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**Development of Higher Education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia:  
Trends and Strategies**

**Abdulhalem A. Mazi & Abdulrahman M. Abouammoh**

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## ***Abstract***

*Higher education at the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has grown very rapidly during the past decade, and it is still going through various major reforms. This paper, presents the size, the growth rates of the higher education and major changes, new initiatives and reforms. Diagnostic and analytical studies also show various aspects and characteristics of the Saudi higher education system. Challenges and opportunities were either discussed or predicted. In fact, development and reforms are based on framed trends and strategies that will be pointed out as well. Further, public and private higher education has integrated their roles to achieve common goals for addressing the social responsibilities, equity, quality assurance and globalization.*

## ***I. General Introduction***

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) occupies most of the Arabian Peninsula with about 2 million square meters area and over 23 million population, 56% males, 73% Saudis. The majority of the population is youth (33% below age 15), hence, education has been one of the priorities for the development of the country. The Kingdom has embarked on five years development plans at the early 1970s, which was a new era of rapid development. see MoFNE (1970, 1975).

Higher Education was one of the major sectors of economy that has significantly improved. By the beginning of the second five years development plan, in 1975, a separate Ministry for Higher Education (MoHE) was established. MoHE's role was to enhance higher education through scholarships for Saudi students to study at recognized higher education institutions abroad, and to support the development, expansion of the present universities, and to propose establishing additional ones. It was until year 2005, where several government agencies participated in management of higher education institutions, such as colleges of education, and colleges of health sciences were administered by Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, respectively, these colleges used to enroll significant number of students.

One of the main objectives for the Saudi government was to establish new institutes of higher education throughout the country and expand existing ones. By 1999, there were eight public universities and a large number of colleges. By 2003, there were also several private institutes of higher education, with more planned to be established. The growth of private higher education in number and size was very slow. Various motivations and support via financial and governance means are introduced for this purpose. Another objective was to establish undergraduate and postgraduate programs in most disciplines at Saudi universities and colleges. As a result, Saudi students can now obtain degrees in almost any field within the country and, only if necessary, pursue specializations abroad. This by, no means, intend to downturn the Saudi-international interactions on education, as one notices later on, in the paper.

Table 1 presents the growth of universities and colleges since 1975 to 2009. It is noted the number of public universities has grown from 3 in 1970 to 24 universities by the end of 2009 i.e. about eight times. The major growth rate was during the past decades where the growth rate was 212.5%. These universities have more than 440 colleges covering more than 70 cities, towns and villages in throughout the 13 administrative provinces. Different associate and bachelor programs in most known filed of studies are awarded at these universities. One can easily note that almost all new universities focus towards

science and technology. At present 2009, almost 86% of high school graduates have found their way to university education.

<b>Year</b>	<b>1970</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>1990</b>	<b>2000</b>	<b>2009</b>
<b>No. of Universities</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>7</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>24</b>
<b>10 years Growth rate % ,</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>133.3</b>	<b>14.3</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>212.5</b>
<b>Growth rate % , compared to 1970</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>133.3</b>	<b>166.7</b>	<b>166.7</b>	<b>733.3</b>

Whereas, table 2 presents some growth rate indicators on higher education for the 8<sup>th</sup> development plan. Part of the newly enrolled student's growth was due to adding all colleges of education and colleges of medical allied sciences to universities administration rather than their earlier managements with Ministry of Education and Ministry of Health, respectively. There has been a significant interest in university education due to the market requirement and the limited number enrolled in other technical and vocational institutes. Even so, growth rates in general are too high compared to other GCC states and almost other parts of the world. The number of public universities is likely to increase but in much slower rate within the 9<sup>th</sup> development (next five year) Plan. Further, private higher education has contributed to the increase in number of colleges, about 30 colleges but it has about 2% of the students enrollment at higher education.

