

***Dossier: Higher Education
in Saudi Arabia***



Experience of Scholarships to Foreign Universities in Saudi Arabia: A Model for Investment in Human Resources & Their Contribution to Development

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Abstract

Through programs of scholarships to study abroad, the Saudi Ministry of Higher Education seeks to train and develop Saudi human resources, with the aim of enabling them to become competitive in the labor market and scientific research, and provide key support to public and private Saudi universities. The most important specific aims of the scholarship programs are: sending qualified Saudis to study at the best universities in various countries around the world; achieving high academic and professional standards; exchanging scientific, educational and cultural expertise with various countries around the world; building qualified, professional cadres; and raising levels of professionalism among them.

This paper provides the following: a historical overview of Saudi programs of scholarships to study abroad; the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques program of scholarships to study abroad as an example of investment in human resource skills in support of overall national development; numbers of scholarships given, the target countries, the educational stages and disciplines covered, and the disciplines encouraged by the Ministry in the service of development plans; and, finally, a summary of the needs of the Saudi labor market and their relationship with scholarship programs.

I. Introduction

The (CTHMSP), with its many phases, represents an unprecedented advancement and a qualitative change to higher education in The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. So far, the program has admitted some fifty thousand male and female students. This distinct program provides the opportunity for thousands of Saudis to advance with determination and energy in the areas of scientific innovation in pursuit of the noblest sciences and highest scientific degrees. Their contact with others in the same field equips them, upon returning to their homeland, with new knowledge, modern skills, an understanding of different cultures and civilizations, the relevant know how, and the ability to communicate with others in order to contribute to the advancement of the country and on its labor force promotion.

This paper is presented with a concern for the strategic planning and careful consideration for the continuity of the success of the program and for the achievement of its goals. This is according to

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the manner in which it was originally devised, the purposes that its managers seek, and with the conviction that the wheel of science never stops and should never do so.

Objectives of the paper

This paper aims at achieving the following objectives:

1. To introduce the history of scholarships in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.
2. To shed some light on the CTHMSP as a model for investment in human resources.
3. To describe the enrollment procedure for self-funded students in the Scholarship Program.
4. To provide statistics of scholarship beneficiaries by: gender, academic level and the host country of study.
5. To present a summary of the needs of the Saudi labor market and its relation to the scholarship programs.

II. History of Scholarships in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia

Scholarships to foreign universities started in the reign of King Abdul-Aziz bin Abdul Rahman Al Saud, when a group, keen on developing education in the Kingdom submitted a written proposal to King Abdul-Aziz. Having examined it, the King summoned and notified them that a committee had been established to study their proposal. The committee was formed of Sheikh Hafiz Wahba, Assistant Deputy of His Majesty the King; Mr. Saleh Shata, Deputy Chairman of the Shura Council; Sheik Saleh Nasif, member of the Shura Council, in addition to the submitters of this proposal. This six-party committee drafted the outline of the first scholarships and submitted its report to King Abdul-Aziz who approved the scholarship project. In 1927, three years after entering the holy city of Mecca, the King ordered that the Saudi mission be sent to Egypt immediately, along with the three submitters of the proposal and six other students. The decree made provision for the expenses of the mission related to the allowances of the individuals and the supervisor of the mission. In addition, it also stated as a condition that the scholarship student must work after graduation in the field assigned to her/him by the government.

In 1929, King Abdul-Aziz sent an urgent mission to London consisting of three employees from the post office of the holy city of Mecca to receive training in the Marconi Company in Chelmsford, England, on how to establish and run wireless communication networks. In 1935, he also sent ten students from Saudi Arabia to study aviation in Italy.

In 1936, the government sent the first mission to Switzerland, consisting of two students, to study law and political science. In the same year, one scholarship student was sent to Istanbul to study engineering. After that, missions were successively sent to Europe and The United States, especially after the discovery of oil in the Kingdom.

In 1936, the King ordered the establishment of a preparatory school for the missions. This was the first high school in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to be based on the modern system that facilitates the enrollment of students in university colleges.

The first educational mission eligible to attend universities outside the Kingdom was sent to the universities of Egypt and elsewhere to study different sciences and disciplines.

The second mission, consisting of ten students, was then sent to Egypt to study Sharia sciences, the Arabic language and the Principles of Education and Pedagogy. In the same year, a regulating system for overseas scholarship affairs was created. This included the cost of living, medical treatment and supervision of conduct through a special management board established for this purpose.

