

## PERCEPTIONS OF SAUDI FACULTY TOWARDS RECENT EDUCATIONAL DEVELOPMENTS

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### Abstract:

*This paper looks at the attitudes of a wide range of Saudi educators and college professors towards the key developments that the field of education has witnessed recently in Saudi Arabia. All Saudi educators surveyed here indicated that the educational process has gained some considerable achievements in this country such as the establishment of King Abdullah University, the first research-oriented higher education institution in the region. On the other hand, many Saudi college professors expressed several points of criticism towards the structure and functionality of the ministry of education and the ministry of higher education. The most revealed opinion focused on the need to reengineer the educational process to make it more quality-oriented instead of quantity-oriented as is the case presently.*

### المخلص

يناقش هذا البحث مواقف شريحة عريضة من التربويين و أعضاء هيئة التدريس السعوديين حيال التطورات المهمة التي شهدتها المجال التربوي مؤخرًا وذلك من خلال ما نشر من مقالات صحفية. أظهرت الدراسة إن جميع الآراء اتفقت على الترحيب بإنشاء جامعه الملك عبد الله للعلوم والتقنية كأول جامعه بحثية في المنطقة كما عبر عدد من التربويين عن استيائهم من أداء وهيكلية وزاره التعليم العالي. وأما أغلب الآراء فقد أجمعت على أهمية القيام بعملية إعادة هيكلة شاملة للعملية التربوية لغرض جعلها تركز على النوع بدلاً من تركيزها الحالي على الكم .

### INTRODUCTION

Several Saudi academics expressed the views that education should respond positively to the societal changes. One of the big problems that education, and higher education in particular, in Saudi Arabia faces is its disassociation from the needs of the society. For example, a few years ago, there was a need for many university graduates in certain fields. Then, things changed and graduates from those fields became too many and there were hardly enough jobs to employ them. Saudi universities ignored the situation and continued producing more graduates in

those fields leading to the unemployment crisis (Sahhab, 2007). Because the future of any nation is based on the power and productivity of its educational system, any progress desired is the outcome of a well-organized process of preparing good human resources that are capable of carrying out the plans for positive change and improvement. In Saudi Arabia, as in many less-developed countries, educational administration has major shortcomings such as the absence of a well defined philosophy of education, the insistence of educational leadership on sticking to archaic procedures and traditional

concepts and considering them necessary for their careers (Almuhaimeed, 2007).

Pointing to the shortcomings of the national educational system was a key area that educators and college professors discussed in their commentaries. For example, the problems of the higher education system were the topic of many articles published in daily newspapers. Albareedi (2006) argued that higher education in Saudi Arabia suffers, among others, the following problems:

1. Saudi universities cannot admit all high school graduates. For example, King Abdulaziz university and King Saud university admitted only students with GPA of 92% or above that year. The ministry of higher education should develop a strategy that provides solutions to this problem.
2. The Saudi government has sent thousands of students to study abroad in the last forty years without benefiting from their research. Is it possible that none of them investigated the current educational problems in a doctoral dissertation? It seems that the ministry of higher education has not done enough to collect, compile, and archive students' dissertations in order to make them available as references for any future development projects.
3. The existing Saudi universities cannot absorb all high school graduates who want to join them to pursue their education.

For example, the population of Riyadh is about four million. Yet, there are only two government-run universities, one private university, and a number of small colleges. There should be more universities in that metropolitan area to absorb the increasing numbers of high school graduates.

4. Higher education is still too far from meeting the needs of the national labor market. The ministry of higher education should be sensitive to the labor market needs and should try to connect all university programs to satisfy those needs by producing well-qualified university graduates who can take the positions currently taken by expatriates.
5. Programs evaluation has not received enough attention in the Saudi universities. There are dozens of programs in different Saudi universities that have not been evaluated or even considered for revision. The ministry of higher education should make program evaluation a mandatory procedure for those programs to continue

Furthermore, universities all over the world are considered the main institutions for human resource development. Yet, universities in Saudi Arabia have not done enough to invest all the available prospects to develop the national human resources. Therefore, a major process of restructuring education has become necessary in this country. The first step in such a reform

process must be improving the academic life in Saudi universities especially the status of college professors who have many needs that should not be ignored. Currently, there is a widespread feeling of frustration among college professors due to many factors (Alharfi, 2006):

- Their salaries are not adequate;
- Their teaching loads are high;
- They cannot attend many conferences;
- They have no grants at their disposal for doing research and professional development;
- Lack of equal opportunities in holding positions as department chairpersons and college deans are not elected.

