Towards an Arab Higher Education Space:
International Challenges
and Societal Responsibilities
Towards an Arab Higher Education
Space: International Challenges
and Societal Responsibilities

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Proceeding of Arab Regional
Conference on Higher Education
Cairo 31 May, 1 - 2 June 2010
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This book has been printed and disseminated thanks to a grant provided by the Ford Foundation

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ISBN 978 - 92 - 3 - 104174 - 7

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# Table of Contents

**Foreword** ............................................................................................................................................... 9

**A Decade of Higher Education in the Arab States (1998 - 2009): Achievements & Challenges (Regional Report)** ......................................................................................................................... 11

**Cairo Declaration on Higher Education in the Arab States** ................................................................. 59

### Educational Opportunity and Students' Mobility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Educational Opportunity and Students' Mobility</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admission Policies and Procedures in Arab Universities</td>
<td>Raïfa Hammoud 69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On Building an Academic Space for the Arab Region The Possible, the Probable and the Hoped For</td>
<td>Abdel W. Ben Hafaiedh 93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Contribution of Private Universities in Higher Education Equity in Kuwait</td>
<td>Imad M. Al-Atiqi, Asad A. Al-Rashed, Farida M. Ali 111</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Where are all the Men? Gender, Participation and Higher Education in the United Arab Emirates</td>
<td>Fatma Abdulla &amp; Natasha Ridge 125</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Undergraduate Admissions, Equity of Access and Quality in Higher Education: An International Comparative Perspective</td>
<td>Kamal Abouchedid 137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Access, Equity and Competitiveness: The Case of Higher Education in Egypt</td>
<td>Mona El Baradei 159</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identifying Potential Stressors of University Students and Ways to Enhance University Climate: The case of the University of Balamand</td>
<td>Nayla N. El Koussa, Laurie L. Williamson, Elie Menessa 185</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Quality of Education: Curricula

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality of Education: Curricula</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementing the LMD System: Experience of the Philosophy Department in the Cadi Ayyad University in Marakkech</td>
<td>Dardari Althami 201</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Higher Education Curricula in Algeria: Indicators of Fragility and Means of Improving their Quality. The case of Psychology, Education and Orthophony</td>
<td>Awashriya Asaid 213</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment of the Post-Graduate Program at the Faculty of Mass Communication. Case Study</td>
<td>Abdel Rahman M. S. Al-Shami 229</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic</td>
<td>Author(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher Preparation: Issues and Trends in International and Arab Frameworks</td>
<td>Mohamed B. Sukariyah</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The LMD Higher Education System in the Maghreb Countries: The Example of Algeria</td>
<td>Meziane Mohammed, Mahi Brahim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support for Distance Language Learners at the Syrian Virtual University</td>
<td>Hala Dalbani</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality of Education: Faculty Staff</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture Shock or Shocking Culture: An Exploration of the Main Obstacles Encountering Syrian Newly Returned Academic Staff from Abroad</td>
<td>Rami M. Ayoubi, Hiba K. Massoud, Hanan A. Al-Maghout</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Path of Higher Education Teaching Personnel in the Arab States and the Quality Challenges</td>
<td>Ramzi Salamé</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engaging Academics in Quality Conversations: A Bottom-up Approach to Improving Teaching and Learning in Higher Education Institutions</td>
<td>Raoudha Ben Othman</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Le Laboratoire de pédagogie universitaire de l’Université Saint- Joseph de Beyrouth</td>
<td>Nada Moghaizel-Nasr</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Quality Assurance Quality Evaluation and Management</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Quality Management in Public and Private Jordanian Universities: A Comparative Study</td>
<td>Aieman Ahmad Al-Omari</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance and a Bologna-type Process in the Arab world</td>
<td>Hossain Zand &amp; Omaima Karrar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensing and Supervision of Private Higher Education Institutions in the Arab States</td>
<td>Abdel Bagi A.G. Babiker</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L’évaluation dans le système d’enseignement supérieur au Maroc: Bilan des réalisations, limites et principaux défis</td>
<td>Abdelali Kaaouachi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Role and Function of Institutional Research in Institutions of Higher Education: Theory and Practice</td>
<td>Karma El Hassan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Assurance Review in Arab Countries</td>
<td>Labib Arafeh</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Impact of Reform Projects in Higher Education: The Case of Egypt</td>
<td>Mohsen Elmahdy Said</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education Faculty of Qatar University: Implementing the Quality Assurance System (Case Study)</td>
<td>Mohammed F. Habib, Ahmed K. Mahdy, Batoul M. Khalifa, Ahmad J. Al Saa’i, Huda I. Bachir</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### The Participatory Approach in the Reform of Academic Curricula – Case Study of the Faculty of Dentistry at Damascus University – Syria

Mohamad Kayyal & Mayssoon Dashash 495

### Research

**The Status of Social Scientific Research in Lebanon in a “Globalized” Context: Attempt to Understand its Components, Conditions and Limitations**