<b>Year</b>	<b>Enrolled Students</b>	<b>Newly Admitted</b>	<b>Public Universities</b>	<b>University colleges</b>	<b>Private Universities</b>	<b>Private colleges</b>	<b>Medical &amp; allied colleges</b>
<b>2005</b>	<b>444,800</b>	<b>137,438</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>199</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>4</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>2009</b>	<b>750924</b>	<b>222,006</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>440</b>	<b>8</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>116</b>
<b>Growth rate</b>	<b>169%</b>	<b>162%</b>	<b>300%</b>	<b>221%</b>	<b>-</b>	<b>400%</b>	<b>725%</b>

Table 3 presents the growth of students since 1970 and how female students are exceeding the number of male students. The present ratio, at 2009,

of female which exceeds 60% is a remarkable achievement for the Saudi woman during this short period.

**Table 3. Growth rates of students at public higher education institutions**

Year	1970		1980		1990		2000		2009	
	Total	FP*	Total	FP*	Total	FP*	Total	FP*	Total	FP*
No of Students	17,142	11.36%	60,655	20.88%	129,991	43.32%	404,094	55.93%	657,418	61.38%
Growth rate %	-		253.84%		114.31%		210.86%		62.69%	

- **FP: female percentage**

About the mid of 1990's the higher education institutions were not able to cope with the increasing demands on higher education. That was due increase of high school graduates willing to pursue their university education, the high quality of graduates that labor market needs, the small number of jobs available for high schools graduates and the limited expansion of non-university technical and vocational training institutes.

Existing universities have done their best to accommodate qualified students for university education through more enrollment of students and establishing additional campuses out of their main cities. These campuses have been developed to universities at later stages. Table 4 presents the campuses and branches of the earlier Saudi universities outside their main campuses that have become, later on, separate universities. This strategy of MoHE has resulted in gradual growth of campuses to universities by getting the academic and administration support of more experienced universities. The main concern of new colleges and off campus colleges was to respond to the need of growing demand on higher education and hence teaching has become their priority. Such action has exerted burden on universities that have just given attention to quality and either has started graduate studies or at the process of establishing their graduate programs. Large universities in terms of student body and multi-campus administration have negative impact on the research activities of almost all Saudi universities.

The policy of MoHE is to provide more support for older universities to achieve excellence in education and research, whereas new universities are encouraged to acquire well equipped infrastructure and prepare their teaching staff by the help of other experienced universities.

**Table 4: Campuses or branches of Saudi universities and their present status**

The Main university	MCC & YE*	Campuses and present status					
		King Saud	Riyadh 1957	Abha 1999	Qassim 2004	Jouf 2005	Kharj 2009
The present status	-	King Khalid University	University of Alqassim	University of Aljouf	University of Alkharj	University of Shagraa	University of Majmaa
King Abdulaziz	Jeddah 1960	Makka 1981	Madia 2004	Tabouak 2006	Arar 2007	Jizan 2005	-
The present status	-	Umm Al-Qurra University	Taiba University	University of Tabouk	Northern Border university	University of Jizan	-
Imam Mohammad Bin Saud	Riyadh 1957	Abha 1999	Qassim 2004	Madina 2004	-	-	-
The present status	-	King Khalid University	University of Iqassim	Taiba University	-	-	-
King Faisal	Ihsa 1975	Dammam 2009					
The present status	--	University of Dammam					
KFUPM	Dahran 1975	Hail 2005					
The present status	-	Hail University					
King Khalid	Abha 1998	Jizan 2005	Najran 2006				
The present status	-	Jizan University	Najran University				--
<b>MCC: main campus city, YE: year of establishment</b>							

In a report by the World Bank (2008), officials warned that education reform needs to take top priority in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) countries, in order for education to meet current economic development challenges and tackle high unemployment. The report stated that unemployment in the Arab world averages about 14 percent, which is higher than other areas of the world except the Sub-Saharan Africa. Palestinian territories are worst, with unemployment at 25.6 percent. In that report, globalization, the knowledge economy, demographic changes and financing are the main challenges facing education at the MENA countries. The reader is referred World Bank (2008) report for more detail of other challenges.