Many Saudi educators think education reform is a must in order to expedite the national development pace. If we look around, there are several countries in the region that are considered poor but have far better educational systems, have produced quality graduates, and their universities have been ranked higher than Saudi universities (Alqurashi, 2007). Curricular restructuring is the foundation for any education reform. In particular, there is a need to restructure the curricula in high schools because their graduates in recent years seemed semi-illiterate because of the type of curricula they study. For example, religion-oriented and Arabic-oriented lessons in high school should be excluded from the scientific section because they do not contribute much to the

knowledge that students are expected to achieve. In response, the focus should be more on English, math, and science in order to produce high school graduates capable of studying medicine, engineering, and all areas of science. (Abu Madian, 2007).

Even though Saudi academics discussed various educational issues in their commentaries published in newspapers, there were four issues that stood out. They are: (1) the results of Webometrics ranking of world universities; (2) the establishment of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology; (3) the declaration of King Abdullah Project for Developing General Education; (4) and the new set of bylaws ordering a number of allowances and bonuses for college professors in Saudi universities. This paper presents the perceptions of Saudi academics towards those developments, their criticism ideas, and suggestions to improve the entire educational process in Saudi Arabia.

### **University Ranking**

The poor rankings that Saudi Universities displayed in 2006 according to Webometrics rankings of world universities represented a significant issue that Saudi educators and college professors discussed in their commentaries. Some of the opinions expressed about this issue suspected the validity of the ranking results while some other opinions focused on the multiple shortcomings that led to the poor ranking. Kashgari (2006) thought that the

problem of university ranking is closely connected to some other significant problems. It might be true that Webometrics rankings of world universities are not one hundred percent fair and accurate, yet the situation of the Saudi universities is alarming. Instead of denying, she suggested that Saudi universities should understand and analyze the ranking standards that are approved internationally in order to make a plan to respond to those standards and improve accordingly.

Some educators argued that the low ranking of Saudi universities is an echo to the poor university situation derived from a negative view of higher education where universities have been separated from real academic life and turned into service establishments. Universities in this country have been treated just like other government establishments that have nothing to do with education. One of the serious problems of higher education in Saudi Arabia is that it has never tried to meet the requirements of quality education. Currently, university products have been among the least important concerns of the society because the society has been preoccupied about how to avail enough seats in colleges for high school graduates and how to employ them once they get their college degrees. Consequently, Saudi universities failed to develop a standardized system that governs teaching, research, promotion, and faculty employment in order

to improve the quality of their products and contributions (Altwerky, 2007).

According to Dahlan (2006), there are three major causes why Saudi universities have not been ranked high. Firstly, Saudi universities have not taken the ranking standards into consideration. For example, teacher-student ratio is a key ranking standard. In theoretical majors the ratio is 20 students to each professor while in scientific majors the ratio is 8 students to each professor. The situation is even tighter in medical majors where the ratio is only 5 students to each professor. However, Saudi universities did not consider teacher-student ratio along with other international ranking standards.

For social reasons, the demand to provide admission to a college for each high school graduate has been enormous which made it almost impossible for Saudi universities to satisfy the international school ranking. However, this increasing demand to admit more students to universities should have been matched with a government decision to support universities with more teaching positions in order to avoid the current discrepancy in the teacher-student ratio.

Insufficient financial support represents the second major cause for the low ranking of the Saudi universities. In order to be able to provide quality academic services, any university needs considerable funds. The little funds allocated for universities made it very

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hard to recruit new professors, lecturers, and teaching assistants. Consequently, the number of students in classes increased dramatically which marked unbalanced teacher-students ratio. In addition, some developed countries allocate 3% of their national GPA to support scientific research. The case in Saudi Arabia is quite different. All funds allocated for scientific research do not exceed 0.02% of the national GPA.

The third reason for poor ranking of the Saudi universities is administrative bureaucracy. Universities in Saudi Arabia are centrally controlled. All universities in Saudi Arabia are part of the Ministry of Higher Education and have to abide by a centrally pre-determined set of regulations which is a significant factor that prevents Saudi universities from establishing their self-regulating identities. For example, universities cannot initiate positions according to their specific needs. It is the Ministry of Higher Education that provides universities with positions and in all the cases the positions allocated by the Ministry of Higher Education are not enough to meet the ever increasing rate of professor shortages felt by individual universities.