The third mission was sent in 1942 to the American University of Beirut in Lebanon, Cairo

University, Alexandria University, Dar Al Uloom College, and the College of Shariah. A boarding house called The Saudi Missions House was also established in Cairo and Alexandria. This house was the first to be established outside the Kingdom to attend to the affairs of scholarship beneficiaries. It acted as the residence of students, providing them with food, drink, clothing, treatment, and taking care of their personal and academic expenses. Students were left thus with no obligation, but to focus on their studies. It may have been the first cultural attaché to be established outside the Kingdom. The fourth mission that followed in 1943 went to Egypt as well. After that, successive missions were sent to Europe and The United States (AlAnsary, 1972). In 1969, the number of scholarship beneficiaries from the Kingdom reached 192 and the number doubled in the years 1977- 78 to finally reach 8,216 male students and 880 female students².

The scholarship phase in the 1970s coincided with the beginning of the government's economic planning. This phase started with the second Five-Year Plan in 1975. During this phase, the list of host countries of study broadened to include Europe and The United States, and the scholarship program developed to allow scholarship beneficiaries to pursue graduate studies and government employees to pursue master degrees. It also allowed assistant professors and lecturers from universities to pursue master and doctorate degrees (AlTalib, 2008).

Aspiring to continue with its educational development policy, to open new horizons for scholarships and to import diverse expertise from the world to the Kingdom, the government of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia launched the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Program in 2005. The Program is considered the largest scholarship program in the history of not only the Kingdom but the whole world. It aims at sending more than 50,000 male and female scholarship beneficiaries, over a period of five years, to different countries in Europe, as well as to the United States, Australia, New Zealand, and East Asia.

III. The CTHMSP as a Model for the Investment of Human Resources

1. Program Definition

The Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques King Abdullah bin Abdul-Aziz Order Number 5387/mb, issued on 26 May 2005, launched the CTHMSP. Which consists of five phases, four of which have been completed at present (2009). The program will undergo further study after the completion of the fifth phase and its continuation will be determined in the light of the results. The CTHMSP sends Saudi students, both male and female, to continue their studies in the best universities around the world at the following levels: Bachelor, Master, Doctorate, and Medical Fellowship

2. Mission

To actively develop, prepare and qualify Saudi human resources to be world-competitive in the labor market and academic research. In addition, to be a high caliber base in Saudi universities as well as the public and private sectors.

3. Goals

- a. To sponsor competent, eligible Saudis to continue their studies in a variety of universities around the world.
- b. To work on setting high level academic and professional standards through the Scholarship Program.

² <http://www.saudiforum.us/vb/showthread.php?t=48872>

- c. To exchange scientific, educational and cultural expertise with a variety of countries around the world.
- d. To develop qualified professional people in the work environment.
- e. To promote and develop the level of professionalism of Saudi nationals.

4. Scholarship Conditions

The following are the most important conditions for those who wish to apply for a scholarship:

- a. The applicant must be a Saudi citizen.
- b. The applicant must not be occupying a government position.
- c. Studies must be regular and full-time in the host country of study and the student must be completely dedicated to her/his studies.

5. Majors, Fields of Study and Countries in which the Ministry Encourages Enrollment in order to Serve the Directions of Development Plans and the Labor Market in the Kingdom

The CTHMSP provides scholarships in many scientific majors selected according to the needs of most of the public and private sectors. These are as follows:

- Medicine, Dentistry and Medical Fellowships
- Pharmacy
- Nursing
- Medical Sciences: Radiology Sciences, Laboratory Sciences, Biomedical Technology and Physiotherapy.
- Health Sciences: Nutrition and Administration
- Engineering: Civil Engineering, Architecture, Electrical Engineering, Mechanical Engineering, Industrial Engineering, Chemical Engineering, Environmental Engineering, Communication Engineering, Automotive Engineering
- Computer: Computer Engineering, Computer Science, Networking etc.
- Basic Sciences: Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry and Biology
- Other Disciplines: Law, Accounting, E-Commerce, Finance, Insurance and Marketing

A number of countries from every continent, distinguished by their educational systems, were selected for the CTHMSP. Emphasis was placed on the following countries: the United States, Canada, a number of European countries, such as Britain, Germany, the Netherlands and Italy. Other countries included: China, India, Malaysia, Singapore, South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand for the following majors: Medicine, Dentistry and Applied Medical Sciences including Nursing, Radiology, Health Sciences, Medical Laboratory and Biomedical Technology.

