

Cases Encountered: the Development of Public Education in Saudi Arabia

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Abstract: *This study investigates some cases that occurred in the development of public education in Saudi Arabia, a country that aims for major development in public education. Very specific cases were chosen for their importance in the development of education, such as technology integration, curriculum development and the teaching process, secondary school development, and professional development. These cases have proved effective and successful in the development of education in many countries. However, despite the considerable efforts of the Saudi Ministry of Education to improve and expand the excellent education, these cases are experiencing difficulty in meeting their objectives and the demands of stakeholders. At present, financial constraints do not pose a problem in Saudi Arabia. However, there is a problem in planning for implementation and this research has revealed that for that reason, the cases studied have not contributed to the development of education in Saudi Arabia. A mode for planning and successful implementation is recommended.*

Keywords: *Cases, Development of Public Education, Education Development, Developing Countries Saudi Arabia,*

1. Introduction

The development of education is considered the basic element for the development of societies and should reflect progress at local and international level. Many poor countries with limited natural resources have become wealthy and productive due to the development of education based on a knowledge economy. This has made these countries more competitive in terms of wealth compared to countries that are rich in natural resources. Saudi Arabia and the Gulf States will lose their power in the world economy if current education does not move in practice toward a knowledge economy and investment in human resources.

Saudi Arabia has realized the importance of educational development with investment sums of more than 25% of the budget expenditure. However, the educational output does not reflect this investment. The problems stem from the weakness of the education system and the shortage of qualified education leaders who can accomplish the goals of government development plans. [1] showed that diagnostic reviews of education in the GCC states have indicated that the main challenges facing the region's education systems are:

- Low performance in terms of international status.
- Non-integration of education processes and curriculum.
- Absence of cultural dimension in the educational process.
- Lack of preparation and qualified education leadership.
- Low efficiency and effectiveness of graduates.
- Limited partnership of educational institutions and community.

The purpose of this article is not to overview the history of education in Saudi Arabia, but to focus on some cases that have hindered the development of education and participated in the waste of money. It will also focus on the weaknesses of education that have led to the slow pace of development for many years despite the unlimited government financial support.

2. Cases of Educational Development

There are many cases of educational development, but only the main cases will be investigated in this paper.

2.1. Technology Implementation in Schools

In the Ministry of Education, technology started with the personal efforts of dedicated teachers, school administrators, and education supervisors. Many of these designed technology programs that reflect educational needs, some of which were programs for school management, for example electronic supervision, and other programs used by educators. The designers of these programs did not receive support or motivation from the management in the Ministry of Education. The main blow for the localization of technology was the elimination of the Maaref program. This program, which was used for years to manage schools all over the country, was designed by educators in the ministry and substituted with an outside program from another Arab country. All programs in the ministry that had been designed by educators were eliminated and all personal efforts were shut down. Although most schools are equipped with computers, data shows, and smartboards, integration of technology in classrooms remains at the early stages. In his findings, [2] indicates that teachers have a strong desire to integrate ICT into education but that they encounter many barriers. The major barriers were lack of confidence, lack of competence, and lack of access to resources. Since confidence, competence, and accessibility have been found to be the critical components of technology integration in schools, sufficient time and technical support need to be provided to teachers. In their study of Saudi secondary schools, [3] showed that ICT was perceived as an important tool in improving performance, collaboration, learning experience, and learning outcomes. However, some challenges that affect the application of ICT in Saudi schools are, for example, the lack of space, resources, maintenance, and ICT skills in schools along with a lack of ICT training and clear ICT policies.

2.2 Curriculum Development and Teaching Process

The Ministry of Education has invested in the development of a new science and math curriculum but did not sufficiently prepare teachers to teach the new curriculum, which had a major effect on student learning. The focus is on content with less emphasis on student learning and the main concern of educational supervisors is to see how teachers teach, rather than how students learn. Therefore, teaching tends to be traditional. Teachers must have continuous training to keep up with the skills required to promote learning and integrate technology into the learning process, thus opening the door to creativity, innovation, and self-confidence for the students and making the school an attractive learning environment. The weak preparation and training programs have contributed to low student achievement in international examinations. The study by [4] examined the similarities and differences between Saudi Arabian and Singaporean science teachers' experiences and teaching learning practices, as measured by the TIMSS's teacher questionnaire. In so doing, the study was designed as a causal comparative study in which attempts were made to determine the cause or reason for the existing differences in the achievement of the students of the two countries. It was revealed that there were significant differences between the two countries in the teachers' preparation for teaching science topics (Biology, Chemistry, Physics, and Earth science), teachers' license, teaching experience, professional development programs, and teaching practices. The findings suggest that Grade 8 science teachers in Saudi Arabia and Singapore differ significantly in most characteristics related to their background, perception of their preparation, and the way that they teach science. The findings also suggest that in most of the comparisons, the Singapore sample was found to be better qualified, teach less content, be more balanced in their perceptions of how well they had prepared, participate more in professional development programs, and had classroom practices close to or resembling those identified as inquiry oriented.