Webometrics ranking of world universities of 2008 came with some unexpected results with respect to the ranking of Saudi universities. For example, King Saud University came in the 380<sup>th</sup> position making it the highest ranked university in the Arab

world while King Fahad University came in the 420<sup>th</sup> position making it the second highest ranked university in the Arab world. Such positive results, according to some Saudi educators, came to prove that Saudi universities are good higher education institutions (Alorabi, 2008). Other Saudi universities that were ranked low in 2006 ranking remained in low positions in 2008. Many educators attributed such low ranking to little attention given to academic research. For example, college professors from Umm Al-Qura University did not have any research grants from King Abdulaziz City for Science and Technology, which is the largest research grant-giving institution in the country. Likewise college professors from King Faisal university got only three grants throughout the last academic year (Alkhazem, 2008).

In response to the relatively better positions some Saudi universities achieved in 2008 some college professors asserted that all higher education institutions in this country should make more efforts to be research-oriented schools in order to create the ideal atmosphere to conduct wide range research projects. One of the most significant factors that led King Saud University to achieve an advanced rank this year than last year was the increasing attention given to academic research. King Saud University connected its research centers with well-known research centers around the globe. This step has been considered a key step that made King

Saud University the highest ranked school in the Arab world (Khaznadar, 2008).

The advanced ranking position that King Saud University achieved this year was considered a direct result of the efforts of the university's new president who supports the activities of the university research center. Those activities included several partnership programs with reputable international research centers and the hosting of prominent scholars some of whom are Noble Prize winners. Other universities are now required to do the same in order to achieve better ranks in the future. The first step in this regard is to understand the significance of the different world university rankings and ask critical questions such as (Alharthi, 2008):

- What do university rankings represent to us?
- What are the sources of input for those rankings?
- What are the rankings standards?
- How were some Saudi universities ranked this year higher than last year?
- How could we achieve better rankings?

Alharthi calls upon the Ministry of Higher Education in Saudi Arabia to offer all universities in this country more support to improve their programs to match the standards of the international university rankings. In particular, he calls for the establishment of a center for measuring university performance. The proposed responsibilities of the center would be:

- Setting up rules and standards to measure the performance of both state and private universities in this country.
- Issuing periodic reports about the activities of each higher education institution.
- Helping schools to diagnose both shortcomings and merits to be the basis of any development plans.

#### **King Abdullah University of Science and Technology**

King Abdullah University of Science and Technology (KAUST) is an international graduate-level institution dedicated to promoting academic research and inspiring a new age of scientific achievement in the Kingdom, the region, and around the globe. King Abdullah attended the occasion of KAUST groundbreaking inauguration ceremony held on October 21, 2006 and declared that KAUST will "be one of the best internationally-distinguished centers of scientific research and invention," and also it "will have faculties staffed by scientists of the highest intellectual caliber drawn from different parts of the world" (Sawahel, 2006).

The KAUST global research and education network supports diverse talents both on its campus and at other premier universities and research institutions, through collaborative research agreements, grants, and scholarship programs. Aspirants from across the globe will be selected strictly on the basis of merit. The university will initially offer full scholarships

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for at least its first 10 years in order to attract students, (Choi, 2008). In addition, KAUST will have research centers and research institutes. The first-four planned research institutes will be:

1. Resources, Energy and Environment,
2. Biosciences and Bioengineering,
3. Materials Science and Engineering, and
4. Applied Mathematics and Computational Science.

Saudi ARAMCO, the state-owned world's largest oil company, has been commissioned to design and build the university's campus (Cambanis, 2007). The campus site is in a coastal location near Thuwal, a small town 80 kilometers north of Jeddah. The total area is more than 36 million square meters, including a coral-reef ecosystem that will be preserved by the University as a marine sanctuary, and will be a focus of research. It is expected to be completed by September 2009. A development team from Saudi ARAMCO was assigned to run King Abdullah University of Science and Technology during its early stages. Nadhmi Al-Nasr, an executive in Saudi ARAMCO who held different positions including Vice President of Engineering, was named the interim chairman of KAUST. As of January 13, 2008, Professor Shih Choon Fong has been named the Founding President of KAUST. Professor Shih Choon Fong served as the president of National University of Singapore and is expected to assume his duties on December 1, 2008.