MoHE has realized the role of higher education exceeds the developments goals and needs to respond to various international calls for its reforms to the humane role on co-existence, cooperation and integration with the whole world. Aspects of these roles are discussed in Abouammoh (2009a) where the role higher education and the trends and reforms are explored on the

EU-GCC understanding and cooperation. Further, the role of higher education in intercultural dialogue and international understanding and co-existence are explored in Abouammoh (2009b). Whereas, in Abouammoh, A. M. (2009c) the impact of education cooperation on USA-GCC relations is shown to be great and very significance in initiating and enhancing other areas of social cultural, economic and political understanding and cooperation.

In section II, the challenges have faced Saudi higher education are exposed and corresponding actions taken to overcome them are identified. Whereas, in section III, we list major developments and reforms for higher education at university level or MoHE and review briefly intended programs to motivate development and reforms. The trends and strategies for these reforms are discussed in section IV. Finally, some concluding remarks are given in section V.

## II. Challenges and Actions

It is natural that speedy expansion might face several obstacles/ or problems and a great deal of challenges. Some universities have enrolled far much beyond their capacity to address the high demand on higher education. At one stage, in 2007, King Saud University has almost become a mega university where it has enrolled more than 120,000 students about 50% of them out of Riyadh campus. Nevertheless, the university has embarked at that year on a strategic plan to transfer from being almost teaching only university to be an excellent recognized university. It was noticed that the status of Saudi universities at the Webometrics university classification in July 2007 was very embarrassing to the higher education officials. Saudi media has criticized harshly Saudi higher education system for being invisible internationally and inefficient and needs major reforms. Such situations have changed tremendously at later classification see Table 5.

**Table 5: The ranks of first five Saudi universities at Webometrics and comparison with other Universities of Arab League States**

Year	King Saud University	King Abdulaziz University	KFUPM*	IMBU**	King Faisal University
<b>July, 2007</b>	3062 (26)+	2789 (23)	638 (1)	5715 (69)	4218 (36)
<b>July, 2008</b>	380 (1)	2106 (6)	420 (2)	2957 (16)	2545 (11)
<b>Jan., 2009</b>	292 (1)	1203 (3)	302 (2)	1788 (9)	1712 (7)
<b>July, 2009</b>	197 (1)	1072 (5)	303 (2)	636 (3)	993 (4)

+ ( ): Rank at the Webometrics with respect to other Arab universities, \*:King Fahd University for Petroleum and Minerals, \*\*: Imam Mohammad Bin Saud University. Source: <http://www.webometrics.info/index.html>

MoHE and Universities are aware of the limited impact of the Webometrics classification, but they have taken different actions to make themselves more visible and sufficiently transparent institutions. Various initiatives have been encouraged by MoHE to individual universities among which:

- All university governance, academic departments and staff have to be visible on the university website.
- Every academic staff has to have rich site with cv, list of publications, copies of research paper and complete course files.
- Increase connectivity of all parts of the campus and accelerate the technology use in management.
- Automation of the university administration and communications.
- Increase the participation of women campus management and increase the interaction by video conferences and electronic communication.
- Introduce training courses for the staff and student to use various aspects of computer and information technology.

Such actions have dual purpose first to be visible and recognized internationally and second to improve quality, support transparency and enhance efficient management. Therefore, universities are glocal i.e. globally recognized and served its local community and participated nationally.

The Times Higher Education - QS World University Rankings (THES-QS) is more academically reliable for university classification, where KFUPM is the only Saudi university included with rank 338 at 2008. Even so, none of the Saudi universities appeared in the more academically comprehensive Academic Ranking of World Universities (ARWU), which is the Jiao Tong Shanghai University, prior to November 2009. In spite of the drawback of these ranking but they have, with no doubt, some credibility which have motivate.