2.3 Cases of Secondary Schools

The case of secondary school development went through three main stages. The first case of a comprehensive high-school pilot project started in 1976 and ended after 10 years. The system of this school was excellent in preparing students for university and practical life. Although this pilot project was evaluated and recommended to be expanded throughout the education system, the project ended without justification. The second case is the Developed High School, which started in 1986 and uses an effective system of credit hours like the system used in university. It also has many elective courses for which students register, each student has advisors, and the school operates an open door policy contrary to ordinary schools where students cannot leave without permission from their parents.

[5] concluded in their study that the weaknesses in understanding the school system, and in academic guidance and family participation, limited the support for children as they did not have sufficient information about the school system. Furthermore, the social needs of students were neglected, as found in the following results by [6]:

- The school program did not reach its goals, since the programs were designed by those who design the traditional curriculum.
- Teachers were not prepared for this new system before engaging in teaching in this type of school.
- Shortages of training programs for teachers.
- Heavy workload for teachers, which has a direct effect on their guidance and counseling of students.
- No incentives or motivation for teachers and students, which affects students.
- School buildings were not prepared to house such a system, which differs from traditional schools.
- Shortage of facilities such as laboratories and other services required for such a system.

This case was expanded to hundreds of schools all over the country, but after five years was eliminated, despite proving very useful and successful in many countries.

The third case is the Pioneer School Project established in 1999 for the development of secondary schools. This case resembles schools in Australia. Teachers, administrators, and supervisors were trained for this project in Australia and this type of school still exists in some school districts. In his study about the degree of application of the criteria of Total Quality Management (TQM) in the Pioneer schools in Sakaka, Saudi Arabia, [7] reveals that the TQM is medium. This result indicates that development remains limited.

Although these are cases of high schools that have developed secondary education, for more than 70 years the main structure has not changed, despite the development of the scientific and literary sections, the change of those sections to the legitimacy or natural sciences, the upgrading of the name of the secondary phase, or decisions being based primarily on the preparation of undergraduate students. In order to keep pace with recent educational developments, I think this may begin with the materials and decisions of technical education in elementary school and expand gradually to secondary school. There must also be some technical materials within the compulsory material at the intermediate and secondary stages, so that students have several options after graduation to pursue academic study, continue to study in technical colleges, or engage in work in the private sector. The current situation only directs students toward university education; however, many of these after a leak go to university because they are directed by the education system and societal pressure to enter into the university's desire in other areas of the public education system has not Ahaiha to acquire skills. Development in developed countries walks on two legs (secondary education output and higher), while the development in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia walks on one leg, the leg of Higher Education.

In the next few years, particularly after the expansion of the universities' emerging outputs, Saudi Arabia will face a large proportion of unemployed university graduates due to the lack of skills required by the development needs in the Kingdom. Students who are graduating today from public education do not have sufficient skills to deal and interact with trade and economic institutions in the community.

The secondary school system directs students to enroll in the university and for that reason, the labor market depends on skilled labor from abroad. At the same time, Saudi college graduates find it difficult to find jobs, not because the jobs are not available but because the market demands skills that graduates do not have. The shortage of skills is a result of the lack of quality education not only in public education, but also in higher education, for the change is very slow.