According to the University's website, King Abdullah University will start in September 2009 with 250/350 students pursuing Masters and Ph.D degrees. At maturity, the total KAUST community will number approximately 20,000 people. KAUST will have interdisciplinary centers instead of departments that will focus on regional interests such as water and energy. As a potentially revolutionary school KAUST will face the challenge of attracting quality faculty and students. For this reason KAUST will spend \$100 million a year for ten years creating joint labs with top research groups to create a good atmosphere to attract scientists to participate in research programs. Likewise, the KAUST Discovery Scholarship is the general scholarship program that is designed to ensure that any highly talented student who is qualified and eligible to enroll in KAUST will receive full financial support while at the university. Those who receive a Discovery Scholarship will receive full tuition support, a living stipend, and summer and career enrichment programs.

Saudi educators celebrated the inauguration of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology. They saw glimpses of hope in establishing a good example for other Saudi higher education institutions. In particular, many Saudi academics wrote praising the procedural steps that King Abdullah University has taken in order to avoid the bureaucratic problems that

other Saudi universities have. Those procedural steps include (Althunian, 2007):

- Financial independence: it has been recognized that connecting the budget of the newly established university with the Ministry of Finance would complicate things, lead to the same problems that exist in other Saudi universities, and prevent it from achieving its basic goals. The expenses of the newly-established school will be covered by a multi-billion donation from King Abdullah which will be one of the world's top ten university endowments.
- Independence in the recruiting policy: King Abdullah University will be able to employ foreign faculty as well as admit foreign students. KAUST is expected to have only 600 Saudi faculty members and 2000 Saudi students. In other words, it will not be bound to follow the Saudization policy which emerged as a need to replace expatriates with Saudi citizens who are qualified and can do the same level of work. Even though the Saudization policy reflects a national need to confront the increasing unemployment rate, it has been abused in most cases.
- Independent decision making: King Abdullah University will not be a state-run school like other Saudi universities which makes it free from any administrative restrictions that apply to other Saudi universities. Instead, KAUST will be managed by independent board of trustees

whose job is to take charge of the general policy of the university without reporting to the Ministry of High Education.

These measures that King Abdullah University has taken in order to ensure its independence have been praised by many Saudi educators who considered freeing universities from such financial and administrative restrictions a basic step in any education reform process (Altwerky, 2007). Because of the independent character of KAUST local students will have the opportunity to study side by side with their counterparts from various parts of the globe. Such a social and academic breakthrough is expected to be a strong contributing factor that enables Saudi students to share knowledge with other students, make new discoveries, and achieve advanced scientific research. Consequently, these academic and scientific transformations are hoped to take the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to new horizons of civilization and modernization and help the country to pick up the pace to catch up with the advanced world which is crucial to transform this promising vision into thriving reality (Safar, 2007).

#### **King Abdullah Project for Developing General Education**

King Abdullah Project for Developing General Education is a SR9 billion project which was approved by the Council of Ministers in February 2007 to help take education in Saudi Arabia to new horizons to

cope with economic transformations around the world. The Project is to be carried out in six years. The project the experiences of 12 countries such as France, US, UK, Ireland, Austria, New Zealand, South Korea, Canada, China, Japan, Malaysia and Singapore were considered for the project. It consists of four main programs:

1. Development of the educational curricula.
2. Re-training and upgrading teacher qualifications.
3. Improvement of the educational environment
4. Development of non-curricula activities.

The project details were discussed by a high-level coordination committee that included the Minister of Education and the Minister of Higher Education along with some other top officials. The project proposal approved by the committee introduced a strategic plan initiated a comprehensive vision of the reform process, and highlighted the following items (Almadeena Feb 21, 2007 16009):

- Developing awareness among the youth to protect them from deviant ideological trends.
- Enhancing teacher preparation and reforming teacher training colleges. This is the responsibility of the Ministry of Higher Education. The Ministry of Education should coordinate with the Ministry of Higher Education in laying out the plans

and programs for taking care of this aspect.

- Providing distinctive curricula and a healthy school environment for boys and girls.
- Setting up the appropriate criteria to measure the efficiency of the education process.
- Planning for the expansion of kindergartens.
- Enhancing the evaluation of scientific and mathematical skills.
- The establishment of an independent commission for education improvement not affiliated with the Ministry of Education. This comes within the powers of the Ministerial Committee for Administrative Organization.