Many universities and countries has introduced some initiatives to include their universities into these classification or to improve the present status of their ranks, such as Japan, China, Malaysia and Australia among other countries. Kingdom of Saudi Arabia was no exception and universities either introduced their own initiative or applied for advancement programs sponsored by MoHE. Next we list main university own initiatives;

- Twining with well known universities in various parts of the world.
- Introducing committee, units, deanships and or vice –president position for quality assurance and development.
- Accommodate private funded research chairs in selected areas of research.
- Adopting mechanism for training academicians on research and teaching skills as well as on project and university management.

- Identifying learning skills on the curriculum and improving the departmental capacity of this aspect.
- Prep-year introduction to improve the quality of the university intake of high school graduates.
- Implementing new selection and appointment procedures for deans and other leaders of university academic units.
- Give more emphasize to new trends, globalization, internationalization programs.

Some universities have made numerous MoU's and cooperation agreements with international universities on research, technology transfer and exchange of students and teaching staff. More experienced university has international consultative boards, Noble laureate's attraction program, drastic reforms on research capability and management, on campus automation among other initiatives. For example King Saud University have contracted leading international company for its "**High Impact Strategic Plan**". The goals and objectives of King Saud plan is to transform the university to a world class university. The main features of the plan are:

- Reduce the student body to one third of its present size, with one third of them in graduate programs.
- Increase the ratio of highly selected international students.
- Move from Arabic to English as a teaching language in all technical, medical and science disciplines.
- Allocate sizable budget and acceleration programs to deep dive areas in research and teaching.

In addition, MoHE has, in parallel, introduced many programs to enhance the capacity of universities in teaching, research and excellence such as:

- Funding the "Long-Term Strategic Plan for University Education, where all universities and other stakeholders of higher education are involved.
- Introducing a new pay-scale for university staff with flexible compensation criteria for type of tasks, research productivity and teaching quality, (merit based compensations.)
- Specify research areas of for support to have excellence research centers at either ready or committed universities for development.
- Expanding the geographical coverage of higher education to all parts of the Kingdom through 4-years or 2-years colleges.
- Expanding the scholarship program of the government and managing King Abdullah scholarship program to renowned or known university in the world.
- Improve and support the construction of 10 new university campuses to high standard spics.

- Introducing package of support to private higher education through lands with nominal process, soft loans, grants for the top one third of their students and inclusion in some government development program on higher education.

One major challenge has faced the Saudi higher education is the incompatibility between the graduate specializations at university education and the labor market requirements. This challenge was due to the enrolling student on soft or easy expandable disciplines such as education, humanities and social sciences. Therefore, KSA has to find solution for employing thousands of Saudi university graduates; most of them are females and has more 5 million expatriate workers from all over the world. The corrective actions were to squeeze the size of enrollment for disciplines available, in abundant, at the market and restrict establishment of new colleges and expansion to medicine, medical allied sciences engineering, IT and basic sciences.

### III. Major Development and Reforms

MoHE is taking major actions and reforms, while AFAAQ project in progress ( AFAAQ : the Long Term University Strategic Plan); as quick wins proposed by studies performed by the Center for Higher Education Research and Studies (CHERS).

In fact, there are many reforms and initiatives at the university individual level that got the support of MoHE and the private sector. These reforms are briefly summarized in the following aspects:

- Twinning Programs
- Student summer mobility program
- Research Chairs program:
- Attractive Program for Excellency
- Quality Assurance Program
- University Preparation Programs (UPP)
- University Scholarship Program
- Endowment programs

Next we briefly describe each of these programs as follows

- Twining Programs:** Many public and private universities have signed agreements for twining with well-known universities in the world. Twining agreements include joint academic programs, student mobility for part of their university academic program to the partner universities, partnership on research and postgraduate studies. Partnership and

twining agreements were very helpful to accelerate quality and assurance of standard academic practices, especially at new and most of private universities.