IV. Number of Scholarship Students till the Time of the Preparation of this Paper

The number of scholarship students from the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia studying in different countries around the world was, until April 2009, 61,969 male and female students. Of these, 45,734 students are funded by the Ministry of Higher Education through the CTHMSP, 6,783 students are funded by government sectors and universities, and 9,452 are self-funded students³. The following tables and figures show the number of scholarship beneficiaries of the Ministry of

³ Ministry Deputy for planning and information affairs, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, 2009.

Higher Education through the CTHMSP (keeping in mind that these numbers are changing since the scholarship program is still ongoing).

Table 1: Number of scholarship students funded by the Ministry, other government sectors and self-funded students

| Student Category | Male | Female | Total | Percentage |
|----------------------|--------|--------|--------|------------|
| Scholarship student | 25,893 | 12,813 | 38,706 | 71 % |
| Scholarship employee | 3,780 | 2,093 | 5,873 | 11 % |
| Self-funded student | 7,958 | 1,542 | 9,500 | 18 % |
| Total | 37,631 | 16,448 | 54,079 | 100 % |

Figure 1: Percentage of scholarship students funded by the Ministry, other government sectors and self-funded students

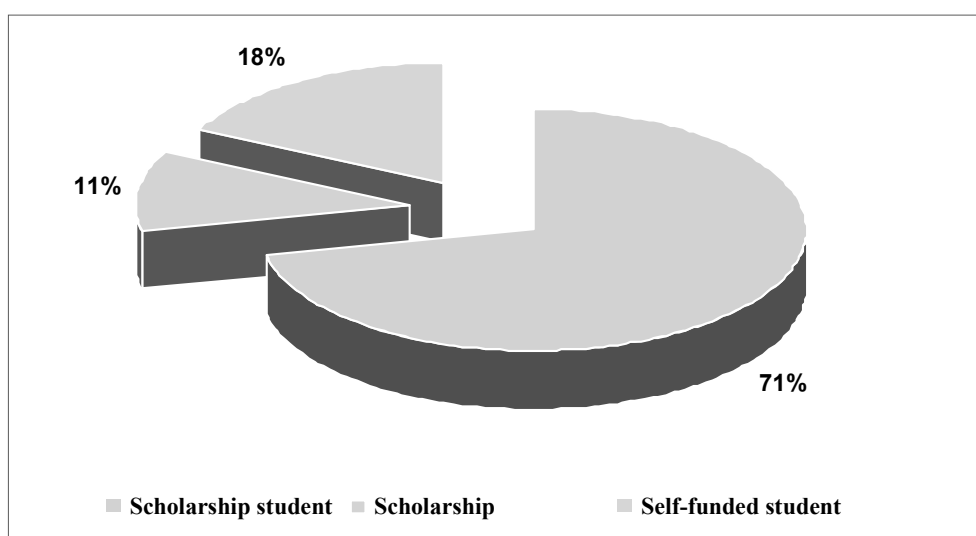


Table 2: Number of scholarship students funded by the Ministry according to gender

| Gender | Number | Percentage |
|--------|--------|------------|
| Male | 25,893 | 67 % |
| Female | 12,813 | 33 % |
| Total | 38,706 | 100 % |

Figure 2: Number of scholarship students funded by the Ministry according to gender

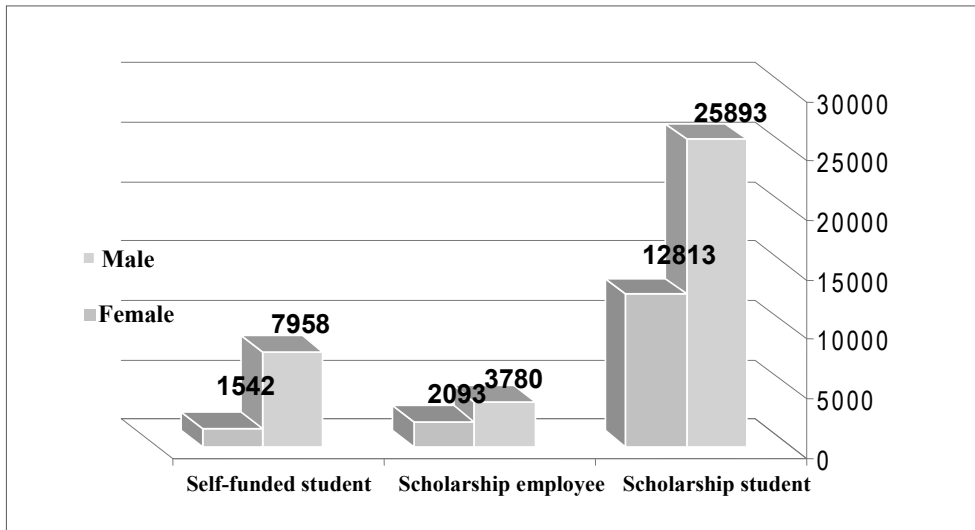


Table 3: Number of scholarship students funded by the Ministry according to level of study.