Furthermore, King Abdullah Project for Developing Public Education will set new methods and roles for students, teachers, and administrators. Old teaching methods used to focus on the traditional concept of teaching in which a student's role was to listen and memorize. The new project aims to help students develop their reasoning skills in order to be able to analyze and think to come up with solutions. School principals are given courses on the art of administration and leadership in order to create more positive school environment and to enable them to deal with their students from different angles to help them succeed at all levels.

The project features multiple programs that aim at training teachers to use the latest teaching technologies to replace the old teaching methods with the use of Internet and computer applications. A teacher's role will be to just monitor the class and distribute roles among learners. Teachers would now provide students with information sources either in libraries or online to make students carry out their own research. The role of teacher is facilitator of knowledge instead of its provider. New teachers will have to sit for professional proficiency exams. Those who pass proficiency exams can continue while others who fail will be given courses to re-qualify them. The aim of such professional proficiency exams is to make sure that he or she is suitable for the profession of teaching as the basis of building future generations.

In response to this ambitious reform project, some Saudi faculty stressed the point that dynamic education should produce interactive students, not emotional. To achieve this goal the whole educational system should be interactive with the society and responsive to its needs. Some writers questioned the basic motives of this huge project and its suitability to the educational scene in Saudi Arabia. Baleelah (2007) questions the connection between this project and another major project that the ministry of education launched not long time ago; namely curricular reform project. He states: "there are two possible scenarios for that relationship.

The first is that the curricular reform project has not given satisfactory results while the second possibility is that content and objectives of the two projects are the same and it is just a matter of changing the name which leads us to ask: if this is the case why should the Ministry of Education spend nine billion riyals on an old project that already has its budget?"

Almosa (2007) expressed a similar concern. He questioned the real motives behind King Abdullah's Project. Saudi Arabia has spent more than those nine billion riyals on education for more than 40 years without getting the expected benefits. What is the difference between the ideas of this project and hundreds of ideas of PhD holders who wrote their dissertations on various aspects of education-related problems? Almosa thinks there is no need to waste nine billion riyals on a project whose basic principles do not have the potential to achieve desired results. Instead, the Ministry of Education needs to investigate the basic defects that hold down any ideas of development; most students are not motivated to learn, most teachers are not qualified to teach, and most school buildings are not well-equipped. There is an increasing need to take decisive actions and find appropriate solutions to these problems. Any ideas of development without resolving those defects will cost the country a lot of money for no return.

Derbas (2007) observed that what has been announced about King Abdullah Project is not enough in the sense that there are many important questions that remain unanswered. For example, on what basis were those aspects of development selected? What kind of research has been done to support the selection of those aspects? What are the procedural steps to improve teacher preparation, curriculum, and school environment? Is the administrative staff included in the improvement efforts? Albadr (2007) expected that there would be some objection to King Abdullah Project based on the fact that many people have negative attitudes towards any innovation. In other words, they are the enemies of that which they do not know. He concluded that any hesitation in carrying out the promising aspects of King Abdullah Project would be a huge drawback in the progress of the education process.

Derbas (2007) called for emphasizing the importance of extra curricular activities and considering them one of the key aspects for the project of education reform an encouraging step. The educational process in Saudi Arabia has witnessed some prominent mistakes due to the negligence of the significance of this aspect. For example, there was a radical opinion that extra curricular activities are not significant for the students' achievement. Consequently, the few extra curricular activities practiced have been

canceled in many schools and teachers who supervised those activities were assigned to teach regular courses. Such an odd situation led to negative types of student behavior such as the increasing cases of violence in schools. One of the main causes for this phenomenon is the absence of well-organized extra curricular activities that positively invest students' time and energy, enhance the learning process, and promote the constructive elements of the moral system in the society that the students belong to.

Other Saudi faculty emphasized the importance of certain issues that should be included within King Abdullah Project to reform education. For example, Albargi (2007) highlighted the significance of encouraging a reading culture within our schools and providing computers with Internet connection to every classroom. He asserted that "Reading and technology should be looked at as a panacea, not a money drain as the old think tank of the 1970s in the Ministry of Education still believes. To create a positive impact on our students' wide knowledge, information, critical thinking, writing and communication skills, they need to develop good taste for intellectual reading and interactive technology. Interacting electronically is here to stay and true literacy will definitely accompany it."