- b. **Student summer mobility program:** Some Saudi universities has designed program to motivate students with high attainment records to spend part of their time at selected renowned universities for further training and coursework. Student mobility has participated on exchange of ideas and experience and improve the intercultural dialogue.
- c. **Research Chairs program:** Business sector have participated actively in supporting many research chairs for either three or five years period at different Saudi public universities. Research chairs have supported significantly the research activities at public universities, encouraged the participation of public sector in influencing the universities research policies and in management of universities. The program has added and external factor in evaluation of university research and knowledge productivity.
- d. **Attractive Program for Excellence:** The objective of this program is to improve the competitiveness of some academic department for excellent researcher from different parts of the world. Competitiveness can be on the research and teaching environment of the academic unit and individual motivation through salaries, allowances and more academic freedom.
- e. **Quality Assurance Program:** The National Commission for Academic Assessment Accreditation (NCAAA) has motivated these programs by issuing guidelines for quality assurance practices at academic departments. Most of Saudi universities have taken this issue with interest and vice rectors, vice deans and specialized committee for quality and development are working to compete for achieving high quality.
- f. **University Preparation Programs (UPP):** In order to prepare fresh students effectively to university life, improve their learning skills, English language and to reduce the dropout rate during their university life, universities has required preparatory programs. UPP is for one or two semester and capable students can be exempted partly or fully based on appropriate tests for this purpose.
- g. **University Scholarship Program:** Some Saudi universities have offered scholarship for some highly selected foreign students to pursue their university or graduate studies at good academic programs. The initial observation leads to the conclusion of further improvement of these programs.
- h. **Endowment programs:** For many years public universities are almost completely dependent on the government allocated yearly budget. Since

two years ago universities were able to initiate endowment funds that are financed by donations, individual endowments and university own revenues of its properties and services.

Further, MoHE has funded a set of initiative and programs that have been considered by Saudi academicians to cause major development, reforms. Most of these programs are put in competition by MoHE and every university has to show its qualification for the fund by submitting proposal that was evaluated by specialized committee.

- Parallel programs
- The National Center for Assessment on Higher Education (NCAHE)
- The National Commission for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA)
- Innovation and Excellence Development for Saudi University Staff:
- Translating Renowned References on Higher Education:
- Centre for Higher Education Statistics:
- Geographical Information System for Higher Education Project:
- Saudi higher Education and Professional Societies Development Project:
- The National Center for Electronic Education and Distance Learning;
- Private Higher Education Scholarship program.
- Student Advisory Services Project
- Research of Excellence Project at Saudi Universities
- MoHE Deputy Ministry for Scholarships

Next, we give a summary of each of these initiative and programs that transformed the scene of Saudi universities.

- a. **Parallel programs:** These are university degree program runs after working hours. Most of these programs are self-financed, i.e. students pay reduced tuition fees for their education. Some of these programs are either terminated or transferred to usual university program. The main problem of the parallel program are treated as private tutoring, with short time available for classes, unsuitable late evening classes for female students, and some students are part-time with full time learning load.
- b. **The National Center for Assessment on Higher Education (NCAHE):** The center holds various measurement and assessment tests for different purposes. In fact, the skill and the attainment tests for the high school graduate are the major task of the center. These tests are aimed to better give more robust measure for high school graduate and help in allocating them to more suitable specialization program at the university. The tests are similar to the role of SAT and GRE for the American universities. They are somewhat recent, in Saudi Arabia, and

therefore appropriate correlation for the test with the student performance and feed back to the Ministry of Education of how their graduates perform are very necessary to justify continuation and development of these tests.