Jacques Kabanji 507

**Globalization of Applied Scientific Research and Development Requirements**

Rafic Younis 527

**The Social Sciences Research in the Arab East Dilemmas of the Research Centres outside of the University**

Sari Hanafi 547

**Impact of Crises on Scientific and Research Activities of Faculty Members: A Comparative Study (Iraq and Jordan)**

Sawsan Shakir Majeed 563

### Societal Responsibility

**Academic Partnerships: The Driving Force behind Social and Pedagogical Development (Case of Mohammed V University at Souissi)**

Ahmed Ouzi 579

**L’engagement social des étudiants universitaires: expérience de l’Université Saint-Joseph de Beyrouth**

Georges Aoun 593

**Beyond the Walls: The American University of Beirut Engages its Communities**

Cynthia Mynitti, Rami Zurayk, Mounir Mabsout 603

**Applying an Interdisciplinary Model for Promoting the Study of Humanities & Social Sciences: the Case of Zayed University (UAE)**

Sabrina Joseph 621

**Les universitaires touareg, vers la normalisation des institutions traditionnelles ou leur réforme?**

Meriem Bouzid-Sababou 631

**Meeting the Requirements of the Modern Times through Development of Interdisciplinary Programs in Social Science: the Experience of the Masters Program in Democracy and Human Rights at Birzeit University**

Mudar Kassis 641

**The Lebanese University and the Issue of Social Integration, An Analytical Survey Study**

Moadad Rahal 657

**Private Universities in Egypt: Are they Venues for Democratic Attitudes and Behavior?**

Nadine Sika 679

**Ahfad University for Women Beyond Academic Excellence: Social Responsibility and Civic Engagement**

Widad Ali Rahman & Shahira Osama 695
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
   Abdullah Bin Abdul-Aziz Al-Mousa 717

Development of Student Admission Criteria in Saudi Universities: the Experience of the National Center for Assessment in Higher Education
   Faisal Bin Abdullah Mashary Al Saud 727

Higher Education in Saudi Arabia 1998 - 2008: Towards Building a Knowledge Society
   Mohammad Ben Abdelaziz Al Ohali, Abdel Mohsen Ben Salem Al Aqili 739

Higher Education for Girls in Saudi Arabia and its Relevance to the Labor Market
   Mohammed Ben Mojab Al-Hamid, Fatmah Bent Backer Jamjoom 761

Quality Improvement and Quality Assurance in Saudi Private Higher Education Institutions
   Walid Abdul Razak Al Dali & Omar M. Al-Rayes 785
FOREWORD

Ten years after the first Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education, held in 1998 in Beirut, Lebanon, there was a need for holding a second Regional Conference to review a decade of developments and achievements in higher education in the Arab region and explore future prospects and challenges in light of developments at the regional as well as the international level. This event is part of a wider exercise initiated in 2008 by UNESCO and covering all five UNESCO regions worldwide. Five regional conferences were held in preparation of the World Conference on Higher Education (WCHE, Paris, 5 - 8 July 2009). This publication contains the proceedings of the Arab Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARCHE+10, Cairo 31 May – 2 June 2009).

ARCHE+10 was attended by delegates from Ministries of Higher Education in the Arab States. A Regional Report was compiled, describing the state and achievements of higher education in the region over a decade, as well as present and future challenges confronting the sector. The Regional Report was based on 17 Country Reports drafted by National Coordinators commissioned by UNESCO’s Bureau for Education in the Arab States (UNEDBAS, Beirut) in close coordination with ministries of higher education. The country reports provided a clear picture of the achievements of, as well as the challenges facing, higher education, using a common template designed by UNEDBAS, for increased homogeneity and comparability.

In addition to these reports by national authorities, ARCHE+10 was also an academic forum for educationalists from the Arab region and beyond. Early in the preparation process, UNEDBAS had set up an Advisory Committee entrusted with issuing a call for papers widely disseminated within Arab universities and on the ARCHE+10 website. Out of some 108 submissions, 69 academics were encouraged to prepare papers and, in fine, 44 papers were accepted with some changes. Authors of all 44 accepted papers were invited to Cairo to make presentations to ARCHE+10.

In principle, the accepted papers should have covered all of ARCHE+10’s five themes: Learning opportunities; quality improvement and quality assurance; the social responsibility of universities; management, governance and funding; and Arab cooperation. However, in practice, some themes were amply provided for while others were underrepresented. Some of these papers are full-fledged research papers while a few others are more descriptive in nature and others still are analyses and reviews of promising ideas. This diversity was retained as it provides a wider picture of the state of higher education in the Arab States.

Another feature of ARCHE+10 was the student film competition entitled “The University in the Eyes of its Students”.
ARCHE+10 was placed under the motto: Towards an Arab Higher Education Space. This was retained as a title for this publication, considering the strategic importance of the topic. While it is true that most academic papers do not deal directly with this issue, they nonetheless give an idea about the Arab space as it currently stands. The publication is also a sweeping review of the most important concepts and issues facing higher education. This is clearly the largest academic work on higher education prepared and published in recent years in the Arab region.

To conclude, I extend my warmest thanks to the Ford Foundation for making a major financial contribution, covering the production of ARCHE+10’s substantive material, as well as its publication and dissemination; and also for providing awards for the student film competition.

Dr. Abdel Moneim Osman
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UNESCO Regional Bureau
for Education in the Arab States, Beirut
July 2010