#### **New Faculty Bylaws**

A new set of bylaws ordering a number of allowances and bonuses for college professors in Saudi universities was approved by the Council of Ministers on Monday September 1<sup>st</sup>, 2008. they include: (1) any faculty who teaches a full load per semester is eligible for a teaching allowance at the rate of 25 percent of the basic pay every month; (2) rarity of specialization allowance - to be paid monthly at the rate of 20 to 40 percent of the basic pay every month; (3) a special allowance to the Saudi faculty at new universities as an incentive; (4) the members of the new college council would get a meeting allowance of SR400 per meeting provided such an allowance does not exceed SR10, 000 per member per annum; (4) department council members would be paid at the rate of SR300 per meeting provided such an allowance does not exceed SR9, 000 per member per annum; (5) special allowances will also be distributed to those who are distinguished for their excellence, award winners at local, regional and international levels, and those occupying leading positions; (6) Ex gratia payments to those who have served 20 years or more as a professor or a lecturer at the rate of one month's salary for every year's service. Another SR5 billion has been allocated to the Higher Education Ministry for speeding up the construction of housing units for faculty members (Arabnews, 2008).

The decision to increase gratuities and allowances of members of the academic staff

in Saudi universities has been praised by the Minister of Higher Education and other top officials and described as an important step for developing the educational system in the Kingdom (Saudi Gazette, 2008). Some educators thought that the new bylaws created a competitive environment in which faculty would make more effort to be distinguished (Almosa, 2008). Other educators believed that the newly-approved decision will result in positive consequences because the increase in gratuities and allowances of Saudi college professors will enable them to (Khairi, 2008):

1. elevate their proficiency;
2. boost their academic research;
3. enhance their creative abilities;
4. participate in development efforts in their schools;
5. get involved in competition with their counterparts for distinction.

In spite of this praise many college professors expressed unwelcoming reactions against the new bylaws of increasing the gratuities and allowances of Saudi college professors. The new regulations do not satisfy the hopes and expectations of Saudi college professors. The salaries of workers in other fields have been raised without any stipulations like the ones imposed on college professors. The newly-approved allowances and bonuses are too far from providing college professors with economic, social stability and psychological tranquility in order to have peace of mind that

enables them to do well in teaching and conducting research. The new raises are surrounded with high walls of conditions and restrictions which make those raises hard to achieve if not impossible (Alzahhar, 2008). In reality, the new allowances will not add real monetary benefits to the income of most faculty because of the unconstructive stipulations imposed on them. Moreover, even if some faculty gets one or two of those allowances, they will not count for their pension when they retire. In fact, the new set of bylaws are detrimental since they might cause some college professors to lose certain privileges like the allowance of computer-based teaching which is given to most faculty without any stipulations (Oraif, 2008).

One of the points of significance is about the mechanism of improving work-related conditions of Saudi faculty who waited a long time for this decision. The new bylaws represented a huge disappointment to them because there were no stable increases in the basic salary that every faculty can get on a monthly basis. The newly-approved allowances are not applicable to all Saudi college professors. Practically, they are applicable to only a few who can satisfy the tough stipulations of those allowances (Alhabbas, 2008). The new bylaws do not respond to the minimum requirements and expectations of Saudi faculty. Quite the opposite, the new bylaws disappointed Saudi faculty, let them down, and came contrary to

their long awaited dreams (Alqarni, 2008). Those bylaws do not correspond to the new national development plan that King Abdullah announced. The national development plan pushes for quality improvement of education and needless to say that college professors represent the backbone of higher education. Accordingly, any attention given to Saudi faculty will reflect in their career and boost up their work proficiency (Alqurashi).

Many educators criticized the unusual stipulations of the new bylaws. For example, the new bylaws stated that college professors are entitled for 25% bonus in their salaries provided they teach full load throughout the semester. Such stipulation is problematic. In many situations college professors find themselves teach loads that is less only one hour than the full load for reasons beyond their control. What is going to happen to them? How could we make a reconciliation between the 25% salary bonus and the fact that only a few college professors can teach full loads that entitle them for the allowance (Almosa, 2008)? Some other Saudi faculty thought stipulating teaching full load to give the 25% allowance is irrational and will create a messy situation because there are no clear-cut rules that guarantee fair application of this stipulation. Instead, the highly expected messy situation can be avoided easily. Why should not all college professors get the 25% teaching allowance since their basic job is 'teaching'? They deserve to have it as a

salary bonus not as a conditioned allowance (Alqarni, 2008).