- c. **The National Commission for Academic Assessment and Accreditation (NCAAA):** The NCAAA main role is to review all post-secondary qualifying programs. Detail requirements for assessment and accreditation are available on the VCAA Website. It has already published the Framework for the Saudi University Qualification. Two rounds for trial assessment and qualifying assessment have been making. The NCAAA has to accelerate its effort to give final accreditation for all institutions and programs in the Kingdom. The speedy expansion of public higher education and the emergence of private higher education put more strain on the NCAAA to perform its tasks efficiently.
- d. **Innovation and Excellence Development for Saudi University Staff:** This program is financed by MoHE for training university Professors on teaching, research and leadership management at university education. The program has two main parts one is run at almost every individual university and the other are at known centers for developing skills at New Zealand, UK, USA and Canada. The overall assessment of this program is fine but specific impact on education and research requires further investigation.
- e. **Translating Renowned References on Higher Education:** this program's objective is to select the best publication throughout the world on higher education's future trends, management, research, globalization and internationalization and to make them available for higher education Stakeholders in Arabic language.
- f. **Centre for Higher Education Statistics:** The quantitative distribution and development of various variables of higher education are needed to monitor in order to put all present or policies to transparent analysis and academic studies. It is therefore MoHE has established the center in order to have very detailed historical data of higher education and to publish various statistics indicators for the local policy makers, researchers and international agencies.
- g. **Geographical Information System for Higher Education Project:** The project is at its final stage and it provides informative maps of higher education institutions through satellites. The project provides recently updated, geographical and statistical information by using the latest available technology. The project might be viewed as luxury in some aspects but it necessary for many stakeholders.

- h. **Saudi higher Education and Professional Societies Development Project:** The Saudi academic and higher education professional societies and associations are considered independent bodies formed at higher education institutions. The management are elected by their own members and general framework of these are outlined by a special bye-law. The main objectives of the societies are to develop the profession of its activity area, publish educational material and technical refereed journals and provide consultative services. There are more than fifty societies and association with thousands of members but their recent experience and limited funds available has hindered the professional activities of most of them. MoHE has imitated programs to fund building offices and activity building for the societies. It is hoped that this project enhance the capacity of these societies to play their roles as in many part of the civilized countries.
- i. **The National Center for Electronic Education and Distance Learning;** the purpose of the centre is to provide technical and professional support to all universities and higher education colleges. It is also considered as spics initiators for practicing electronic education and distance learning programs. It is likely to be the host for expected open or virtual Saudi university. This mode of education and learning has got more interest of universities and better recognition of the role it plays by employers.
- j. **Private Higher Education Scholarship program:** In addition to the support for private higher education in terms of soft loans and low price land this program is directed to improve the quality of student's choosing private higher education. The scholarship covers all or most of the fees for the top one third of any private college or university. The scholarship is restricted to discipline mostly needed by the Saudi labor market such as medical studies, engineering and business. This program is in its second year and is being monitored by MoHE for further adjustment and d3velopment.
- k. **Student Advisory Services project:** The project intends to improve services for consultation, advisory and guidance for students. It also aims to develop staff skills and institution capacity for providing efficient services for students. This includes students with special needs and gifted students as well. It is hoped that the project participates in reducing dropout rates, failures and frequent change of disciplines and make more social support to students.
- l. **Research of Excellence Project at Saudi Universities:** MoHE has since 2008 budget has made arrangement with Ministry of Finance to hold competitions between Saudi universities for funding project in priority areas for research at the Kingdom. The outcome of this program is the

initiation of 13 centers of research excellence at six universities, See Table 5. These research centers are evaluated on yearly basis through their activities, research publication and publications on highly academic refereed journals.

- m. **MoHE Deputy Ministry for Scholarships:** The growth rate in the number of students studying abroad required major unit of MoHE that is the Deputy Ministry for Scholarships. Female students form about 21% of the Saudi students studying abroad, see Table 6. A significant proportion of Saudi students currently study abroad, with the US, UK and Canada accounting for about half of overseas enrolments, but recent developments could signal a growing diversification of study abroad destinations.

**Table 5: Centers of Excellence on Research at Saudi Universities**

KSU	KAU	KFUPM	KFU	UQU	IMbS
<i>Mathematics and Science Education</i>	<i>Medical Genome Research</i>	<i>Research Oil Refinery and Chemicals</i>	<i>Research Palm Trees and Dates</i>	<i>Research Hajj and Omra (visiting the Two Holly Mosques)</i>	<i>Philology of Contemporary predicament Research</i>
<i>Engineering Material Research</i>	<i>Osteoporosis Research</i>	<i>Research in erosion</i>			
<i>Biotechnology Research</i>	<i>Desalination Research</i>	<i>Renewable Energy Research</i>			
	<i>Environmental Research</i>				

Source: MoHE Website Centers of Research Excellence

Saudi students have been studying abroad with state encouragement for over a decade. The Saudi MoHE has actively built relationships with overseas universities, particularly, those in the US, in recent years and provides scholarships to about half of Saudi overseas students to cover the costs of their foreign degree programs.