| Level | Number | Percentage |
|------------|--------|------------|
| Bachelor's | 16,275 | 42 % |
| Master's | 4,851 | 13 % |
| Doctorate | 799 | 2 % |
| Fellowship | 3,195 | 8 % |
| Other | 13,586 | 35 % |
| Total | 38,706 | 100 % |

Table 4: Number of scholarship students funded by the Ministry according to host country of study

| Country | Number | Percentage |
|-------------------|--------|------------|
| The United States | 12,199 | 31.5 % |
| Britain | 7,029 | 18 % |
| Australia | 4,818 | 12.5 % |
| Canada | 3,975 | 10.5 % |
| Jordan | 2,296 | 6 % |
| Egypt | 1,589 | 4 % |
| New Zealand | 1,626 | 4.5 % |
| Malaysia | 796 | 2 % |
| The Emirates | 465 | 1 % |
| Other | 3,913 | 10 % |
| Total | 38,706 | 100 |

V. A Summary of the Needs of the Saudi Labor Market from the Labor Force and its Relation to the Scholarship Program

The population growth rate in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is considered high compared to other population growth rates around the world. According to the data from the Ministry of Planning 2009, the population of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia reached 23 million in 2007 with a growth rate of 2.3 %, of which 73 % are Saudis (BinOubeid, 2000).

With this relative increase in the population growth rate in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, the population census data for the year 2003 reveals that the Saudi population is concentrated in the young age group, since approximately 67 % are under the age of 30. The increase in the population growth rate has led to an increase in the number of incoming job seekers into the labor market. This has doubled the burden on the government and private sectors to create new job opportunities and/or take the necessary measures to replace the foreign labor force with the national labor force (Directorate of General Statistics, 2003).

The data from the Ministry of Planning (2009) indicate that the size of the labor force working in the government and private sector in 2006 reached 7.8 million workers, 46% of which were Saudis. There are 1.13 million workers in the government sector, 86% of which are the Saudis. There are 6.64 million workers in the private sector, 40% of which are the Saudis. The average annual growth rate of the labor force in the private sector (according to the statistics of the Eighth Development Plan, 2005) was 2.2 % during the 1999 – 2004 periods. The available data



on the national labor force and the foreign labor force reveal an increase in the national labor force and a decrease in the foreign labor force in both government and private sectors since the middle of the last decade. This indicates the orientation of both the government and the private sector towards employing Saudi nationals' citizens entering the labor market.

It is only natural for the process of employing the national labor force and/or replacing the foreign labor force (especially that which has recently entered the labor market) with the national labor force to encounter difficulties and challenges. Some of these difficulties are related to demographic factors, others to the government's employment and economic policies, still others to the characteristics of the national and the incoming foreign labor force, and to education and training (BinOubeid, 2003).

The government and the private sector are increasingly orientated towards employing the national labor force, and this is a positive orientation. However, the successive development plans (from the Fourth Plan 1985–1990 until the Eighth Plan 2005–2010) indicate that the number of jobs required in the labor market for citizens is much less than the number of young job seekers in that working age group (BinOubeid, 2003). This calls for the need to create new jobs and job opportunities for citizens seeking employment.

The challenges concerning education and work, according to some studies, are related to the relevance of the educational system to the needs of the labor market and the failure of the training programs to redress the skill deficiencies in some citizens. In spite of the increased expenditure on education and the increase in its output during the development boom of the Kingdom for more than three decades, this quantitative development was not accompanied by a similar qualitative development to meet the needs of the labor market. Similarly, the training programs failed to meet the need for workers equipped with skills required by the labor market. As the demand of the government and private institutions increased for specialized professionals in medical, engineering and scientific domains, the Ministry of Higher Education was compelled to seriously seek the best means to qualify citizens to obtain suitable jobs, fulfill the needs of the labor market with the required professions and provide manpower in all domains. The Ministry of Higher Education adopted two approaches to confront the challenges related to the inadequate relationship between the labor market and the training and educational programs:

The first approach: Establishing many new universities and limiting their educational programs to disciplines related to the labor market.

The second approach: Supporting scholarships to foreign universities through the CTHMSP which was established in 2004, with emphasis on the domains in which the labor market is suffering an obvious deficiency, such as Medicine, Medical Sciences, Pharmacy, Dentistry, Engineering, Computer Science, Accounting, Finance, Insurance and Law.

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