According to an old set of bylaws, the assistant professor's load is 14 contact hours of teaching per week while the work load of an associate professor and a full professor is 12 and 10 contact hours of teaching respectively. The same set of bylaws state clearly that the duties of the college professor include teaching, conducting research, and community service. Many academics questioned whether or not conducting research, and community service will count for their so called 'full load' (Aljameeli, 2008). In addition, the teaching allowance is fixed and does not increase as the college professor works more years. In other words, the teaching allowance is given only at the rate of 25 percent of the basic pay every month which is very limited. Moreover, satisfying the condition of teaching full load to get the 25% teaching allowance will be impossible at many departments either because the number of faculty is high or the number of students is low (Oraif, 2008).

Another point of significance is related to the ex gratia payments to those who have served 20 years or more as a professor or a lecturer. Surprisingly, the new bylaws did not consider the years of scholarship that those professors and lecturers spent abroad to earn the degrees they were sent for. Excluding the years of scholarship from the ex gratia payments made it too tough for many

academics to satisfy the 20 year service condition. This decision represented a big question mark especially for those who spent ten years or more abroad and found themselves unrewarded for the time they spent for the sake of earning a higher degree (Alhabbas, 2008). Saudi college professors want the ex gratia payments to consider the time they spent as teaching assistants and the time they spent in scholarship working for their degrees (Alqarni, 2008).

Some other Saudi academics had concerns regarding the special allowances paid to distinguished faculty for their excellence and to award winners. The new bylaws did not specify transparent criteria to define what is meant by the term 'excellence' or how could a college professor be 'distinguished.' In addition, the new bylaws did not specify certain award-granting institutions whose awards qualify faculty for getting that special allowance (Aljameeli, 2008). Similarly, academic research has not received much attention in the new set of bylaws. Many faculty expected to be rewarded monetarily for the papers they publish in scholarly journals and for the papers they present in conferences. Instead of meeting such legitimate expectations, the new bylaws ignored the significance of research papers and proposed fiscal rewards for achieving prizes and patents on inventions that are limited in number and available only for a few specializations (Alqarni, 2008).

In addition, the rare specialization allowance is problematic and not well defined. There are no clear standards that identify what those rare specializations are. Are they rare at the level of each university individually or at the level of all Saudi universities? For this purpose there should be a committee for determining the rare majors with periodic updates. This committee should consider the decisions made by some universities concerning the issue of rare majors in those universities. Therefore, all Saudi universities should be represented in this committee to avoid taking decisions that contradict previously taken decisions by universities with respect to the same issue (Assaqaf, 2008). Moreover, the low scale rare specialization allowance does not seem enough to stop the increasing immigration of Saudi college professors from high education institutions to the private sector (Aljameeli, 2008)

The special allowance that Saudi faculty would be given as a work incentive at new universities came as if it were a penalty to their counterparts in the other universities. This decision did not take into account the efforts of old faculty who served at the today-old universities when they were new 30-40 years ago. Retired faculty and those who are close to retirement feel victimized because the new bylaws marginalized their efforts in building the then-emerging universities and turning them into well-established universities today (Alqarni, 2008).

In their commentaries published in daily newspapers, Saudi academics complained that the new set of bylaws came contrary to the recommendations of the Shura Council and contrary to the wishes of thousands of Saudi faculty. The new set of bylaws represented a huge shock to the academic circles because it did not consider what hundreds of educators wrote concerning the best methods to boost up the work atmosphere in Saudi universities. For example, many commentaries highlighted the fact that Saudi faculty get salaries and benefits that are much lower than what their counterparts in the Gulf states get. In comparison with the situation with certain Gulf states, Saudi college professors get only one third of what college professors earn in those states (Alqarni, 2008). Similarly, in a lot of cases university graduates get more well-paid jobs than their college professors like the students who graduate with certain religious majors and are appointed as judges. Why is there such discrepancy?

(Almosa, 2008).