**Table 6: Distribution of KASP students with region and gender**

Region	Total	FP+	Percent
EU Countries	15233	22.02%	26.41%
GCC States	2924	62.93%	5.07%
Other AL** countries	10922	16.00%	18.93%
Other countries	23484	21.80%	40.71%
Total	57682	20.91%	100%
+: <i>female percent</i> , **: <i>Arab League</i>			

#### IV. Trends and Strategies

Trends and strategies adopted by MoHE and all Saudi universities are apparent in the policies, programs and future or strategic plans. Businesses operating in Saudi Arabia have been required to employ foreign nationals to fill their skills gaps, particularly in areas such as science and technology. The Saudi government has set as one of its key goals the nationalization of its work force and the development of higher education and specialist education to fill existing key skills shortages and curb dependency on foreign labor. It is looking over time to replace over five million persons employed expatriates (an estimated 21% of the total Saudi population are foreigners) with skilled Saudi nationals. In the meanwhile arrangement has been made to adopt excellence by attracting highly trained experts, scholars and very highly qualified academicians. It is also realized that large size university can improve participation and teaching quality but research and innovation can be done only on medium or small size institutions.

It is important to mention that, the aim of this paper is not to review the recommendations of different efforts made by the MoHE such as the (AFFAQ: Future plan for the university education in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia), or the “highly impact strategic plan for King Saudi university” or other corresponding Saudi university plans and reforms programs. Reasons for reforms were very similar with differences on experience, emphasize of universities and local surroundings. It is noted that challenges, problems and goals of most of higher education institutions are similar but solutions have to consider resources and environment which differ from one country to other.

The above are among many reasons for the present trends and strategies, which are briefly presented in the following:

- Development and reforms have to be through planning for the entire higher education system or at the level of individual institutes.
- Quality is the main priority for the reforms and programs and initiatives are tailored to better serve this priority.
- Quantitative and qualitative analysis with informative and precise indicators are the means for measuring the effectiveness of reforms and development.
- Competition between institution, motivation and intended programs are the means for development.
- Scoring advanced position in World Class University Ranking system is considered as an indicator that can be rewarded and accelerated program for this trend is obtainable on competition.
- Excellent universities and research centers are specialized and comprehensive Saudi universities have to integrate for their areas of excellence.
- Government support must continue but other measure is used for efficient management and self-funding.
- Accreditation through NCAAA or other well-recognized international agency is necessary for every academic program or institution.

## **V. Concluding Remarks**

Higher education system in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is at the peak of its major development, expansion and reforms and is going through very many changes and detours. It is, therefore, unfair to claim that the present paper has contained all present changes in the system. Even so, drastic quantitative changes seem to be over but very many qualitative are expected to be soon.

Interaction of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia with many parts of the world is increasing, intercultural and inter-religions dialogue is lead by the Kingdom, the call to lower the economy dependence on oil is becoming louder. Also, the restructuring of development is giving more spacious distribution to investment and rural areas and new economic cities. The market is international rather than purely Saudi. Higher education has to align with the work force requirement within the national context that have many international characteristics.

These remarks lead us to believe that higher education in the Kingdom is still in the move. It is changing to be nationally effective and internationally recognized. Challenges to Saudi higher education might change their titles but surely will be more difficult to handle because of their international dimension.

Even so more interaction with the international community will sharpen the tools and enhance the local experience in the reform and facing rising challenges. Macro-initiatives and programs have to be associated with internationally known performance indicators. Mission diversity of university education has to be spelled out and performance based or program based budgeting will enhance efficiency and better resource utilization. The Kingdom is a part of international community and it is one of the key players in international politics, thus its higher education can interact more through exchange of experience, education mobility and joint activities.

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