (Havril, 2015). Financial incentives might be provided to young Saudi citizens to improve their education and acquire significant skills they can apply in their future occupation. In addition, the government aims to reform the education system emphasizing quality of education and professional skills of teachers.

Another suggestion is to follow the examples of well-developed education systems and knowledge-based economies, such as that of the United Kingdom. Education focus should be refined to transform Saudi Arabia's education system by instilling a solid foundation of learning among local students. Helping students become keen learners is a proper approach instead of only encouraging them to seek jobs. Workforce development in Saudi Arabia may be improved with policies and reforms focused on promoting creativity and enhancing local talent.

The idea to harmonize education outcomes with the Saudi labor market needs implies that local authorities should refine their perception of labor market qualification. All individuals seeking employment opportunities in Saudi Arabia should meet labor market qualification requirements prior to being recruited. The education sector in the country needs to focus on the introduction of a holistic strategy

through financing higher education, addressing unemployment, improving education quality, and expanding employer engagement. Moreover, teacher oriented initiatives might contribute to better harmonization of education outcomes with the Saudi labor market needs. If Saudi Arabia adopts the strategy to recruit more teachers, this may improve student-teacher interaction, which may further lead to enacting solid values of learning among students.

## Conclusion

This study discussed the importance of achieving a better aligned education system of Saudi Arabia with the labor market needs. The expanding labor market demand in the country prompted government and education officials to introduce solutions to improve the Saudi education system. Despite the deficiencies and challenges demonstrated in the country's education sector, it was concluded that it has the potential to harmonize education outcomes with the labor market needs. Following Western education and economic models was suggested as a strategy that might be customized to the Saudi education and workforce sectors.

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