2.4. Professional Development

The development of educational leaders in various positions is considered the basis for development. The government has spent millions of dollars on training all education leaders both locally and abroad, but the outcomes of professional development have not been measured. Transfer of training is still in its early stages and is seldom measured, but special attention should be given to the professional development of women leaders to prepare them for leadership roles that require planning, decision-making, problem solving, and managing educational projects. An analysis of open-ended questionnaires by [8] indicated that over 60% of

teachers share the same concerns while trying to implement what they have learned in training within their classrooms. Challenges related to school and classroom environments were the major concerns cited by teachers. Small classrooms and the large number of students in each classroom overwhelm teachers and distract them from utilizing new teaching strategies. The large classrooms force teachers to exhaust their energy managing students instead of implementing new teaching strategies. [9] recommended that the class time for teachers should be extended and curricula reduced so that teachers could have sufficient time to fulfil the requirements of each curriculum within the lessons available, making use of ICT. Teachers need to be released from their workload for a reasonable time to attend training without fear of the accumulation of work when they return to their schools.

3. Research Methodology

A survey method was used to follow up specific cases of educational development in public schools in Saudi Arabia to determine their influence on the development of education in Saudi Arabia.

4. Discussion

The Ministry of Education has spent millions of dollars on the planning and implementation of these cases, but the outcomes are not satisfactory, because none of these cases accomplished their planned goals. There are many reasons for the setback of these projects including poor management, unclear strategies at the outset, program management not seeking Saudi experts, and above all, that the planning for implementation was very weak, which is the most common cause of slow and failed projects and other cases in education in Saudi Arabia. All these cases have good finance and planning, but weak implementation. This can be illustrated by figure (1) for all cases. Planning and implementation of projects that link project planning and implementation.

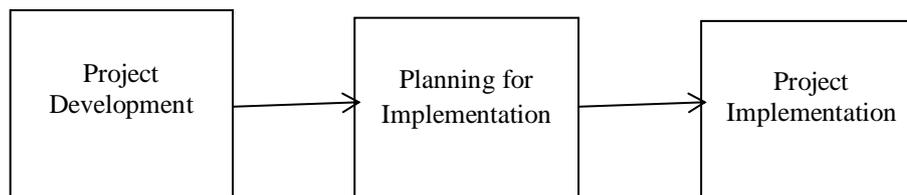


Fig. 1: Mode for planning and successful implementation.

Using figure (1), the problems of implementation of these cases can be illustrated. The barriers to the integration of technology are not related to the budget allocated in these cases, but mainly to the planning of the implementation phase. This is basically related to the training of teachers and administrators in schools before the real implementation phase. Teachers must be freed from heavy teaching workloads to have time to integrate technology into classroom teaching. For the development of curricula and teaching, the Ministry of Education spent millions of USD to develop the curriculum in general and Math and Science in particular, but students still cannot compete with international students in TIMSS and other global exams. The problem stems from the second phase in figure (1), which is related to weaknesses in planning for implementation of Science and Math, where teachers were given only brief training that was insufficient to teach the new modern curriculum. There is also no orientation to these new curricula for students and stakeholders. The case of professional development of teachers and administrators also faces problems for the same reason of lack of planning for implementation. Training programs may begin without investigating the training needs of educators. Evaluation of training programs concerns the reaction of trainees to the program, but evaluation has not gone further to investigate the effect of these programs on the workplace and the results for the organization. Therefore, professional development will be limited if the planning of implementation of these programs is not very well investigated.

King Abdullah noticed that the educational output was not satisfactory, so he initiated a project for the development of public education called the King Abdullah Project in 2007. The budget for the project was nine billion Saudi Riyals (2.4 billion USD) to be accomplished within six years, but the project could not make the deadline and will probably take 12 years to accomplish. The project focused on four areas:

development of educational curricula, training of teachers, improving the educational environment, and improving classroom activities, but none of these four areas achieved the ultimate goal of the project. Since the beginning of the project, it has not been satisfactory, but it may be more successful in the future.

5. Conclusion

The cases investigated in this study show that the development of education in Saudi Arabia can be very important if they have very well-planned implementation strategies. These cases are well planned, but they have very weak planning for implementation, and that is why these cases did not accomplish their goals. In order for these cases to be successful, it is suggested:

- To plan for implementation before the implementation itself.
- To implement accountability to ensure success at work.
- To base selection of managers and project directors on special criteria according to the job requirements.
- To make use of local experts who have high qualifications from international institutions. Many developing countries have thought that progress lies in the dependence on foreign expertise, because they have experience in the development of quality education. However, these countries did not succeed in achieving their objectives, for educational and social fields have social factors in terms of customs, traditions, values, and policies, which take a long time for foreign experts to be acquainted with in order to achieve real development in a different social setting. However, international experts are very useful when collaborating with local experts.

6. References

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