These bylaws are obscure and ambiguous and should not be interpreted literally, but rationally (Almosa, 2008). If the bylaws are interpreted literally, most college professors will not qualify for any of those allowances. This is going to create an odd situation in which college professors will compete negatively to satisfy the requirements of those allowances at the price of the educational process (Aljameeli, 2008). Many academics

expressed concerns with respect to the expected discrepancies in interpreting the new regulations. Different universities are expected to have different interpretations of the new rules just like what happened with respect to several old regulations. The Ministry of Higher Education is required at this point to issue clear interpretations of the new bylaws in order to avoid any variations when applying the new regulations. Furthermore, the Ministry of Higher Education should listen vigilantly to the questions, concerns, and even objections of college professors who want their employer to protect their rights (Alzahhar, 2008).

Saudi faculty still have hopes that the new bylaws will be revised to include what they ask for. They still hope for a genuine unconditional salary bonus that would make their salaries closer to the salaries of their counterparts in the Gulf states and help them confront the increasing inflation rates (Alqarni, 2008). One of the proposed solutions is introducing a change in the new bylaws to make at least the 25% teaching allowance a permanent part of the monthly salary (Aljameeli). A more ambitious idea expressed in this regard asks for establishing the principle of different levels of salary bonus connected with the academic rank of the faculty. This proposal suggests raising the salary of an assistant professor by 25%, an associate professor by 30%, a full professor by 35%. Such bonuses are expected to reward those who do research and get promotion and also make other college professors compete

to achieve higher ranks through doing research (Alzahhar, 2008).

### **DISCUSSION**

The four major developments of the past few years in the field of education in Saudi Arabia were the result of Webometrics ranking of world universities, the inauguration of King Abdullah University of Science and Technology, the launch of King Abdullah Project for Developing General Education, and the new set of bylaws with respect to a number of allowances and bonuses for college professors in Saudi universities. This paper discussed the attitudes of a wide range of Saudi educators and college professors towards these developments, their views pertaining to the various related educational aspects, and their suggestions about how to get the best out of these developments.

In addition, many Saudi educators made notes on other related issues. For example, it has been suggested that one of the priorities of the national educational system should be changing many passive concepts that have become deeply-rooted in this country. Universities should play a leading role in the movement of social change and in restoring good values one of which is the significance of knowledge. In particular, there is a need for positive social changes that create a constructive movement that aims at suppressing the widespread repulsive social aspects in order to replace them with useful social aspects and behaviors. The curricula should emphasize and instill in the students

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the values of appreciating others, respecting time and commitment to hard work.

A similar change in the philosophy of education has become necessary to respond to the new needs that have emerged in this country. In particular, there is an urgent need to develop vocational training to produce qualified workforce that can replace about seven million expatriates working in the country. The increasing numbers of graduates from majors that are not needed by the labor market are piling up and raising the unemployment rate. This crisis has made it imperative to change the quantity-based education into a quality-based one in order to overcome the current problems and to improve the outcome of the educational system. One of the steps that can help in this direction is improving the measurement principles. Measurement in education should not focus on written exams where students memorize a great deal of information to pass. More attention should be paid to the development of intellectual and innovative capabilities of students.

There are positive signs of change in Saudi Arabia. For example, the number of universities has increased from only 8 to 20 in a small period of time to meet the increasing demand of admitting more high school graduates. The funds allocated for universities have increased rapidly to reach unprecedented figures. However, some educators thought that new variables in science and technology made it necessary to

increase the budget allocated for academic research. Saudi Arabia currently invests only 0.25% of its GDP on research. In contrast, developed countries like Japan, United States, and some European countries who have realized the significance of research in building their national strategic plans, allocated up to 10% of their National Gross Income to support research projects.

Some other Saudi college educators expressed strong opinions concerning several critical educational issues. For example, students in middle and high schools take *National Education* lessons as part of the curricula. It has been observed that the rationale behind those lessons is unconvincing and fruitless. The question remains: why should we teach a marginalized lesson? Working to make students patriotic should start with pushing the idea that adults set the right example for young generation. Being loyal to one's country is not developed by teaching lessons or giving lectures, but by taking genuine steps that guarantee infusing that love in everybody's heart.

Changing the mechanism of teaching is another significant concern. It has been suggested that one of the necessary developments that should be implanted to education is allowing new delivery systems that utilize the prospects of elearning and distance teaching. Utilizing electronic delivery systems is a key step in modernizing the society because it indicates that the society became ready to accept positive changes that can lead to the fulfillment of its

educational and economic needs. Employing the various aspects of digital technology in education is a critical movement that can take the national educational system in any country to new horizons of progress and work to bridge the digital divide between developed countries and less developed ones.

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